The coronavirus crisis is demanding new approaches for servicing the global market

Virtual communication platforms as alterna tives to real trade fairs?

The coronavirus pandemic is also presenting the global textile machine industry with new communication challenges. Leading technology and conti-nental trade fairs such as the ITMA Asia, the ITM, the INDEX and the ITME, along with important sector events such as the Global Fiber Congress (GFC) in Dornbirn, will not be taking place as normal in 2020 and have had to be postponed until next year. However, what alternatives are now available for intensively maintaining networks and continuing to communicate with part-ners and customers – and for attractively presenting new products and services in the pro-cess? New virtual communication platforms could possibly be a solution here and could ulti-mately also be considerably more sustainable in the long term. We spoke about these to André Wissenberg, Head of Marketing, Corporate Communications and Public Affairs for the Oerlikon Manmade Fibers segment and Chairman of the VDMA Marketing and Trade Fair Committee.

What impact has the coronavirus epidemic had, and does it continue to have, on events within the textile machine industry?

In principle, all trade fairs, events and similar get-togethers were put on ice in the middle of March. Most organizers initially repeatedly moved these to in part later dates in the year in the hope that the pandemic would be quickly contained and the second half of the year could continue as normal. Ulti-mately, we must all recognize that the coronavirus crisis and its impact on our global coexistence will continue to determine activities for a long time to come. Travel currently continues to be possible only to a limited extent and with restrictions and it appears that it will be difficult to plan trips for many months yet. However, planning is everything when it comes to the international trade fair and events business – and that applies to both organizers and, above all, to us as an exhibitor.

What alternative communication channels are currently available?

For us, the focus is more than ever on intensively maintaining contact with our customers and part-ners. Here, it is about providing information on new products and services, commercial clarification for business already being conducted, the implementation of and support for machines and systems to be installed and commissioned and also maintaining excellent customer relations. And this also includes everyday things, private matters and one thing above all: emotional concerns. Here, we are using –

insofar as possible – all modern digital means of communication such as Skype, MS Teams, Zoom, etc. Ultimately, it is about how those persons involved in this digital world open up and interact with these communications methods. Undoubtedly a question of generation. If at all possible, hybrid customer support solutions with local employees from the company-internal local network and participating experts are currently probably the best alternative.

What will the future look like?

Technology webinars – as recently also initiated by the VDMA with a new series and as they will also be offered by Oerlikon Manmade Fibers in the second half of the year – help convey detailed information, predominantly on focus topics, to existing and potential customers. While the didactic focus of webinars is generally more likely to resemble university lectures, regardless of how creative these might be, and the dialog takes a backseat here – not least also due to the fact that the participants are competing with each other – new, currently nascent digital communication platforms in the form of virtual trade fairs could represent an invaluable addition for all market players.

As well as the purely unidirectional transfer of information using attractively-designed Websites with – in the best case – state-of-the-art virtual reality technologies, there will also be bidirectional communication possibilities available using scheduled video chats between customers and company experts. Conferences and seminars generally round off the program. A hugely-attractive offering for all participants – as long as sufficient numbers take part on both sides. Because it is only if the benefit of a ‘real trade fair’ is created – the possibility to compare products and solutions from different suppliers and the offerings on a digital communication platform designed in this manner and to collate all the relevant information for making a purchase decision in a timely and efficient way, i.e. by means of downloads – will suppliers and visitors be able to acquire long-term added value. With its ‘Innovate Textile & Apparel Virtual Trade Show’, WTIN will – between October 15 and 30, 2020 – be one of the very first organizers within the textile machine industry to take this new digital step. And we at Oerlikon Manmade Fibers are thrilled to be part of this and to welcome our customers to a new virtual world.



Caption: André Wissenberg, Head of Marketing, Corporate Communications and Public Affairs for the Oerlikon Manmade Fibers segment and Chairman of the VDMA Marketing and Trade Fair Committee.



Caption: A new digital world with augmented and virtual reality technologies as alternatives to real trade fairs? Modern communication platforms must prove whether there is acceptance of these among exhibitors and visitors.