

TTNA Annual Conference - Global opportunities, local knowledge

With a wide selection of international and local guest speakers, the 2006 TTNA annual conference offered excellent insight into new technical and nonwoven products as well as global markets and opportunities.

Held at the palatial Langham Hotel on Melbourne's Southbank, the conference also proved an excellent forum to meet and network with the leaders of the industry including those in research and development, manufacturing, machinery suppliers and students.

Opening proceedings was Ian Butler, the Director of Market Research and Statistics, Industrial Nonwovens Disposables Association (INDA). Butler's presentation revolved around the prospects for the worldwide nonwovens industry, covering product trends as well as global market trends.

"Currently the largest growth area is in wipes," Butler said.

"In 1997 the retail market for wipes stood around US\$700M, today that figure is around \$2.2 Billion."

Butler said that the growth had been spurred on purely by the US market with a large amount of that growth due to the emergence of antibacterial wipes introduced into the market by Swiffer in 1999.

"I still see tremendous growth in wipes, greater than eight percent, as new products are released the US market will continue to grow."

The environmental impact associated with the disposal of the wipes has caused a great deal of concern. An advertising campaign by a US company for a toilet wipe in Sweden caused a tremendous backlash when consumers were encouraged to dispose of the wipes into the sewer.

"The Swedish Government had been encouraging its people to stop throwing things down the toilet for the last 20 years and in no time at all one advertising campaign has undone all their hard work," Butler said.

India: A sleeping giant

A growing middle-class, and higher living standards are just two of the reasons why the Indian nonwovens sector is expected to boom according to Butler. India currently produces around 50,000 tonnes of nonwovens annually, around 5000 tonnes less than that currently produced by the Australian nonwovens sector.

"I recently spoke with an Indian manufacturer and he said he is putting in 5 spun lace lines. I asked when, he said August, September, October, November and December."

"That sort of growth is unheard of," Butler exclaimed.

Leaving off when Butler finished was Samir Gupta, Managing Director of Business Co-ordination House, with his presentation entitled 'The Indian Perspective'.

"Consumption of nonwovens in India is currently around 100,000 tonnes per annum. By 2010, we expect this figure to reach 200,000 tonnes," Gupta said.

"There is a very solid base for textiles manufacturing already, which makes India attractive for nonwoven manufacture."

Gupta then went on to outline the expected growth of technical textile markets, highlighting extraordinary potential for agricultural textiles, fire resistant and ballistic product and perhaps the biggest growth market, geotextiles.

"In the next five years we see the market for geotextiles increasing from around US\$10M to US\$1,418M."

"This consumption of geotextiles will be mainly accounted for by the construction of roads and highways that is currently taking place, and this figure could well be higher if the government introduces mandatory legislation," Gupta said.

Other growth markets in India include medical and health care textiles, baby diapers, feminine hygiene products, automotive textiles, awning and blinds and eco textiles.

"As companies like Honda have shown in India, first mover advantage is always an advantage."

"China may be faster, but we think India is a sure bet," Gupta concluded.

An electric presentation

The highlight of the afternoon session was a presentation from Dr Richard Helmer from CSIRO TFT.

His presentation 'Electronic Textiles: Technologies, Applications and Impacts' outlined the incorporation of electronics into textiles and the significant impacts on both traditional and many non-traditional textile uses.

He outlined some of his work on the development of electronic sensors for adult sanitary pads, as well as the development of an 'air guitar shirt'. Helmer also outlined a number of potential products made possible through 3D knitting, such as EEC monitoring.

"Electronic textiles is a tough area to go into business in, unless you have an excellent business plan," he said.

"There are markets for electronic textiles already in control devices, such as buttons for iPods, but there are plenty of potential markets in medical and sporting sectors."

"There just happen to be plenty of hurdles as well."

A full list of speakers and presentations can be found at www.ttna.com.au