

FILMS

Flex Films Europa, Uflex's European stronghold

Wrzesnia, a sleepy Polish town is the place from where Noida's Uflex has set out to conquer the European flexible packaging market, and has been doing it magnificently, reports Rahul Kumar

Headquartered in Noida, Uflex, the world's leading supplier of BOPET (Biaxially-oriented polyethylene terephthalate), BOPP (Biaxially oriented polypropylene), CPP (Cast Polypropylene), metalised and speciality films for flexible packaging applications has polymeric film manufacturing facilities in India, Dubai, Mexico, Poland, Egypt and USA with a cumulative capacity more than 3,37,000 tpa.

The Poland plant is in the sleepy small town of Wrzesnia, halfway between the Polish capital of Warsaw and the German capital of Berlin. It's a small place even by European standards but for it employees largely from the local populace and a few from India, Uflex offers all the amenities that are required for a progressive multinational organisation. Wrzesnia town has only a few restaurants but one among them offers Punjabi cuisine!

The total area of the film production plant is 6.5 hectare with facilities to run two production lines. Currently, it has a single 8.7 m wide high performance BOPET film manufacturing line with plans afoot for the second production line. The current line runs at the speed of 500m per minute.

The construction of the plant started in June 2011, and production commenced from July 2012. As



Sundeep Saksena, head of Flex Europa, who joined the company in February, 2011 proudly says "The project was completed within 13 months, scratch to finish." Saksena, an MTech from IIT Mumbai, and an MBA, has had successful stints in companies of repute like Good Year, Blow Plast, Eureka Forbes, BPL, Koshika Telecom and Reliance, before joining Flex Films Europa.

Coming to Poland

"If you want to start a manufacturing plant in European Union, Poland is the first choice. It is a connection

point of Eastern and Western Europe. Poland is the only country in the entire European Union which is surrounded by seven countries. The most important aspect that I would like to underpin over here is that Polish people demonstrate high professional integrity and deep respect for a culture of productivity," Saksena says.

Connectivity is quite strong with all the modes of transportation easily available. The nearest seaport is around 300 km away from the production facility. The railway hub is around 25 km away. There is also a

dry port about 25 km from our factory. The international airport Poznan is just 45 minutes away from the production facility.

Poland is the only country in entire Europe which has positive GDP after Germany. According to a 2015 report, flexible packaging demand in Poland achieved a solid growth of five percent during 2014, compared with 1.4 percent for Europe as a whole. This has actually been the highest in Europe and the scenario continues to be equally lucrative and favourable in 2017 as well. "The workforce is very productive, disciplined, technically trained and computer savvy. Our staff strength is 208 people mainly from the local populace," he says.

10% of the produce of Flex Films' plant in Wrzesnia caters to the Polish market and the remaining 90% to the other parts of Europe. The plant manufactures and dispatches around 3,750 tonnes of polyester film per month.

The raw material comes from Lithuania. Saksena vehemently says that Flex Films Europa is a company which buys from Europe, manufactures in Europe and sells in Europe, "Europe is our focus. We also supply to CIS (Commonwealth

of Independent States) countries," he says.

Flex Europa manufactures films on demand. "We are the only plant which works on just-in-time principle. At any point in time we maintain a stock of raw materials to feed 15 days of production capacity. Every day, we receive 80 tonnes of raw material and approximately 80 tonnes of polymeric film goes out per day. This enhances our working capital management," he adds.

Now, the company is planning to start a second line of production soon. "Expansion is all about capacity utilisation," Saksena explains. "If we put a second line, it will be sold out. No problem. We shall be putting up second production line soon but that will depend upon the demand."

The manufacturing

Polyester and silica chips are used at the ISO 9000/14000/22000 certified and FDA approved Flex Europa plant.

To begin with, drying temperature of the chips is checked. It is important to control the drying temperature and then decide about the extrusion.

Dried chips from a specially designed vessel are sent from both

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Recently, Flex Films Europa has added holographic films in its portfolio. For this the company has extended its existing ties with Wave Front Technology, USA (WFT) to bring Fresnel lens packaging film manufacturing to Europe. Saksena says that holographic designs include multiple lense effects on the films. "All lenses basically add up to the aesthetic quotient. It's a long-drawn process involving both mechanical and chemical engineering expertise. To begin with, a lens effect is created, followed by metalising and thereafter printing."

the ends and they club the polyester chips in the middle. Silica chips make the material smooth, without which it will be not possible to wind the film.

Flex Films Europa converts around five tonnes of raw material per hour. The drying of raw material takes around four hours and the company keeps five tonnes of material ready at all times.

The manufacturing facility has five silos ie two with a capacity of 800 tonnes; one is of 400 tonnes and remaining two of 280 tonnes of storage capacity.

Best practices

"Consistency of the product is what we strictly adhere to so that the customer enjoys the same experience every time. Such are our systems and processes," Saksena adds

There is a designated person per shift for quality check. That person checks the thickness of the film. If the difference is not in the tolerable margin then the production person adjusts the dies accordingly. If the material is not up to the mark it is referred to the laboratory to establish the quality gap. "If we find that the material is not usable, we recycle the film," he says.

Trainings

Flex Films Europa provides quick weekly trainings for around 30 minutes to its staff. This is to remind them of their roles and also to hear out any complains that they may have. Adequate time is also spent on understanding the reasons for these complaints and how they can be avoided.

"Managers are not the people who know everything; they know how to manage it. Skill matrix is a place where everyone comes forward and shares expertise. You exactly know who holds what expertise or who is learning what for that matter. At the end of the month you come to know how much an employee has learnt," Saksena explains. "We have face-to-face meetings every month to discuss about the areas of improvement." ■

