



NEGATIVE GROWTH, BUT APPETITE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

EuPIA's 16th Annual Conference took place on 11-12 April 2019 in London. By Sebastian Krauß, CEPE.

Negative growth in the largest markets, slower development in the East and growth only outside of the EU highlight the challenging times facing the European ink industry. Regarding sustainability, the ink supply chain thinks 2018 could have seen a better performance. These issues plus industry trends and innovation have been key discussion points during EuPIA's Annual Conference 2019.

The latest regulatory measures such as the Single-Use Plastics Directive target the reduction of waste, especially plastic waste, as primary objective. Equally, the ink consuming packaging industry recognises sustainability as the best way forward. The innovative solutions offered by the supply chain are two-fold: improved product design and more recycling. What does this mean for the ink industry?

LEADING CHANGE THROUGH STRONG PRODUCT DESIGN

Product design has been identified as a primary path to reach higher recycling rates, since not all items are equally recyclable. The UK's sixth largest food retailer Co-op therefore suggests to narrow the range of polymers used (matching them with what the current waste

management systems can cope with), to simplify the packaging construction by reducing the number of layers and the removal of metal components. In addition, a reduction in the use of colour is helpful – as the sorting process becomes easier with transparent packaging. Austrian plastics producer Borealis has established a dedicated code of conduct to have their rigid packaging designed ready for recycling. By making the appropriate material choices and design decisions, each product is produced to allow them to be collected, sorted and recycled. This entails more combinations of virgin polymers with recycled plastics and an increased use of mono-materials.

Nestlé Research established golden rules for the packaging of the future. With regards to plastic and coated paper there should be no use of oxo-degradable plastics, less use of carbon-based materials, and a phase-out of certain plastics (PVDC, PVC, PS). Instead, the use of transparent or lightly tinted materials should be encouraged and those residual products favoured that can easily be removed.

THE QUALITY OF RECYCLED PLASTICS

The improvement of the quality of recycled plastics is of particular interest to the ink industry, as inks have an impact on the overall characteristics of recycled plastics. Hence, the supply chain hints at



SAVE THE DATE

The next EuPIA Annual Conference
will take place on
26 and 27 March 2020
in Budapest, Hungary.

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the need for innovation to further enhance the de-inking properties, a focus on polymers used in inks and new technologies such as solvent-based or chemical recycling.

Design thinking and improved waste management are expected to meaningfully tackle today's environmental challenges. In order to make it a success, a collaborative approach with consumers and the supply chain is needed, especially to achieve the proper economies of scale. An excellent example is the charity and not-for-profit organisation Recoup. By providing research, technical guidance and training, Recoup promotes and increases the levels of plastic recycling among plastic manufacturers, retailers and waste management companies in the UK.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The way forward seems clear: companies take steps towards full recyclability. UK retailer Co-op already introduced a compostable carrier bag and pledges to have all its packaging recyclable by 2023. Two years later, Nestlé seeks to have achieved a rate of 100% recyclable or reusable packaging and Borealis aims at having quadrupled its recycling volume by then. These are just some of the actions already in development.

Ink manufacturers are prepared to rise to the challenges ahead. This includes giving due consideration to the interaction between the print and the substrate during the recycling process. Ink manufacturers have an important role to play and should therefore develop and promote sustainability strategies that align with their brand owners, converters and the broader supply chain. 



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