

Barrier cream

Kuhne sees a growing market for its high-end film-making equipment as barrier applications spur an expansion in flexible packaging, CEO and sales manager **Hubert Armbruster** told Packaging MEA

Kuhne participated at the K trade fair with three machines while shuttling expo visitors to its site only 70 km away to get a more in-depth view of its solidly German technology.

As CEO Hubert Armbruster sees it, focusing production at the firm's plant at Sankt Augustin provides an assurance of quality.

"Comparing our manufacturing with other players, we still manufacture exclusive in Germany only," said Armbruster.

"And there is no manufacturing in countries with cheap labour. There are no parts coming from China or elsewhere. So these are purely made-in-Germany products. We have only one plant and there we do everything."

Describing K as the sector's Olympics, he said Kuhne had aimed to set out "some nice developments" but also "to show the customers what are the developments in the industry itself".

Here he sees growing opportunities not only for Kuhne but flexibles in general. "I think, of course, there will be an increase in flexible packaging because today we as Kuhne, and other producers, are more and more focusing on barrier applications especially for food packaging that gives an increased shelf life of the product," he told *Packaging MEA*.

"I think this is the main driver. Also, downgauging heavyweight packaging to thin-walled packaging with all the benefits of the barrier properties is another driver. Today in the supermarkets we see so many ready packed foods with high shelf life. That will be the driver for the future in my understanding."

But within this industry expansion, he naturally sees a special place for Kuhne, a company with roots back to 1949, thousands of installation, and a reputation for

innovative and sophisticated technology.

"We developed ourselves with the so-called triple bubble technology, which is a very specific technology, with highly sophisticated technique and parts that helps to do high-barrier packaging," he said.

"Major thing is that we have patent pending for these technologies so it's not so easy for other players in the markets to copy these because we have a lot of patents there and a lot of know-how also with our team as to how to set up this kind of technology. The same also applies in our rigid business. With flat film and sheet, we have a very big background with long-term relationship with big players in the market knowing that the process itself needs to be under control."

Kuhne also has every intention of sticking with its focus on German-made quality, he added.

"We will stick to this plan because, first of all, we are a private-owned company and the owner has a clear focus on how to continue with the business," said Armbruster.

"We are not interested in distorting the name of Kuhne as a company nor the owner's name. The owner doesn't want to be linked with some cheap manufacturing places. Such a thing may involve troubles like bad services and this is not our owner's aim."

At Kuhne's open house during K, the company is showing products for both flat films and rigid films. On display is a 7-layer barrier line capable of doing typical barrier sheets for food packaging in thermoforming applications such as coffee cups and the Xpet rigid sheet line.

"We have a line running to show that it's also possible to downgauge the density of PET by approximately 30% in order to achieve the density of a polystyrene or a polypropylene," said Armbruster.

"In the flexible business area, we have, I think the No1 in the world: a 13-layer triple

bubble line. This line is also capable to do a high barrier film and is been shown to a lot of potential customers and they were really happy to see that Kuhne has a technical partner and the response was very nice... All our products are our own technology and we manufacture them by ourselves. This way we have the know-how and everything in one hand. That's our target."

In terms of applications, 30% downgauged PET can offer enhanced products as well as low price, according to Armbruster.

"We are in development with some thermoforming companies and the target is to replace polystyrene cups in the dairy business, for example, because of some bad qualities of polystyrene like brittleness and cracking," he said.

"So they want to focus on that on the one side. And on the other side it's clear that PET is available in the market in big volumes. End of the day, it's much cheaper packaging than the packaging with polystyrene and polypropylene."

In the Middle East, the company's equipment is welcomed for its "high quality and precision" but also "excellent customer service" and the "excellent customer satisfaction after a customer has bought a Kuhne line", according to Armbruster.

"Quality speaks for itself because we have satisfied customers who actually vouch for our systems," he added.

"I consider Kuhne as an institution and as a company which has a solid foundation and background and philosophy – and they stick to it... The people that I meet at Kuhne are highly qualified technicians and engineers and salesmen with high experience. When a customer asks them a suggestion, there is true value-added information passed on."

Support is provided online but also through a team of technicians organised so

that “at any time one of them has a valid visa for each country”.

Training, he added, is also key to the appeal, taking place “99.5%” of the time at the customers’ facility.

“When the installation is finalised and the start-up procedure is going on, then we training the team how to manage the line and how to find our errors and mistakes and so on,” he said.

“With a lot if customers we make an agreement that our technicians will come two-to-three months later for a second round of training because by then the operators have learnt how to handle the machine and would have gathered issues here and there and realise a need for deeper training and this method works really well with the customers. They are happy that when their team has running knowledge of the machine and our experts return to give deeper training to solve issues.”

In the view of Rahim Jamal, general manager of Al Shihab Al Thahabi, which distributes for Kuhne in the Gulf, purchasing Kuhne kit involves joining “a family”.

“When we sell a line we come into a partnership and our customer is no longer a customer but more like a partner,” he said.

“We support the customer as a family. We have lines running over 20 years and that speaks for itself. The relationship grows with this.”



↑ Hubert Armbruster with Rahim Jamal of Al Shihab Al Thahabi