

The Giant of Alfeld

C2 visits SAPPI Alfeld, one of the biggest European manufacturers of specialty papers



The huge production site of SAPPI Alfeld

The heart of SAPPI Alfeld is enormous and it beats in the company's Paper Machine 2 (PM2). It measures 6.4m in diameter and weighs an unbelievable 135 tons. When the operator stands right in front of it, he has to put his head back to see it in total but you cannot ignore it because it roars and hums at working speeds of several hundred metres per minute.

Everyone is talking about the new MG Yankee cylinder, which was installed into PM2 just recently when the huge coating line got a complete 'face lift'. To install the cylinder, the roof of the production hall was taken away and SAPPI had to order the biggest crane available in

Europe. "We invested more than €60M to give our paper machine the best possible technical update," explains Gunnar Sieber, product manager release liner.

"Today, we can offer our customers an even better product quality and an improved production capacity. We can now run working widths of up to 4480mm with a maximum annual capacity of 135,000t. Together with four additional paper machines at the Alfeld site, SAPPI is able to produce up to 300,000 tons of specialty paper per year. The range of coating weights spans 50-180g/m² so that we can produce an impressive portfolio of specialty papers. The purchase of the Yankee cylinder was much more than a pure investment. It was our commitment to the specialty paper market, which is one of our main business fields," underlines Sieber.

Enlarged portfolio

Months after the installation of the new giant drying cylinder SAPPI introduced a greatly enhanced product range whose core is the Algro Sol release liner. "The Alfeld site was always very strong in the field of coated papers and our Algro



Gunnar Sieber



The part of the wide range of Algro Sol products for different applications

INFORMATION

SAPPI at a glance

1. 1936: foundation of South African Pulp Paper Industries Ltd.
2. Head office in Johannesburg
3. Three business units: Graphic Paper, Specialty Paper, Release Paper
4. 17 paper mills on three continents
5. 41 sales subsidiaries
6. 13 000 employees worldwide (5246 in Europe)
7. Production of 5.7M tons of paper per year (63% of the total European production), 2.4M tons of paper pulp (48% of the total European production) and 1.3M tons of specialty pulp
8. Total revenue in 2014: US \$6.06bn.



The impressive modernised paper machine (PM2)

products have proven their quality within recent decades,” stresses Dr Peter Wenz, head of technical customer service at SAPPI. Based on these experiences, the paper experts not only enlarged their range of the specialty papers of the Algro Sol brand but also adapted it better to meet customer demands.

With Algro Sol they put an interesting all-rounder into the limelight. The silicone

base paper Algro Sol is now on hand with paperweights of 70, 80, 85, 90, 98, 120 and 135g/m². All silicone base papers are convincing with their very low consumption rate, their homogeneous silicone surface as well as with their high dimension stability and flatness. The faster curing and the better anchorage of the silicone opens up the potential for a wide range of graphic applications, e.g. as a

release liner for self-adhesive films and prepregs, plotter films, self-adhesive labels, protective films, full vehicle wrapping or stickers.

Changing sales structures

According to the SAPPI experts, the markets have changed rapidly within the last few years. Like many other paper manufacturers SAPPI had to face the printing industry crisis and had to witness the strengthening of film-based applications, which displaced paper-based solutions step by step. The Alfeld experts not only reacted with a courageous investment and innovative new products but also with new sales structures.

“We redefined our sales activities,” argues Sieber. “Our international sales network now follows a global approach. Our sales managers are proven experts in their product fields, product managers act



The giant Yankee cylinder is the heart of PM2

as a kind of interface, which bundles expert knowledge and supports our sales agents.”

Increased activity at the American markets

Only installed some months ago, the modernised Paper Machine 2 is running entirely according to plan. “We are more

than happy about our success and feel vindicated by the commitment of our customers,” Sieber explains. He already has new ideas and goals in sight. Since SAPPI is one of the leading European suppliers of coated paper, the experts are now strengthening their efforts on international especially American markets.

“In the US, silicone base papers often don’t have a backside blade coat,” Wenz reports. “This leads to different further processing parameters. Instead of a blade coat, American paper manufacturers use moistening processes to bring humidity back into the paper.” The recognition that European specialty papers with a blade coat offer improved processing features is gaining increasing acceptance in the US, although further intensive consulting is needed from the SAPPI experts.

“That is an interesting challenge for us because we not only launch new products but also advise on new further processing and application possibilities,” Sieber explains, but, with a 6.4m high and 135t heavy giant behind them, the SAPPI team gladly took on the task ... ■