



French Textile Equipment Manufacturers' Association

UCMTF

Interview for China Textile

Christian Guinet, Secretary General

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1. How was it going with the textile market in France in the past year? Is there any change in orders for textile manufacturers compared to the same period last year?

After the pandemic, our sales rebounded by more than 50% in 2021 to a “normal” 1 billion euros annual turnover. Again in 2022, figures both for orders intakes and sales were slightly over 1 billion euros.

At the beginning of 2023, our orders books are quite good. Most of our members have a backlog of orders of about 5 to 6 months, and new orders are coming in at a reasonable pace. Then, we do not have any reason to be anxious about our near future. For the long run, we believe that the apparel and home textiles productions will at least, increase with the world population and the economic growth and that many new applications will fuel the technical textile sector. Recycling processes may dampen the production of new fibers but recycling is also a new sector by itself which needs as many equipments and workforce as the more traditional sectors.

2. Is the production affected by the rising price of raw materials? In your opinion, when is it expected to return to normal?

The rising prices of raw materials is not a problem specific to the textile industry. After an unusually long period of worldwide low inflation, the geopolitical tensions, the war in Ukraine, the availability and prices of energy have set a return to a new wave of inflation, rising interest rates and social disruptions. In the equipment business, our companies have faced shortages and incredible price increases in electronic devices and transportation.

But, it is when everything looks complicated and difficult that good news may come in. War, logistical disruptions, high energy prices and inflation, higher interest rates make up for the headlines. But logistical disruptions seem to ease substantially, transportation prices are going back to pre-crisis levels, the inflation peak seems behind us and interest rates are increased at

a lower speed. Then, it may be time to be positive!

3. How many French companies will participate in this exhibition? Could you recommend some high-quality exhibitors to us?

The French textile equipment manufacturers are the 5th exporters worldwide.

All of them offer high quality equipments and service. Of course, they will participate in ITMA 2023.

We are particularly strong in long fibre spinning (wool, acrylic ...), yarn twisting and control (including technical yarns), space-dyeing, heat setting for carpet yarns, carpet systems, bleaching and hydro-extractor equipments, dyeing and finishing, felts and belts for finishing processes, precision machining and textile ERP.

4. As far as you know, what new equipment and technologies will be unveiled? Could you share some new trends in the industry with us?

We are still a few months away from ITMA which will take place next June in Milano. I cannot speak specifically of the new features our members will introduce. It is not the responsibility of our association to do so. Each equipment manufacturer has his own strategy to present its innovations to his own partners and to the general market.

New trends are of course related to sustainable developments and Artificial Intelligence. Concerning sustainable developments, the demand comes from the end consumers themselves. The well-known global brands as the smaller ones cannot just follow this trend but have to be leaders. Then their own suppliers, the textile (fabric) manufacturers have to adapt their own production processes. This is where, we, as equipment manufacturers, have our own responsibilities. Offer energy, water, chemical, raw materials savings thanks to new design of our equipments. Artificial intelligence may help as it helps to focus on zero defects and traceability.

5. What are the advantages of French companies compared with other countries and regions?

Our customers have to adapt more and more quickly to their own markets' demands. They have to offer new products with zero defects and less environmental footprints. Then they need flexible equipments and many services from us. Our members have to be agile to design, produce and service the equipments which are needed even for small orders. As they are mostly SME's, run by real entrepreneurs, they can sustain this strategy.

Offering off-shelves equipments for mass markets productions is not our strategy. We are focused on smaller or even niche markets, then we have to be prepared to adapt our equipments to our customers specific needs and have design and production capacities to do this at industrial prices. This has been our strategy for many years now, and this is why most of our customers are long time partners.

6. What aspects will French enterprises focus on in product development and technology promotion this year?

Let's come back on energy savings. They are a major trend both for us and for our customers.

For the long term, I think it will have a positive effect on our companies. Just one example: one of our members, just a few days ago, showed me the energy savings from the replacement of an equipment he had computed with a customer. The pay back of the equipment he was offering was less than a year compared to the machine which was installed in the customer's factory.

The equipment we sell may run for many years but the old equipments are not energy efficient, new investments have very quick paybacks, I believe that this is a real argument to invest and then an additional chance for us to sell new equipments.

7. Artificial intelligence is changing our lives. Could you share some relevant examples from French enterprises?

Industry 4.0, is already a reality in the factories of our customers. Artificial intelligence is no more a dream but a tool to maximize the cost reductions and the metaverse is already developed, even by us as an association, to design virtual presentations.

In our R&D departments, we see the developments of digitalization and Artificial Intelligence. For example, to design new equipments we have incredible tools like CATIA which has been developed by a French software company.

It is sure that digitalization within a factory or between customers and suppliers will continue to take a bigger and bigger role.

8. What is the domestic sales situation of French textile machinery? What kinds of products do Chinese customers generally prefer? Does French enterprises have any actions to expand their business in emerging textile centers, such as Southeast Asia and Africa?

Our domestic market is quite small in apparel and home textiles but it is more important and grows fast in technical textiles. These new textiles are everywhere, whether as commodities, mostly in nonwovens, and highly technical markets like in the medical fields or the automotive industry.

Asia and particularly China are very important markets for us. China has been our first market for many years. Unfortunately, the pandemic has restrained our marketing efforts in China. I think this is changing very quickly for the better.

We have agents in China who are well introduced; our sales teams are starting to travel again. As they have established personal relationships with their Chinese counterparts, I strongly believe they can go beyond usual business relationships and see how our companies can help their customers develop new markets and products.

These partnerships are really important as our strategy has always been to have very stable collaborators, continuing education and internal promotion. This is very positive to establish a mutual understanding relationship with our customers and go beyond the day-to-day business.

9. Apart from good products, marketing is very important as well. Do you have any good product marketing experience?

Since the pandemic, we have organized two seminars in Poland and Belarus. We used to do so in China. After the pandemic, we will come back! We have redesigned our website www.ucmtf.com which is a very convenient hub to visit our members own websites. We have helped our members design new marketing tools incorporating virtual presentations.

10. Do you have confidence in the textile machine market in 2023? What are your expectations for this exhibition?

ITMA 2023 will be a great edition. I just received some statistics from the ITMA organizers. Already 120 000 square meters are booked which is about 10% more than the final figures for ITMA 2019 in Barcelona (before the pandemic). This increase does not come from the number of exhibitors but from bigger stands reserved by many exhibitors. We can suppose this means that they think positively and have many equipments to show, many improvements of course but also quite a number of breakthrough technologies. This is quite a thriller, let's wait and see!

We expect ITMA 2023 to help finalize orders already in the pipeline and to open new perspectives with new customers.

11. Do French enterprises have any plans to participate in ITMA ASIA + CITME held in China in November 2023?

Of course, ITMA-ASIA+CITME is a major event and our companies have plans to participate. They have always done from the first ITMA ASIA in Singapore and then in China. We are a trade association grouping the French textile equipment manufacturers. As such we are a member of Cematex and therefore have an important role in the decision-making process of this European association which owns the ITMA brands including ITMA ASIA.

12. Do you have any suggestions for Chinese textile machinery enterprises?

Chinese textile machinery enterprises may be our competitors but considering we are not on mass markets but on smaller or even niche markets, I do think they are really interested. Let me give you an example of a niche market because; we are particularly proud of it. Kristian Blummenfelt, the Norwegian athlete won the Men's Triathlon Olympic Gold Medal. At that time, I did not know that the Trintex Skinsuit he was wearing for swimming, cycling and running was made of a fabric designed and produced by the French company Payen. Even more: to dye and finish the fabric, Payen is using a machine from one of our members, Alliance. It dyes and finishes the fabric which incorporates an unusually high percentage of elastane covered polymer.

A highly technical finishing equipment for a highly technical fabric and, at the end of the story, a gold Medal!

I trust that many customers will award us “gold medals” during next ITMA. It will be an honor and a pleasure to welcome them on our booths.

Name, position and 1-3 photos of the interviewee.

Christian Guinet

UCMTF Secretary General