How ?One Thing? Made National Instruments Into a Billion-Dollar Company

Forty years after starting National Instruments Corp., co-founder James Truchard can trace the company’s vast success back to a single idea.

In 1976, while developing automated equipment for a sonar application, Truchard and his small engineering team at the University of Texas saw a need for an interface between test instruments and computers. Their solution -- a general purpose interface bus (GPIB) -- gradually evolved into the cornerstone of a business.

The main thing we carried with us was a new way of doing instruments, Truchard told Design News. It was a singular idea -- the one thing that all of our future decisions were vetted against.

Today, Truchard looks back on it and draws a parallel to the 2013 book, The One Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results. National Instruments' initial concept was a small domino that knocked over bigger dominoes, he said. In 2014, the singular idea resulted in $1.24 billion in revenue based on business in 50 countries.

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