In March, the European Coatings Show 2019 once again opened the massive doors of the Nürnberg Messe to welcome the international coatings industry. Sally Roberts reports.

**Sustainability leads the way at the European Coatings Show**

Whereas talk in the industry is usually geared towards Asia Pacific and, specifically, the industry giant that is China, from March 19-21, 2019, everything became very Euro-centric as the international coatings industry once again descended on the Nürnberg Messe in Germany to partake in, arguably, the largest coatings exhibition in the world.

The European Coatings Show 2019 welcomed approximately 30,500 attendees from 124 countries, providing a busy conference programme, 1156 exhibitor stands, numerous business presentations, a start-up innovation area and gratefully received rest areas for its assumedly exhausted visitors.

As expected for a coatings event, colour was bright and it was everywhere, with stands promoting the latest technologies, equipment, concepts and innovations over the three-day period. Covestro was prominent in its array of colour choices, whereas Clariant opted for white, both looking sleek and opting to ‘zone’ its stands to best show off its different product applications. Clariant also offered a virtual reality tour of how its coatings impact cities, while Wacker, cleverly, built its own presentation area across from its stand. BYK charmed the crowds with its monkeys, while Lanxess was incredibly generous in its hospitality, treating members of the press to a Michelin-starred dinner. DSM won the prize for the best ‘press freebie’ with its specially coated metallic water flask – which is much in use, thank you.

Some, perhaps more relevant, facts about the stands demonstrate the growth the show enjoyed: the show filled eight halls in total, with six focusing on raw materials for paints, adhesives and inks. Two more were dedicated to testing and measurement devices, as well as laboratory and production equipment. Most of the 1156 exhibiting companies came from Germany, followed by China, Italy, The Netherlands, the USA and India.

Visitors came from six continents and 124 countries, with the top 10 list including Italy, The Netherlands, the UK and Turkey.

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**THE MAIN TOPICS OF CONVERSATION**

Sustainability, inevitably, was at the forefront of the conversation for the vast majority of companies that Polymers Paint Colour Journal (PPCJ) and Asia Pacific Coatings Journal (APCJ) spoke with.

No longer a buzz word or trend but a here-to-stay focus, the conversation ranged from low VOC targets to the sustainable sourcing of materials, covering virtually every aspect of the sourcing, production and logistics of chemicals and coatings.

Martin Vlak of DSM spoke about how the company’s focus has changed from simply improving performance, to doing it sustainably. The company’s ‘Improve. Enable. Advocate’ mantra was underlined by the self-imposed ambitious sustainability targets that were announced at the show. The company has taken it upon itself to become one of the most environmentally friendly producers within the resins industry and the most prominent supplier of sustainable solutions. Helen Mets, President of DSM Resins & Functional Materials, said: “For too long, there has been a general feeling that you either do well in business or do good for the environment – that you have to choose between performing well financially and contributing to a better world. I’m proud that my organisation doesn’t think this way. We strongly believe that doing good and doing well go hand-in-hand.”

It was a sentiment strongly echoed by Sweden’s Perstorp, who introduced its new portfolio, Pro-Environment Solutions, at the show. This is an expanded portfolio of renewable and ISCC PLUS certified products. Anna Berggren, Business Development Director, Specialty Polyols & Solutions, said: “The market trends that we see are connected to sustainability and demand for high performance and environmental coatings, with more consumer awareness and brand owners driving this.” Malin Johansson, Corporate Communications Manager, agreed: “Our long term plan is sustainability; it’s about becoming finite material neutral for all of our sites and all of our products.”

Continued Anna: “So, connected to sustainability, Perstorp is dedicated to becoming what we call ‘finite material neutral’ – to move away from fossil material to renewable and recyclable materials. Of course, raw materials and energy is part of the challenge on that. And this isn’t something we can do on our own.”
This comment highlights one of the other main themes present at the show: co-operation. Whereas before, there may have been an instinct or desire not to share information, technology or processes, there is now a definite mood from many companies that co-operation and sharing knowledge is the best way to progress in terms of both high-performance products and sustainability working hand-in-hand.

Holger Hüppeler, General Manager of Inorganic Pigments at Lanxess explained how Lanxess is working together with more and more companies in the customer’s own laboratories. ‘This saves on time going backwards and forwards. Lanxess’ technicians go to the customer wherever they are, therefore speeding up the process and reducing costs on both sides – offering value for both parties,” he said.

Covestro’s ‘City of Sustainnovation’ provided the concept for its stand and underlined the importance the company places on environmental progress. The zoned stand highlighted the company’s offerings to the many aspects of modern day life and demonstrated the ecological advances in each sector. “In addition to water-based and low VOC coatings, we are focusing on bio-based raw materials and, for the first time, biodegradable products,” said Martin Hellemann Soerensen, Head of Commercial Operations in the Coatings, Adhesives, Specialties segment for the EMEA/LATAM regions.

BASF took the opportunity to talk about its progress with chemical recycling and turning plastic waste into raw material for high performance coatings. Dr Nick Gruber underlined the company’s desire to “create value out of waste,” and how chemical recycling, which BASF refers to as ChemCycling, allows the company to recycle plastics for which there are no current recycling solutions. It was noted that future regulatory framework will decide whether chemical recycling will reach market maturity – the acceptance of chemical recycling and mass balance approaches for the fulfilment of recycling targets is crucial.

The subject of legislation and regulations was another hot topic at the show. With mounting pressures on biocides and the possible ban on TiO₂ in Europe, companies, such as Dow, were exhibiting their alternative technologies. Dow has been working on alternatives for both TiO₂ and biocides, as well as addressing a growing need for additives to have ‘multifunctionality’ – ie, doing more with less. Sarah Eckersley, Global Director, Research, Development and Technical Service for Coatings, Monomers, Plastics and Additives noted how consumer driven demands and regulatory demands are now more intertwined than ever, both with far reaching consequences on the coatings industry. The company also had many exciting developments with the products on offer, including the Formashield technology, which promotes healthier, more habitable interiors.

NEW PRODUCTS

Of course, as well as conversations, most people attend trade fairs to look at the new technology and equipment on offer.

Wacker stood out from the hundreds of companies debuting new products at the European Coatings Show by having a plethora of new product lines available. Amongst the company’s innovations were Vinneco, a line of new polymeric binders based on raw materials; Silres BS 6920, a flexible binder that protects mineral flooring; HDK H21, a hydrophobic pyrogenic silica for industrial adhesives; Vinnapas EP 3560, a polymeric binder for the production of interior paints with Ecolabel credentials; and Vinnapas 7150 E, a dispersable polymer powder for waterproofing membranes. This is not an exhaustive list, so it was no wonder the company built its own presentation area within the hall, so as to demonstrate the scope of its developments.

One of the highlights of the Kraton stand was the company’s new video on crude tall oil refining, which explains how Kraton’s bio-based products can help you improve performance and contribute to the intelligent bioeconomy.
Kraton introduced Sylfat 2LC Exp Tall Oil Fatty Acid (TOFA). Designed for architectural coating applications, this new product provides high gloss, low initial colour and excellent yellowing-in-the-dark performance. These benefits enable alkyd binder and paint formulators to achieve light colour and colour stability, as well as enhanced scratch and corrosion resistance for longer-lasting aesthetics. The 100% bio-based TOFA offers a significantly lower carbon footprint compared to other vegetable oil-based substitutes currently in use, allowing formulators to significantly reduce carbon dioxide emission. TOFA is also a non-food raw material.

Other key solutions for the coating and adhesives market from Kraton included: Syvalite 9000 Rosin Ester Tackifier. Designed for hot-melt adhesives, this bio-based solution delivers light colour, stability and excellent adhesion; Sylvares 1000 Series Terpene Phenolic Tackifier. Engineered for specialty pressure-sensitive adhesive applications, this product provides balanced adhesion and cohesion with formulation flexibility; and Kraton thermoplastic binders. Developed for road markings, Kraton binders enable brighter illumination, increased visibility and higher durability on heavily-trafficked roads.

Korea’s Songwon Industrial Group was again present at the show, promoting its new functional monomers and additives. Rosanna Telesca, Leader Market Center Coatings Director, noted: “We are very excited, because we developed these new products over the last year by responding to customer needs. They were asking for products in the waterborne area. We have new product lines and we are bringing those products to the fore.”

Dr Heiner Schulte, Leader Market Center Functional Monomers Director, concurred: “We are here once again, with a bigger team and a bigger product portfolio.”

Lanxess demonstrated its most extensive product portfolio to date for the manufacture of high quality coatings. This year, it included not only colourants, preservatives and benzyl products but also a wide range of aqueous special polyurethane dispersions and urethane prepolymers for coatings systems. One of the company’s focuses was on demonstrating how the raw materials can be used to formulate paints that are solvent-free, low monomer and easy to use for a wide range of applications, from glass fibre and plastic coatings, to automotive paintwork.

Staying with chemicals, the USA’s Ascend Performance Materials, the largest producer of Nylon 66 products, launched two new high purity, epoxy curing amines that satisfy the trend for increased performance, as well as those customers looking for products that resist yellowing.

### OPTIMISTIC MOOD

Talking to different companies, it became apparent that although there are very serious challenges to be faced, perhaps most notably in terms of environmental legislation, the general mood is of optimism. Companies are genuinely excited about creating cleaner, environmentally safe products for the world.

The mood in the halls was also one of lively optimism, with crowded hallways and busy stands reflecting the growth in the coatings industry as a whole. The sheer size of the show not only ensures that you reach your daily steps goal by 11am, it also depicts the strength of the industry.

Often described as a ‘mature’ or ‘stagnant’ market, the European Coatings Show made it clear that the continent is still home to innovation and the level of international exhibitors and visitors proved that what happens here is still important to the global industry.
Sally Roberts took the opportunity to speak with industry experts from Perstorp at this year’s European Coatings Show, to find out what the specialty chemicals company is currently focusing on. Here, Anna Berggren, Business Development Director, Specialty Polylols & Solutions; David Engberg, Product Manager, Specialty Polylols and Malin Johansson, Corporate Communications Manager tell us more

**Becoming finite neutral**

Can you tell me about the products you are promoting at ECS?

Anna Berggren: We have two new areas and the first one is an expanded portfolio of renewable products. At ChinaCoat 2017 we launched the first portfolio of renewable products and now we are expanding that one, with the new name of Pro Environment Solutions. The second is a new offering to the resins and coating industry. So, the portfolio of the new product is part of that but it’s also a new offering stretching beyond that, it’s a service offering to support our customers with our expertise, digital tools and solutions.

They both start from looking at what is happening in the market, what are the trends and how can we best support our customers. The market trends that we see are connected to sustainability and demand for high performance and environmental coatings, with more consumer awareness and brand owners driving this. Trends connecting to that are growth, especially in APAC, and how integration and supply chains can handle that and also looking at customised solutions. That is where the starting point to strengthen our offer came from.

Connected to sustainability, Perstorp is dedicated to becoming what we call ‘finite material neutral’, so, to move away from fossil material to renewable and recyclable materials. Of course, raw materials and energy is a big part and challenge of that. This isn’t something we can do on our own, so we are trying to find like-minded customers and suppliers to jointly drive this shift. That is the background to what we are offering here at the show.

The launch of Pro-Environment Solutions is also a geographical expansion: we started off producing the renewable products in Sweden and now we are expanding the production also to the German plant.

Is it harder to become finite material neutral in countries, such as China?

AB: We have a Chinese production plant and one in the USA, as well as Europe. We are looking at how to expand this concept globally.

Malin Johansson: The ambition to become finite material neutral is our company’s mission and it’s a global ambition – not only the production sites and our raw materials and energy but also how we minimise waste from our production processes. It’s our long-term mission.

Can you tell us more about the service offering?

AB: The purpose is to be able to support the customer throughout the whole business cycle, not only with products but also with our expertise, tools and solutions helping our customers within the areas of insights and applications, innovation and development, sustainability support, as well as logistics and secure supply.

Is there a lot of digitalisation at Perstorp?

MJ: It’s one of the three key areas. Sustainability is one of the biggest things for us, also health and safety and then digitalisation is the third layer that we put a lot of focus on. It’s a massive topic. It can mean so many different things that it’s hard to put a definition on it.

David Engberg: I think it comes down to what we are connected to, and it’s really interesting and we are quite unique in that way. I think is really interesting and we are quite unique in that way.

What are the main challenges in the industry at the moment?

DE: Sustainability is one of the main challenges. The majority of chemicals today are based on finite sources, so to be able to become finite neutral is quite a big task. Not only from sourcing the raw material but also how you handle it in production.

That’s why we’ve gone to the mass balance. It’s a way to gradually transition from finite materials to neutral and bio-based materials. It means we don’t need a new production set up; we already have one set up to produce the bio-based production. This is really key for us, to make this switch.

AB: We have been encouraged by our customers to help explaining and informing about the concept.

MJ: That has been a challenge, to talk to customers and explain what it is and get accepted for applying the mass balance. But it is positive. We feel it’s the natural and best way to make the shift because we can make it gradually without building separate production plants, etc. It’s more sustainable and we see it as a necessity for making the shift to renewables.

Do you see a demand for this all over the world?

AB: A few years back it was different, but now we see interest from all the regions.

What other plans do you have for the future?

DE: We are also looking at expanding and looking in to different technologies for the markets we serve. A trend we see as well is the trend towards sustainability in different coating technologies, so less and less solventborne technologies and more waterborne or high solid technologies.

That’s something we’re also quite active in. We are looking in to developing different systems for waterborne alkyls, for example and also several products support radiation curing – they naturally have very low, even zero, solvents and we have good growth in that. We are now able to support with bio-based products to these technologies, so that’s another layer of sustainability that I think is really interesting and we are quite unique in that way.

The chemical industry can sometimes be a bit slow and conservative. We have taken a stand not to wait: We are prepared to take a leading part here, to come out with new bio-based sustainable solutions. There’s a lot of interest in what we are doing.

MJ: Our long-term plan is sustainability; it’s about becoming finite material neutral for all of our sites and all of our products.

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