

Roundtable discussion
(from left to right): Boris Engelhardt (wdk), Dr. Rüdiger Baunemann (PlasticsEurope Deutschland), Dr. Oliver Möllenstädt (GKV), Werner M. Dornscheidt (Messe Düsseldorf) and Thorsten Kühmann (VDMA) in discussions on the opening of the K preview at the end of June in Düsseldorf © Hanser/K. Klotz



What Makes the Plastics Industry Tick?

Executives of Important Associations Took a Look at the Industry in Advance of K 2016

Some companies prefer to play a home game, in which they can also offer media representatives a tour of the company. But, in advance of K, others disclose the first secrets at a central event in Düsseldorf, Germany, where, as a prelude, the associations first shone a spotlight on the industry.

The K preview started in late June in Düsseldorf, Germany, with a round table discussion by important industry representatives, before over a dozen companies presented their trade show innovations to about 70 technical journalists from all corners of the globe over three days. Whereas individual presentations of course also dealt with market appraisals of the respective companies and their technical responses, the trade show and association heads, in the run-up to the main event, took a close look at the industry as a whole. For example, Thorsten Kühmann, CEO of the Association of Plastics and Rubbery Machinery in the VDMA, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, emphasized that Germany is the biggest exporter of plastics machinery, while China is the biggest manufacturer thanks to its huge domestic market. The success story of plastics will continue, assured Dr. Rüdiger

Baunemann, Director General of PlasticsEurope Deutschland GmbH, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, though with different drivers than three years ago. The BRIC states are no longer the engine; instead Asian states increased their share from 46 to 49% in the last three years.

In the view of Boris Engelhardt, Secretary General of wdk Wirtschaftsverband der deutschen Kautschukindustrie e.V., Frankfurt am Main, Germany, rubber processors have been satisfied with the last three years. However raw materials manufacturers have been under price pressure – rubber has never been so cheap. That raises the question of whether plantation owners can survive or will switch to other plants such as palm oil. There are also overcapacities in synthetic rubber, which are driving manufacturers to close operations in Europe and other countries. “That is bringing us to the brink of exist-

tence in some product areas,” is how Engelhardt dramatically expressed the worries about future supply security.

Attracting Young People already at Schools

The biggest challenges to plastics processors, according to Dr. Oliver Möllenstädt, General Manager of GKV – the German Association of the Plastics Converters, Bad Homburg, Germany, is globalization and the problem of recruiting young people for the industry. “A third of employees in the plastics industry will be retiring in the next ten years,” he warned. As a business-to-business industry, the plastics sector does not have the recognition of, for example, the automotive industry. It is therefore essential, he said, to present the sector as a modern, sustainable industry that is among the key suppliers.



The starting points, according to Rüdiger Baunemann, are the fact that ever more plastics are now used in attractive application fields, such as lightweight design, architecture and medicine.

On the other hand, however, there is also the risk of issues such as “marine litter” damaging markets and the plastics industry’s reputation, Baunemann continued. The key to avoid polluting the seas is proper waste management on a global scale. To increase awareness of this – at least among the trade visitors – a theme day will be held in Hall 6 at K on October 22.

The perception of Industry 4.0, on the other hand, can be described as mixed: clearly useful applications, such as early warning of downtimes as part of condition monitoring of the production line contrast with anxieties about data security or the effects on the employment environment, said Thorsten Kühmann, giving food for thought. But “Industry 4.0 cannot be avoided,” he is convinced. It is a matter of being one of the front runners and becoming engaged from an early stage.

“For the first time at K2016, we will show what that entails for the plastics industry in concrete terms.

The Chinese are Coming – But How Many?

At the roundtable discussion, there was confusion about the apparent reduction in the number of Chinese exhibitors compared to 2013. “The major Chinese exporters are here!” was the immediate response of President and CEO of Messe Düsseldorf GmbH, Werner M. Dornscheidt, and K Project Manager Petra Cullmann could ultimately give the all clear: The area occupied by Chinese exhibitors has hardly changed. The fact that they appear to be fewer in number than in 2013 at the end of June is due to the fact that not all co-exhibitors have been registered in advance of the trade show, and – as with three years ago – the total number will continue to rise until the gates are opened because of this technicality. ■

Dr. Karlhorst Klotz, editor

Trade Show Previews

More detailed information about the market appraisal of important manufacturers and innovations can be found, listed by company, on the following pages of **Kunststoffe international**. We will provide you with more technical details about the individual thematic focuses in our September edition.

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