

Entrepreneurial spirit pays off: Dr. Anne Lamp (CEO, left) and Johanna Baare (COO, right), the founders of Traceless Materials, won a German Entrepreneurial Award in 2022 for developing a granulate used to make fully biodegradable plastic products. © Porsche Consulting/Andreas Laible

From Garage to Factory

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16/01/2025 For winners of the German Entrepreneurial Awards (Deutscher Gründerpreis), trophies are incidental. What counts for them is professional start-up assistance. Solid consulting services have helped many start-ups develop into profitable large companies. The two founders of Traceless Materials with their alternative to plastics are a prime example.

AI-optimized waste management. Digital dermatological treatment. These two innovative business ideas, one from WeSort.AI and the other from Dermanostic, were what convinced the jury at this year's German Entrepreneurial Awards. On September 24, 2024, the awards were announced in the capital city, Berlin, for the 22nd consecutive year. They are the country's most prominent honor for outstanding entrepreneurial performance. The founders of WeSort.AI won the "StartUp" (start-up) category with their AI-supported high-speed method of sorting waste. And the founders of Dermanostic were

recognized in the “Aufsteiger” (rising star) category for their smartphone app enabling prompt and high-grade dermatological care.

Bio-focused start-up headed for success

The Traceless Materials start-up is an example of how innovative ideas can be put into practice and winners of the German Entrepreneurial Awards can become notable companies. The idea for Traceless came from Hamburg native Dr. Anne Lamp in 2019 during her doctoral studies at the Hamburg University of Technology. In 2022, by then CEO of Traceless, Dr. Lamp and her co-founder, COO Johanna Baare, took top honors in the start-up category of the German Entrepreneurial Awards for their outstanding product and contribution to the global fight against plastic waste. A lot has happened since the company was founded in 2020. Behind the grey rolling door of a factory hall in the northern German town of Buchholz south of Hamburg, Lamp and Baare have continued to work toward their ambitious goal of a world without plastic waste. The key is their bio-based granulate, which can be further processed into a sustainable alternative to plastic.

The innovative material is made of residues from processing grain. Of note is that this alternative to plastic is 100 percent biodegradable under natural composting conditions — within a record time of two to twelve weeks depending on thickness, the founders promise. As the name Traceless suggests, this is a solution that leaves no harmful traces behind.

New dimension in production

Investors, too, are convinced that the start-up has a successful future. In a large-scale financing round in September 2023, the young entrepreneurs secured 36.6 million euros, marking a milestone expected to usher in a breakthrough. With more than 50 employees at present, the Traceless team is still producing small volumes of its granulate at an initial pilot plant in Buchholz. That should now change, as funding flows into the first industrial-scale facility in Hamburg. The project is also receiving subsidies of more than five million euros from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV). Construction began in 2024. And mass production of the patent-pending bio-based material is scheduled to start in 2025.

The new plant will produce several thousand tons of the granulate annually. Carbon emissions and fossil fuel requirements will be 90 percent lower than those for conventional plastic production. This opens new horizons for the founders in attaining their goal of widespread replacement of plastic materials. “By scaling up our innovative technology, we’re demonstrating that it's possible for the industry to be climate-friendly, circular, resilient, and regenerative,” says Dr. Lamp. “Our innovative bio-based material can make a substantial contribution to solving the problem of plastic waste.”

Combining innovation and scale

The bio-based granulate has a wide range of applications. It can be processed into flexible wraps as well as coatings, adhesives, and rigid molded components. Examples include single-use products such as drinking straws, ice cream spoons, and disposable tableware, as well as packaging for fruit, vegetables, and shipped goods. In parallel to ramping up production, the company and its partners are also developing pilot products made of Traceless materials. Early on, Traceless began working with the Otto e-commerce corporation to develop non-plastic packaging. Together with Lufthansa, the start-up is designing more environmentally friendly on-board food packaging and disposable cutlery. And since 2022, the C&A apparel manufacturer has been successfully testing clothes hangers made from the bio-based material.

In June 2024, Traceless launched a strategic partnership with Mondi, a global leader in the packaging and paper production sector. Their shared aim is to advance large-scale applications for the Traceless granulate as solutions for paper coatings. Conventional paper coatings often use synthetic plastics to enhance sealant and barrier properties. These coatings are generally made of non-renewable fossil resources and are not biodegradable under industrial composting conditions. As Dr. Lamp explains, "Our collaboration with Mondi is more than a partnership. It's a high-powered combination of innovation and scale. Together we're seeking to change the paper coatings sector by using our Traceless alternatives at a scale that only a company like Mondi can achieve. This is a major step toward a sustainable future in which our material will become the standard in everyday products."

Another Traceless product, namely French-fry pickers, could be experienced first-hand by attendees of the Labor Tempelhof concert series in Berlin in August 2024. The pickers were developed in close cooperation with GTB Gastro Team Bremen, a catering service provider and member of Aramark, a leading catering and service management group.

The Traceless start-up expects industrial production to bring a substantial increase in its customer base. Its new plant will not only produce much larger volumes of the bio-based material, but also significantly lower the price. And this new plant in Hamburg is just an interim step on the road to full industrial production. "Industrial-scale production will make us competitive in terms of price," says COO Baare. "Step by step, we'll be able to close the price gap between our products and conventional plastics."

Commentary

The German Entrepreneurial Awards: Promoting a Pioneering Spirit

Entrepreneurship means having the courage to take things on. To reconceive and refigure them. In concrete terms, to work on the innovations of the future. Brilliant ideas alone are not enough — we also need the right people behind them. Individuals who, despite the high risks involved, do not hesitate to

devote passion and energy to turning visions into ventures. That is what the German Entrepreneurial Awards (Deutscher Gründerpreis) stand for. In conjunction with "Stern" magazine (from 2025: German newspaper F.A.Z.), the Sparkasse banks, the ZDF public broadcasting company, and Porsche, the German Entrepreneurial Awards have been honoring outstanding entrepreneurial performance annually since 2002, in four categories: Student, Start-Up, Rising Star, and Lifetime Achievement. The aim is to find the talented individuals who can become the great entrepreneurs of the future in Germany. Their number is not large. Every year, we seek the very best of them.

And we have in fact done so with the majority of enterprises honored thus far. Many of the winning companies are now highly relevant to the status of Germany as an industrial site. One of these innovative frontrunners is Aleph Alpha, the largest German AI company. Its founders developed their own AI system, which is eminently competitive with that of OpenAI. Tonies, another winner, has reimagined a market sector with its Toniebox and innovative audio experiences for children. A mere seven years after being founded, the company can show a very successful stock market launch. Yet another outstanding example is the Traceless Materials start-up. With its alternative to plastic, its founding team is making a serious contribution to a more sustainable world.

For us what counts is not only to identify the best young entrepreneurs in Germany, but also to create a community. A community in which top talents network with each other and can spread their entrepreneurial spirit. It is inspiring to see that there are people in Germany ready to roll up their sleeves. Who dare to dive into the deep end. Who have the courage to get up and go — successfully so — despite all adverse external circumstances such as bureaucracy, policy hurdles, and tight conditions in terms of funding.

We at Porsche Consulting want to foster this entrepreneurial spirit with our own commitment, by sharing our expertise and experience in building efficient businesses. All six of the finalists in the Start-Up and Rising Star categories receive four weeks of consulting from us. We provide the founders with assistance targeted precisely to their specific situation. Emphases differ depending on company size. But our work generally focuses on the following questions: how can the enterprise be scaled up? How can it attract investors? How can it enter new markets? And what is the right way to structure and expand its organization?

Info

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Path: From Garage to Factory/Images/img_1.jpg
Title: Dr. Anne Lamp (CEO of Traceless), Johanna Baare (COO of Traceless, r-l), 2025, Porsche Consulting GmbH
Subline: The Traceless product has also impressed investors: 36.6 million euros are flowing into construction of the first industrial-scale production plant. The initial round of financing was led by the UB Forest Industry Green Growth Fund (UB FIGG) and the SWEN Blue Ocean fund. © Porsche Consulting/Andreas Laible

Path: From Garage to Factory/Images/img_2.jpg
Title: Dr. Anne Lamp (CEO of Traceless), 2025, Porsche Consulting GmbH
Subline: "In scaling up our innovative technology we're also showing that the industry can be climate-friendly, circular, resilient, and renewable," says Dr. Anne Lamp, CEO of Traceless Materials GmbH. © Porsche Consulting/Andreas Laible

Path: From Garage to Factory/Images/img_3.jpg
Title: Johanna Baare (COO of Traceless), 2025, Porsche Consulting GmbH
Subline: "Industrial-scale production will make our prices competitive," says Johanna Baare, COO of Traceless Materials GmbH. © Porsche Consulting/Andreas Laible

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