

Company History



1961
1970
1980
1992
1997
2001
2002
2006
2007
Today

1961

Front Panel Express' roots span all the way back to 1961 when German physicist, Bernhard Schaeffer, founded Schaeffer Apparatebau KG. The company primarily produced the Dynamometer, an amusement machine designed and developed by Bernhard.

In the 1960s and 1970s approx. 10,000 units were sold throughout Europe.

1970

At the end of the 1970s Bernhard Schaeffer designed another amusement machine, the original model of the Power Rocket, which can still be found at many of Berlin's amusement parks today.

1980

The company's products changed in the 1980s and the owner developed and manufactured measuring instruments for fundamental thermodynamic research in universities.

1992

In 1992 Bernhard Schaeffer's two sons Jörg (technical computer scientist) and Kai (physicist) joined the company. They repeatedly faced the same problem when manufacturing small production runs of their products: using hand tools for their custom front panels.

This led into the early development of Front Panel Designer, a CAD/CAM system adapted to the production of front panels for their products.

1997

Knowing that many other engineers were facing the same problem of small production runs of custom front panels, the decision was made to offer Front Panel Designer as a free download on the internet. This move gave the company a completely new orientation.

The demand for customized front panels was so great that the Schaeffers withdrew completely from the measuring equipment business and have since focused on the production of custom front panels. Jörg and Kai took over the management of the company, leaving the founder Bernhard Schaeffer more time to spend on his own research projects.

2001

In Spring 2001 the company moved out of the garage of the family's house into a commercial business complex.

2002

Schaeffer Apparatebau was growing fast, not only in Germany but also in Europe. More and more requests came from design engineers in the US. This led to the decision to start Front Panel Express with the help of a partner in Seattle, WA.

2006

As expected, Front Panel Designer and the fast and easy method of machining custom front panels was also huge success in the American market. By the end of 2006 Diane Haensel relocated from Berlin to Seattle to manage the fast growing company.

2007

Front Panel Express relocated to its current location, a warehouse with 18000 sft production area in Seattle's Georgetown neighborhood.

Today

The company continues to grow, as does the demand for custom front panels and enclosures. A team of 20 employees produces high quality products on eight CNC milling machines in two shifts.

Since opening in 2002, Front Panel Express has captured a large share of the US and Canadian market, and is rapidly expanding its market share in Asia and Australia.