

German innovator wins NICE innovation challenge, secures \$40,000 fund to advance breakthrough maritime maintenance tech

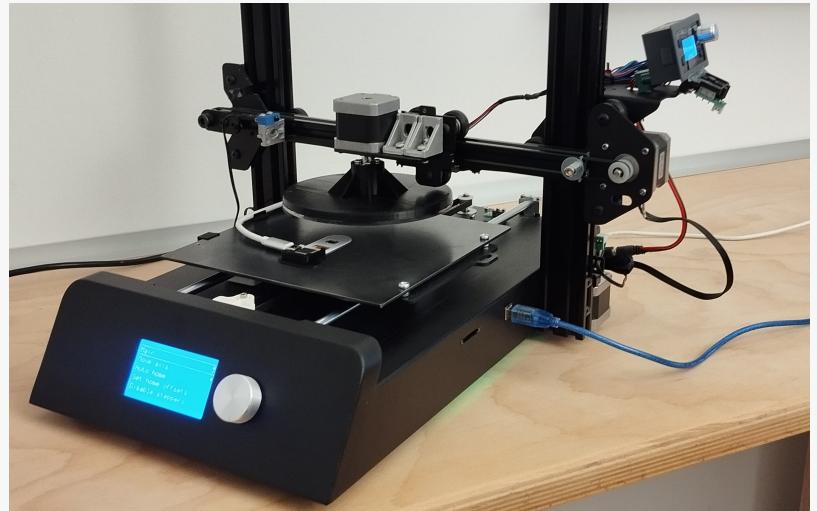
Innovation winner presents low-cost ship shaft bearing clearance monitoring system following global scouting, evaluation and partner selection

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, February 10, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Wazoku](#) has announced the winner of last year's [National Innovation Center par Excellence](#) (NICE) innovation challenge: German innovator Christoph Bültemann, creator of ClearSense, a compact, low-cost ship shaft bearing clearance monitoring system set to transform global maritime maintenance practices. The challenge was fully designed and delivered by Wazoku, from problem definition and global scouting through to evaluation, pitch selection and commercial pathway development.



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Simon Hill, CEO, Wazoku



Characterisation Rig

Bültemann will receive a \$40,000 working fund and support from NICE to establish and scale a new technology venture in China's Yangtze River Delta, with the potential to unlock up to \$4 million in further funding as the solution progresses toward commercialisation.

ClearSense addresses one of the most persistent issues in the shipping industry: the costly and labour-intensive inspection of water-lubricated ship shaft bearings. Most vessels still rely on manual checks performed by divers,

while existing automated systems are bulky, difficult to retrofit, and expensive to install.

Bültemann's innovation offers a clear alternative. ClearSense is a highly accurate, ultra-compact sensor system capable of continuous, real-time monitoring, even in the extremely constrained

space between a ship's bearing and propeller.

The fully functional prototype, has already been demonstrated to Thordon Bearings, the Canadian market leader in ship shaft bearings, with strong interest expressed.

"This sensor is my 'innovation baby', and the NICE Challenge has given me the means to bring it to life," said Christoph Bültemann, founder of the project. "ClearSense can massively reduce maintenance costs, improve safety, and make continuous bearing monitoring available to vessels where it was never possible before. It's a hugely exciting opportunity for me, to work on such a personal innovation and to do so in such a dynamic part of the world."

During the challenge, Bültemann also developed Houdini, a novel wireless power and data transfer system capable of transmitting energy and communications through a ship's steel hull without any hull penetration. This is a significant technical and regulatory hurdle for maritime operators.

While ClearSense is at an advanced prototype stage, Houdini is in early development (TRL 3). Together, they create a fully integrated, maintenance-free bearing-monitoring solution suitable for even the most challenging retrofit environments.

The NICE Innovation Challenge aims to attract global technology innovators to Yangtze Delta, particularly those addressing core priorities in industrial engineering, maritime technology, and advanced manufacturing. Using the [Innocentive](#) open innovation platform, NICE identified and selected Bültemann from a global pool of solvers.

"This is exactly the type of innovation the NICE Challenge is designed to uncover," said a NICE spokesperson. "ClearSense and Houdini have enormous commercial potential, and Christoph's meticulous approach and technical creativity made him stand out at every stage."

With the working fund now secured, Bültemann will begin establishing his venture in China, supported by NICE and the Marine Technology Institute (MTIC) in Nantong. Marine approvals, which are required even for testing, mean the first commercial versions of ClearSense are expected within 12 months, with China likely serving as the initial launch market.

"This programme shows what happens when innovation is treated as an end-to-end system, not a one-off challenge," said Simon Hill, CEO, Wazoku. "From defining the problem, to evaluating solutions, to creating a real commercial partnership, this is about turning effort into actual outcomes, not just generating ideas."

Programmes like the NICE Innovation Challenge reflect Wazoku's broader approach to innovation delivery, combining platform, ecosystem access and hands-on management to help organisations move from insight to impact.

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For further information about Wazoku, visit <https://www.wazoku.com>

For further information about NICE, visit <https://en.nice.org.cn/>

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