

# Cooler than wood. Better than plastic.

How an inconspicuous building brick from Austria has set out to conquer the world.

The story of Bioblo started in summer 2014 when plastics expert Hannes Frech had a random encounter with marketing man Stefan Friedrich in the small town of Tulln, Lower Austria. Stefan, who was really looking for a suitable material to bring his idea of a brick-based furniture system to life, was immediately fascinated by the 12 by 2.4 by 0.8 cm building brick that Hannes pulled from a drawer during their very first meeting.

Hannes Frech, who was – and still is to this day – heading the technical laboratory of the Institute of Natural Materials Technology within the Department of Agrobiotechnology at IFA Tulln, had constructed the then-unnamed brick for his daughter a couple of years prior to the encounter. Little did he know that the very same brick would embark on such a successful and far-reaching journey.

In September 2014, Bioblo was born – not yet as a company, but as a brand. The two men added a third one to the core team: Dietmar Kreil, who Stefan Friedrich had come to know as one of Austria's finest art directors during their common employment at Viennese advertising agencies DDB Tribal and Jung von Matt. Stefan came up with the Bioblo name, Dietmar designed the logo, and the very first boxes were sold for Christmas via the company's webshop.

## Broadening the horizon

The early customers' feedback being overwhelmingly positive, Bioblo soon extended their reach into kindergartens and schools, a channel that is not only interesting in itself but also as a multiplier for B2C sales. The rationale behind this is that kids tend to recommend the toys they like in kindergarten to their parents at home. Early distribution partners in this field included the Austrian companies Schmiderer & Schendl, Höller Spiel and Lipura. Shortly after the official foundation of the company "Bioblo Spielwaren GmbH" in May 2015 another important partnership was formed when European distribution rights were



signed over to "Wiener Spielkartenfabrik Ferdinand Piatnik & Söhne", a traditional Viennese manufacturer of playing cards, board games and puzzles, and a long-standing player in the toy market. Together, an expansion plan was developed that consequently brought Bioblo to France, Germany, Canada, the UK, Poland, Hungary and many other markets.

## Form follows function. Material follows Form.

So what is special about Bioblo? The company's unofficial slogan "Cooler than wood. Better than plastic." actually describes it quite well: The unique honeycomb structure that seems to appeal to children more than the usual wooden blocks can only be accomplished by means of injection moulding, which in turn requires a mouldable material. This is where Bio-Fasal, the highly sophisticated wood and plastics composite behind Bioblo, enters the stage. The composite, which has been developed by the above-named institution over a period of almost 20 years, combines the best characteristics of "both worlds": On the one hand, the sustainability, look and feel of wood; on the other hand, the durability and processability of plastics. Add to that the ecological benefits of bioplastics over fossil-based plastics, and you have already gathered more than enough selling points in a world that is increasingly environment-minded.

## Success comes with awards – and vice versa

Bioblo soon discovered the relevance of certificates and awards to the quality-minded parents. This is why the bricks were tested extensively to document the absolute absence of heavy metals, bisphenol A, BPA, plasticisers and other potentially harmful substances. As a result of these efforts, Bioblo was the very first toy brand to be awarded the Austrian "Umweltzeichen" as well as the German "Blauer Engel" certificate, which last year celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary making it THE oldest and one of the World's most trusted eco-labels.



## Pinch, zoom, swipe – or build?

In case you ever asked yourself how we can prevent our children from spending their entire days pinching, zooming and swiping on their smartphones, Bioblos might be just the answer. Building with their own two hands not only drives away our kids' boredom but actively promotes their hand-eye and hand-hand coordination. It enhances their physical and mechanical understanding, trains their concentration and improves their patience, stamina and ability to deal with frustration (for example when the cat knocks everything over). Not surprisingly, building with friends, classmates, parents or siblings is even more fun – and it promotes team spirit and communication skills beyond the scope of WhatsApp and Facebook. **MT**

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