A review of 20 years of meetings, talks and inspiration

Leading lights in the PET world

Technology is only as good as the people behind it. Lots of clever minds, from bottlers, processors and suppliers have made the PET bottle what it is today with their imagination and energy. We have come to know and appreciate quite a few of them over the past 20 years. We do not want to keep the highlights from you. In issue 3, we focused on some of the stars of the stretch blow moulding industry. This one will focus on other big players of the PET world.

In 1999, the world was in the grip of an internet fever – who would still persist with a printed magazine? Only very few saw the need for a trade journal early on and put time and effort into it.

Volker Kronseder from Krones saw the value in this during the first few years, and he always gave sound advice and had a keen eye for target groups in his charming Bavarian English; Dr Peter Neumann from Engel was always very professional and exactly the same as us who were newcomers to the PET sector at the time; Stefan Zatti with Waldemar Schmitke and Otto Hofstetter (from left) on the forecourt of Otto Hofstetter AG in Uznach, Switzerland

Otto Hofstetter, an outstanding preform mouldmaker, provided Swiss precision in PET toolmaking; Romeo Corvaglia who was constantly striving to optimise the weight of screw caps;

Gianfranco Zoppas from Sipa, a controversial innovator, continues to surprise the industry with his unconventional ideas to this day; Alexander Büchler during a Prosecco reception with Gianfranco Zoppas during NPE 2012.

Günter Krautkrämer and his sons, Bericap, without whom there would probably not be such a wide range of closures today; the Lehner family from Alpla, very respected when dealing with the media but, like Bericap, have established their company with production facilities in all the important hubs worldwide; Ichiro Mizuuchi, Nissei ASB, standing for Japanese thoroughness in single-stage production; Mrs Grace Lee set up the South Korean company, Chumpower, which has been shaking up the market for as long as we have;

Peter Pan and Grace Lee, Chumpower, with Johann Lange-Brock and Kay Barton (from the left)

Yuri Khmara, Retal, has transformed the small company Uniplast in Dnipro into the globally influential processor, Retal; and of course, Robert Schad, founder of Husky, the market leader in preform mould and machine construction, saw the opportunities offered by PETplanet.

However, it was not only the owners and CEOs of large companies who gave great impetus to PETplanet. A great deal of encouragement and support has come from sales and marketing departments. First of all, Gerd Liebig (first Demag, then Engel, now Demag’s CEO) came up with the rough concept of PETplanet during a fact-finding trip in 1998; Waldemar Schmitke, formerly of Netstal, was always involved in battles with the military high command to actively promote PET in the Netstal group, then taking on a new role as a highly-driven reporter at PETplanet with a keen eye for detail; Stefan Zatti from Otto Hofstetter was always very much on the ball in terms of technology and customer requirements; Christiane Wells, Corpoplast, has been an ever dependable leader at the company; Roberta Gualtieri and Martina Bottarel at Sipa are a highly efficient duo with the highest level of technical expertise, allied to an extremely professional outfit;

NPE 2018: Johann Lange-Brock and Heike Fischer (second from the right) meet with Martina Bottarel (second from the left) and Roberta Gualtieri

Manfred Rückstein, a real character from PET press, formerly of KHS, has seen more CEOs come and go than all the other marketing managers in the PET world put together; Valentina Gollini, Sacmi, the good soul of the company has been and is present at every important trade fair;

Valentina Gollini, Sacmi, framed by Johann Lange-Brock (left) and Kay Barton
Professor Michael Koch, formerly of TU Ilmenau, a feisty colleague, very rarely minced his words and was ultimately mostly proved right in what he said; Manfred Hackl, Erema, saw the importance of bottle-to-bottle recycling from very early on; and Gerd Fuhrmann, with his ideas on inspections with Intravis, has driven the PET industry to new heights of quality and excellence and never tires of reiterating the fact that everything we have today is down to the peace we have enjoyed in the West over the past 70 years;

Which of these names stand out? With one exception, all these people are either still working or have given their all before retiring; Sadly, Professor Dr Koch is no longer with us having passed away following a serious illness.

So, the question is – why is everyone else still with us? In most other industries, people change jobs after two years at the most. The answer is simple: they are all lateral thinkers who know their own minds and have fought hard and are still tilting at windmills, be they internal, technological or political. This is what binds them together. If all these actors have been working in the sector for at least 20 years, does that mean that PET is an industry for old fogies? The answer, of course, is no. These lateral thinkers are always coming up with new ideas for driving the PET bottle forward in competition with other types of drinks’ packaging.

John Galt joined Husky around 10 years ago as Robert Schad’s successor and has quadrupled the company’s value during his tenure.

Vezio Bernadi also ensures that Sacmi is always encouraging innovation.