

item

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A SUCCESS STORY

USER REPORT

Z-LASER

Work benches for
a champion



The new Z-LASER work benches from item – with ergonomic transport trolleys

Work benches for a champion

Over the past 25 years, Z-LASER, a medium-sized enterprise based in Freiburg, Germany, has grown into a genuine hidden champion. The family-run high-tech company started off by developing and manufacturing laser systems for the timber industry. Today, it works with several prestigious global players in the automotive, textiles, image processing, aerospace and medical technology sectors. item Industrietechnik GmbH supplied the company with optimum work bench systems and several metres of its aluminium profile tube system for lean production.

When the CEO of Z-LASER, Stefan Randak, talks about the future, his eyes light up: “Our company has been growing continuously for 25 years. That’s down to our capacity for innovation and the fact that the laser industry is a young sector that is still on the up.” His claims are backed up by a track record of sustained growth across the entire laser sector – a trend that has not just benefited the Freiburg headquarters of Z-LASER. The international company has a subsidiary in Milan, which is responsible for southern Europe, one in Montreal that covers the North American market and sales offices in the UK and China.

“Being close to hand is still extremely important, even in the modern world of electronic communication,” points out Randak, speaking from many years of experience. “Multimedia tools enable us to hold meetings with people based all over the planet. But when it comes to concrete solutions for specific requirements in industry, developers and users like to put their heads together.” The same applies to the collaboration between Z-LASER and item’s Freiburg branch. The two businesses worked together to roll out major changes in the laser specialist’s production halls.



Users:
Industry, single-part and series production

Sector:
Laser projection as a positioning aid for industrial and skilled manual applications
Measuring technology / image processing
Medical technology / biophotonics

www.z-laser.com

Versatile factory equipment for versatile production lines

No fewer than 16 employees of the 80-strong workforce in Freiburg are involved in the development of new and customer-specific laser applications. Innovation and quality are their absolute top priorities. As the requirements placed on these laser systems continue to grow, it is vital that these high quality standards are safeguarded. Consequently, series production runs in parallel with the continuous building and reconfiguration of test benches for prototypes. Naturally, this testing then has to feed into series production, without causing delays to ongoing orders. This continuous process of change affects individual work benches and entire production lines equally,

meaning that factory equipment has to be sufficiently versatile.

For almost two years, Martin Rasch has been responsible for ensuring that production at Z-LASER runs smoothly and competitively. And he has been hugely successful. All the changes he has put into place ramped up productivity by 40 percent in 22 months. A large share of these changes have been implemented using item products. Rasch has been familiar with the item building kit system for many years and is certain that the high-quality products represent excellent value for money: "The modular technology is ideal for us. Everything that has to be dismantled can be reused in some other way. We have a good basic stock of item parts in our warehouse, but if we find anything is missing, we can order in more very quickly." The head of production is also quick to point out that "delivery conditions and times are optimum."

Rasch recalls one particular time when item's delivery conditions really impressed: "Once we had placed the order for the new work benches, we wondered how they were actually going to be delivered. I imagined a huge lorry pulling up crammed full of parts that we would have



The calibration wall made of item profiles is perfectly adapted to its surroundings.



Martin Rasch, head of production, (right) shows off the new production line.

to put together. In the end, it was quite different. On the delivery day, two fully loaded lorries rolled up to the plant. All the work benches came assembled and perfectly packaged. The entire production system was ready to go in just one day.”

item supplied 17 work benches. Each individual table features built-in stepless height adjustment. Multi-axis Pivot Arms permit exceptionally short reaching distances and – coupled with matching Chairs – ensure that every member of staff can work to their full productivity potential. What’s more, the working environment is now much more comfortable and allows employees to adopt ergonomic postures that prevent skeletal and muscular complaints. Because the product components handled at Z-LASER are highly sensitive, all the surfaces in the working environment feature an ESD-safe design. Thanks to the modular Work Bench System from item and its more than 200 components, every working area can be individually reconfigured in just a few easy steps, whether to suit the personal requirements of users or specific tasks. Feedback from the workforce about the new work benches is unanimously positive. The versatility of production at Z-LASER has reached a whole new level. But there was another reason why the plant opted for item: “The sup-

port, the flow of information is seamless. We understand each other, bureaucracy is kept to a minimum and we can communicate on the same level.” All these are elements that medium-sized companies really value. “When you pick up the phone and call, you never end up in a queue – neither at Z-LASER nor item. You can usually get hold of the person you need straight away,” explains CEO Randak, describing collaboration with item.

Big steps towards lean production

A Kanban system has also been rolled out in production with the support of head of production Martin Rasch. The advantages of this new approach have made a big impression – the throughput time for individual products has dropped dramatically. Material handling was significantly scaled down in just a few weeks. But the change wasn’t easy. Each and every member of staff was asked and required to take part. Areas that had become easy going were dissolved and workflows were made altogether more efficient. Work benches are now being adapted to production stages in line with lean production principles and under consideration of the ergonomic needs of individual employees. The changes were stark, but everyone felt the benefit in the end.

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5S was also introduced during the changeover process in production. This methodology from the toolkit of Japanese production concepts is aimed at keeping work benches and their surroundings safe, clean and clearly laid out. The work benches from item fit neatly into this concept. The wide range of sorting and fastening options and large clear areas on the ground make it easy to keep the hall clean and tidy. Moreover, the high-quality appearance of the aluminium Profile Tubes from item is also proving helpful at Z-LASER, as Rasch explains in the production hall: “Although our production systems are constantly changing, we can show visitors around any time. Everything is always clean and tidy, and the design looks stunning even

after spontaneous modifications have been made. We are always presentable.”

Sustainability, reliability, quality – these are the strengths of item and Z-LASER. Top quality, a versatile approach to customer needs and the courage to try out new ways have all helped the team at Z-LASER achieve worldwide success and sustained growth. And item is there to support the company every step of the way.

item and Z-LASER – two medium-sized businesses on a global level



Z-LASER work benches from item – with versatile tool provisioning systems.

LINKS

Find out more about Z-LASER:

www.z-laser.com

Find out more about the work bench systems:

www.item24.de/aps



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item Industrietechnik GmbH from Solingen, Germany, develops and supplies the MB Building Kit System, a system which enables customised solutions for all aspects of industrial factory equipment engineering. The Building Kit System is based on aluminium profiles, carefully coordinated fasteners and versatile functional elements.