

Federico Jiménez Around the World with Conti.

Five years, tops. Half a decade at a company. When he was studying engineering in Madrid, Federico Jiménez could not imagine working at a company for any longer than that. No way. After five years at the same company, the work would become too much a matter of routine and the desire to try something new too strong – a new project, a new job, maybe even a new city!

He finished his studies a long time ago and Jimenéz has now been at Continental for 12 years. He no longer wastes any more time thinking about a change. But that doesn't mean that the 40-year-old has lost any of his passion for new challenges. "I face new challenges here all the time," he says. "And, if you want, you *can* change companies every five years – and *still* work at Continental."

Jimenéz started out working in customer service on the Iberian peninsula; after two years, he switched to commercial vehicle tires. He is now Key Account Manager Global Operations Ports and responsible for worldwide sales of special tires for forklift trucks, tractors, and mobile cranes at major container docks around the world. The four big-name terminal operators, who between them share almost half of the global market, are his most important customers.

This is a market in which you can only be successful if you know precisely what your customers want. This is why Jimenéz spends much of his time traveling around the world each week, between the ports, the company headquarters, and the Continental locations where the tires are developed and manufactured. He typically heads off from Madrid in the early hours of Monday morning for Dubai or Hong Kong, Fort Mill or Copenhagen. "It's fascinating to find out about other cultures," he says. "I've learned a great deal on the many trips for Continental over the years."

He has to draw on this knowledge every day to do his job successfully. It is essential for Jimenéz to understand what clients from China want, how to motivate sales colleagues from the USA, or what is driving development engineers from Germany. "This is the only way for me to work successfully in a global company such as Continental," he says.

A few facts about the technical specifications of the new products or a handful of charts with market data are not enough to go on when training sales employees at the different Continental locations. Jimenéz now knows how to address colleagues on site – for instance in China. "They learn quickly and get bored easily – which means that you can't offer them the same message twice over." The experienced salesman is happy to share his experiences of dealing with customers from the most varied cultures. "I never wanted to become a teacher," he says. "But people tell me that I do a pretty good job of it."

Global communication is also required when Jimenéz promotes his projects. As head of sales for ports, he plays a pivotal role in the development of new products. Continental is the market leader in many segments, such as forklift truck tires, and it is important to maintain this position with new innovations. But Jimenéz is more attracted by the prospect of

conquering markets in which Continental has not yet been represented or winning over market share from competitors. "Setting yourself up as a challenger might be more stressful – but it's also more fun," says Jimenéz.

Jimenéz is now approaching the conclusion of one of his development projects once again, It's only a matter of a few high pressure weeks before Continental brings to market a new tire for straddle carriers, a high-performance product for high performance vehicles. A tire that can take loads up to 150 tonnes.

The experienced salesman recognized the potential to win over new customers with new tires in Continental quality with lower wear and therefore lower overall service costs. "To achieve this goal, I first had to go knocking on a few doors within the company," Jimenéz recalls. He had to win over supervisors, get developers on board for the project, bring financial, legal and marketing experts together, and build up an international team. "We were under a great deal of pressure, but management was committed to the cause and convinced that we would make it."

Jimenéz appreciates the working atmosphere in the Continental Commercial Vehicle Tires business unit. "If you have a good idea, you can suggest it and make it reality here," he says. "Management has an open-door policy – and you get answers quickly." Freedom To Act – that is the watchword: The greatest possible scope for action in order to exploit growth opportunities and the freedom to start over again. "Starting from scratch – and making something great," says Jimenéz.

The effort involved on his part is considerable. He spends many nights on planes and rarely spends more than two days at the same place. But, on the flip side, Jimenéz doesn't have to go to the office. He can do the work that comes in when not traveling and at home. Unbelievably, he still almost always manages to spend the weekend with his family and friends at home in Madrid. "Traveling so much is sometimes quite hard," he says. "But I have learned that the time I spend with my family is more about quality than quantity."

Development of the new tire for the straddle carrier is now complete. A new vulcanization process has reduced its rolling resistance by 15% while the procurement cost of the tires is approximately 25% lower than the competition – and better still, they are more stable and safer. "Now we're rolling it out into the market," says Jimenéz with a grin. And he can't wait to start on the next project – the next challenge. Perhaps in a new role at a different location? "The world is on the move. If you want to get ahead in your career, you have to be mobile," he says. And there's certainly enough room for that where he's working right now.