When business owners build tools for business owners

Background article from CORE Navigator

Format
Background article

Length
809 words

As of
9 November 2026

Many founders have built a company before: 39.8 per cent of the founders surveyed for the German Startup Monitor 2026 had already started a business before their current startup. Anyone who knows owners' problems first-hand in this way is tempted to build the tool they once lacked. There is a catch: your own problem is not necessarily anyone else's.

Contents
Where ownership and management coincide 1 · What the founder data shows 2 · The trouble with your own problem 2 · One example: CORE Navigator 3 · Sources 3

Solving a problem you once had yourself looks like the most obvious business idea there is. A typical pattern: an owner notices that every approval goes across his desk, that customers only ever call him and that decisions stall whenever he is on holiday. At some point he decides to build the tool he was missing back then. Companies like this often start with a memory of the founder's own business.

Where ownership and management coincide

In Germany there is a large market for such founders. According to the Institut für Mittelstandsforschung (IfM) Bonn, some 3.52 million firms are small and medium-sized enterprises, 99.2 per cent of all private-sector companies. The figures refer to 2024 and follow the European Commission's size-based definition.

The IfM defines the Mittelstand, Germany's owner-run business sector, differently: as firms in which ownership and management coincide, meaning up to two individuals or their family members hold at least 50 per cent of the shares and sit in management. According to the IfM, official statistics do not show how many firms meet these criteria. In these firms, whoever owns the company also runs it. That makes them quick as long as the owner is reachable. It also makes the owner the point where much of the business converges.

For software vendors, this situation is hard to pin down, because in these firms much depends on how one individual works.

What the founder data shows

The German Startup Monitor 2026, published by the German Startups Association, is based on 1,803 participants and, by the association's account, is the largest survey in the startup ecosystem. It shows that new companies almost always build on previous experience. 29.1 per cent of respondents were employed at a larger company immediately before founding, 11.5 per cent at a smaller one. 39.8 per cent had already started a business before their current startup.

Their customers fit the picture. According to the study, 76.5 per cent of startup revenue comes from business customers, the highest share since the survey began. Most of their money, in other words, comes from other companies, an environment many founders know from earlier jobs.

In financing, 23.6 per cent of the startups surveyed rely on bootstrapping, growing without outside investors, up from 22.3 per cent the year before. The authors also point to a wave of software start-ups driven in part by new possibilities in artificial intelligence. For experienced owners who want to build a tool for a narrow audience, the barrier to entry is likely to fall.

The trouble with your own problem

Personal experience is a head start. Someone who has run a business asks the right questions and speaks the customers' language. But it is also a single case. What one founder lacked, other owners may not lack, and what would have helped him may not help them.

The real test comes after the product is built. Do other owners use the tool when nobody is talking them into it? Do they recognise their own problem in it? Founders who build from experience need to ask these questions earlier than others, because their own story can easily supply the answer in advance.

One example: CORE Navigator

One example is Joram Höfs. By his own account, he helped build the digital agency Junge Haie as a co-founder from 2012 to 2020, for most of that time as managing shareholder, and the agency grew to 40 full-time staff in that period. He tried twice to rearrange his own role in the company and left in 2020. He has worked with assessments since 2017/2018 and has been developing his own since 2020. Much of what he examined in that work, he says, he recognised from his former teams: the causes rarely lay with the individual alone, but often in how work was organised and how people dealt with each other.

Since 2025 Höfs has been building CORE Navigator, a digital assessment for entrepreneurs and business owners. It starts with the person who runs the business. After a free QuickCheck, a personal CORE profile describes how that person works as an entrepreneur. Sprints & Checklists turn this into individual steps in day-to-day work. From the user's point of view, the aim is a business that depends less on the owner stepping in all the time. CORE Navigator is planned to launch in 2027; until then, a waiting list is open. Whether other owners find their own problem in it will become clear after launch.

> **Most team conflicts are conflicts of values. Treat them as a communication problem and you burn energy and solve nothing.**
>
> Joram Höfs, founder of CORE Navigator

Sources

1 Startup-Verband (Bundesverband Deutsche Startups e.V.), Alexander Hirschfeld, Jannis Gilde, Vanusch Walk: Deutscher Startup Monitor 2026. Berlin 2026 (German). Data: 1,803 participants. (accessed 9 November 2026) https://startupverband.de/media/file/rs-deutscherstartupmonitor2026

2 Institut für Mittelstandsforschung (IfM) Bonn: Der Mittelstand im Überblick. Informationen zum Mittelstand aus erster Hand. Leaflet, July 2026, data for 2024 (German). (accessed 9 November 2026) https://www.ifm-bonn.org/fileadmin/data/redaktion/ueber_uns/ifm-flyer/IfM-Flyer-2026.pdf

Press contact

Joram Höfs, Founder
press@core-navigator.com

www.core-navigator.com
LEGENDS LIVE FOREVER LLC · Casper, Wyoming, USA