

OCMI-OTG

all upbeat about beginning 2023 'full speed ahead'

Still upbeat in the positive wake of Glasstec, our editorial team recently asked OCMI-OTG Spare Parts Manager Alessandro Crescentini for his personal take on the future of the glass industry and on how the group fits into the big picture.

G LASS MACHINERY PLANTS & ACCESSORIES (GMP&A):

Can you give us a brief summary of the post-COVID period, of your company organization and your markets?

Alessandro Crescentini: As for OCMI's core business, the Covid pandemic didn't affect our activity much - which is to supply complete lines for glass pharmaceutical production. Instead, the spread of different vaccine types around the world pushed the demand for borosilicate glass vials for filling. Over the past few

months OCMI has introduced important technological innovation surrounding glass vial production, starting from the new index rotation FLA18-9 forming machine. At the end of October 2022, on the wave of such an innovative push, the complete vial production line was introduced, comprising the FLA18-9 forming machine and LF518 after-forming line. This new line, which assures the most accurate vial quality control during all the main steps of the production process, is already operative within factories of all the main multinational European companies that



manufacture tubular glass pharma containers. That makes Europe the main market for this solution at the moment, even if OCMI estimates that the line is also set to enjoy great success within other strategic markets in the Far and Middle East. In the meantime, we've consolidated our leading position as world ampoule lines supplier - especially in China, which remains the most important OCMI market, despite the fact that Covid still lingers in the country. As for our tableware glass machines division, it saw a rebound in demand for sealing/stretching machines stemware after the long pause associated with the pandemic - seeing Horeca beset by a very serious crisis. After a period marked by lockdowns and restrictions, the main European suppliers of drinking glass articles should improve their production capacity according to market recovery. OCMI now finds itself ready to face all production division requests, despite the big issues represented by strong increases in the cost of raw materials and energy as well as delays in the supply of electronic and pneumatic components - which have seriously affected the smooth working of the supply chain. Neither can we

ignore the fact that the post-Covid period was marked by the start of the Ukraine-Russia war, which saw any exchange with Russia and Belarus put on hold due to current sanctions and restrictions. That said, OCMI remains constantly committed to finding solutions that can support Russian and Belarusian customers in a way that fully respects European legislation.

GMP&A: What has changed in your relationship with customers?

AC: From the Covid pandemic, I'd say, we inherited a new way of relating to our customers which favours commercial meetings via remote connection. This offers considerable saving in time and resources even if -in special cases and when faced with certain particular cultures- face-to-face meetings remain the best means toward either sustaining good relations or else starting new ones. Our after-sales service, too, had to implement new procedures while being mostly managed via remote connections that allowed us to reach the factories of our customers worldwide. Here our purpose is to check machine operation parameters in real time so as to offer technical solutions -

either by direct, remote intervention or by giving suggestions on setting or providing maintenance for local operators. Indeed OCMI is now equipped to perform some very specific services, like acceptance tests on production lines via remote connection with dedicated audio-video tools - which sees customers interacting with OCMI technical and commercial staff in real time.

GMP&A: What can you tell us about savings in relation to energy and its associated costs, or about related problems and solutions?

AC: From the point of view of our customers, any increase in energy costs could seriously impact decisions on future investments by OCMI, given that their machines are powered by natural gas or LPG - as well as, of course, by electricity. Factories that are especially small and which produce ampoules and vials could find themselves in serious trouble by this new scenario - maybe needing to reduce energy costs. Here's why OCMI started researching alternatives to powering its machines - particularly focusing on hydrogen to replace natural gas or LPG. At the experimental level, hydrogen gave some exceptional results. Large multinational companies have hydrogen generators currently installed. Indeed they can already work with a mixing of hydrogen and oxygen or gas. For small and medium companies the greatest struggle will be that of scouting for ways to reduce initial investments to convert the feeding of existing production lines. As a supplier of glass processing machines, OCMI is experiencing a continuous increase in raw material prices due to energy cost increases - from foundries, for instance. The main problem is that the company's suppliers can't provide reliable advance information about such increases, owing





to the extreme unpredictability of cost fluctuations. So it's very difficult to update production line prices and avoid losses. Here we're facing the same situation with electronic and pneumatic components. And solutions aren't easy to find. A very careful analysis of cost increase progression could help us keep a reasonable margin on sales.

GMP&A: Finally, Alessandro, how would you evaluate the 'post-Glasstec' situation and what pros-

pects do you foresee for the market over 2023?

AC: The Glasstec trade show turned out better than expected given that many customers couldn't attend owing to the war in Ukraine - not to mention Covid's ongoing effects upon China. We nonetheless noted a resumption in the demand for stemware sealing machines from European customers, together with the birth of new projects for glass pharma-packing in both Europe and Middle East. Not only. Many projects intro-

duced by visitors at Glasstec could well be converted into orders by the end of 2022. With Glasstec behind us OCMI is now strongly focused upon the promotion of its new vial production line - of which we expect to install several units between the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024. In any case, regarding 2023, we expect a very complicated year according to information coming from our suppliers. Here the main target remains that of respecting lead times while allowing our customers to fulfill their engagements with end users. We also hope the war will end as soon as possible so we can have a more stable geopolitical scenario to restart commercial exchanges with Russia and Belarus - where OCMI enjoys a very long-term relationship with its customers. ■



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MECANIQUE**



**KYP
ACCESORIES**

OCMI-OTG S.p.A.

Via Privata Venezia Giulia, 7
20157 Milano MI
ITALY

Tel. +39-02-390-9181

E-mail: info@ocmigroup.com

www.ocmigroup.com