

French Textile Equipment Manufacturers' Association

UCMTF

Interview for Fibre 2 Fashion

Christian Guinet, Secretary General

February 2023

- **Has the French textile machinery industry revived to pre-pandemic levels?**

After the pandemic, our sales rebounded by more than 50% in 2021 to a “normal” 1 billion euros annual turnover. I do not have yet the precise 2022 figures but they should be around this figure both for orders intakes and sales.

At the beginning of 2023, our orders books are quite good. Most of our members cannot deliver new orders before the second half of 2023 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.

- **Do you see a shift in the buyer demand post-pandemic in terms of textile technology preferences and order quantities?**

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.

- **How did the recent energy crisis affect the French textile machinery industry?**

From a short-term point of view, the energy crisis, and, to be precise, the price increases of energy we have to support, have a negative effect on our margins. For the long term, I think it will have a positive effect. One of our members, just a few days ago, showed me the energy savings from the replacement of an equipment he had computed for 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.

- **What is the current strength of members at UCMTF?**

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.

Our DNA main characteristics are R&D and service. Our strategy is to offer the right equipments to produce what their own markets ask to our customers. Within this framework, we are focusing on energy, raw materials, water and chemical savings and on recycling processes.

What efforts has UCMTF made post-pandemic for its members?

We have organized two seminars, in Poland and Belarus. We have redesigned our website www.ucmtf.com which is a very convenient hub to visit our members' websites. We have helped our members design new marketing tools incorporating virtual presentations and we have shown these on our booth at Techtextil in Frankfurt.

- What kind of support has the government provided post-pandemic to help the textile machinery industry?

During the pandemic our factories had to nearly close down due to sanitary precautions but also for lack of orders, even of spare parts as worldwide our customers' own factories closed for weeks and even months. Our government helped us with financial compensations particularly to keep our skilled workforce. This was 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. It also helped us to rebound quickly.

- When do you see the demand picking up given the recessionary fears in many countries?

As I said, our orders books are quite normal. 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!

- What new technologies and innovations have the French textile industry come out with in the last two years?

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.

Concerning the energy savings, I believe that most of our contributions are not within our own companies but are coming from the equipments we offer. Nevertheless, within our own companies we continue to see mergers and acquisitions which are a source of economies of scale and rationalizations.

- What breakthrough technologies for the textile industry will UCMTF member companies showcase at ITMA 2023?

We are still 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 them to his own partners and to the general market.

- What are your expectations from ITMA 2023?

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.

- How do you envisage the future for UCMTF?

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. We provide our members economic information and represent them at European and French levels.

We provide logistical support to our members to help them select the shows where they will exhibit and enhance their marketing efforts through seminars. In your own country we have organized such seminars

For example, our seminars in your own country, India, took place in Delhi and Surat. They attracted more than 300 textile companies from Delhi, Panipat, Ludhiana, Amrtisar, Ahmedabad, Silvassa, Vapi, Baroda, Vadorara

Our goal is to do all this even better.

- Any other point that you would like to share, especially in view of the upcoming ITMA fair?

I would like to share with you a proud moment for the French textile equipments. 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 honour and a pleasure to welcome them on our booths.