



An Evolving Industry

A few years ago, I examined the problems our industry faced. I couldn't see a way forward at the time, but the industry did. And it has evolved in an encouraging manner.

By David Price

We still face most of the problems I listed a few years ago, such as closures, downsizing, and contracting markets, but the industry has developed in positive and unexpected ways. The positive aspects are energy platforms, new hardwood plantations in Latin America, innovation in new paper-based materials and a new pro-active media campaign.

Energy Platforms

"Energy platforms" is the fashionable term consultants use for the growing biomass technology most modern pulp mills are perfecting. This trend does not need too much explanation because this magazine, over the last decade, has frequently led with news stories and features on biorefining, biomass, recovered waste and so on.

The technology has revived the prospects of ageing pulp mills and, in addition, new players from outside the industry got involved. They include energy, chemical and the automotive industries. At first, these dynamic and deep-pocketed players seemed a threat to the more traditional practices of the forest industries. But suppliers and innovators soon meshed together. Money did not seem to be a problem. Federal, state and local authorities had millions of dollars to invest in "green" technology. MeadWestvaco was able to tap into \$285 million to build a new, cutting-edge biomass boiler and to upgrade its power



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infrastructure at its Covington, Virginia mill. The project is scheduled to start-up shortly.

Southern Pulp

In a year's time around 3 million tonnes of hardwood pulp will be ready for harvesting in Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Argentina. And much more is being planted. Most of it will be for the Chinese market and the remainder for Europe and domestic markets in Latin America.

Eucalyptus plantations have been a success for the industry as they mature quickly (about seven years) and the fiber performs well on the paper machine. Opposition to plantations has been strong but often unjustified. In Argentina and Uruguay, for example, forests were cut down for cattle ranching. In time, pasture was overgrazed and, consequently, degraded. Eucalyptus plantations seemed an ideal crop for exhausted soil. The species is now the fiber of choice for the industry.

The eco-lobbies now recognize that the eucalyptus does much to revive degraded land.

Consequently, the popularity and merits of eucalyptus trees have caused major problems for northern softwood producers in regions like Sweden and Finland where growing times and harvesting costs are high. But some papermakers such as Stora Enso and UPM bit the bullet and invested

in, or partnered with, southern producers in Brazil and Uruguay. Ten years ago, who could have imagined that a Finnish paper company would supply the Chinese market from its Brazilian hardwood plantations?

Innovation

Pulp and paper producers lost technology leadership to the suppliers some time ago. Yet that change seems to have taken place smoothly, creatively and, happily, with little controversy. The “Editor’s Note” addressed this in the last issue of *PaperAge* when he reported on innovative work done by European firms, PTS and Innventia. There are now paper products out there which can be used in lightweight construction products, vehicle manufacture, insulation, smart packaging solutions and paper batteries.

I’ve been to a South African packaging mill which had a problem with its piles of sludge. The local university experimented by adding a polymer to the mess. It resulted in a product that was hard enough to be nailed, planed, chiseled or sawn to make fences, gates, doors and animal pens.

Another example of creativity (not far from me here in the UK), are farms that use deinked and sterile sludge from local fine paper mills for animal bedding.

Fighting Back

My last “heads up” reported on a new and encouraging trend in the industry’s media activity which is vigorously pro-active in promoting our interests. This is now ramping up strongly in Europe and the USA. There is still much to do, but a structure is now in place which we can all add to and help develop.

I still think we need to get on-side with major celebrities and the media. We also need to continue to lobby hard with key politicians — something that seems to be less of a problem in the USA than in Europe. Politicians on my side of the Atlantic seem to be accident-prone to financial and sex scandals; not enough of them are able to commit to protecting natural resources, waste recovery, etc. In short, they can’t see votes —yet — in the forest industry communities. But the industry’s new campaign, *Two Sides*, is opening up a path to candor and understanding.

Compared to my gloom nearly three years ago, I’m now writing in a mood of feel-good optimism. At a time when things could not be worse for our industry, things are happening inside and alongside it which are making a difference to its products, our image and its future. ■

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calendar of events

2011

OCTOBER 2-4, 2011

ASPI Fall 2011 Customer Alignment Meeting

Association of Suppliers to the Paper Industry
Austin, Texas, USA
Contact: Colleen Walker
Phone: 770-209-7521
email: cwalker@aspinet.org
Web site: www.aspinet.org

OCTOBER 3-5, 2011

ABTCP 2011 (Congress and Exhibition)

Brazilian Technical Association of the Pulp and Paper Industry
Transamerica Expo Center
Sao Paulo, Brazil
Web site: www.abtcp2011.org.br

OCTOBER 3-5, 2011

North American Forest Products Conference

RISI
Hotel Del Coronado
San Diego, California, USA
Contact: Misty Belser
email: mbelser@risi.com
www.risiinfo.com/events/na_conf/index.html

OCTOBER 23-25, 2011

Paper Recycling Conference & Trade Show

GIE Media
Downtown Chicago
Chicago, Illinois, USA
Phone: 800-456-0707
Web site: www.paperrecyclingconference.com

OCTOBER 10-12, 2011

BLRBAC Fall Meeting

Black Liquor Recovery Boiler Advisory Committee
Crowne Plaza Hotel – Atlanta Airport
Atlanta, Georgia, United States
Contact: Barbara Holich
Phone: (630) 512-0144
email: fhholich@aol.com
Web Site: www.blrbac.org

2012

JANUARY 31 - FEBRUARY 2, 2012

PaperWeek Canada

Paptac
Queen Elizabeth Hotel
Montreal, Canada
Contact: Thomas Perichaud
Phone: 514-392-6956
email: tperichaud@paptac.ca
Web site: www.paperweekcanada.ca

MARCH 12-15, 2012

24th Annual Pulp and Paper Reliability & Maintenance Conference

IDCON
Marriott Raleigh City Center
Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

MARCH 25-27, 2012

Paper2012

AF&PA and NPTA
New York, New York, USA