

EVENT REPORT

UV/EB Curing: best in class! RadTech Europe's major event delivers proof

'UV/EB: best in class' was the uncompromising theme of this year's RadTech Europe conference and exhibition in Prague, 17-19 October. The number of event participants – in excess of 400 – confirmed the interest and focus on this headline technology, across all its many – and ever-growing – applications and markets. Sponsored by a number of leading companies in the industry – including Gold Sponsors Allnex, BASF, BCH, IGM Resins, Lambson, Nagase, Rahn, Sartomer, and Siltech, and Silver Sponsors BYK, Covestro, EIT, Heraeus, Nedap, Nippon Gohsei, Nissan Chemical Industries, and Synthos – the event was also home to a number of exhibiting companies from all corners of the world.

Setting the context

RadTech Europe President and independent specialist in radiation curing David Helsby (CH) -- opened the proceedings. He set the context for the extensive programme of 'high technical quality presentations' that would span current major applications, in pursuit of RadTech Europe's primary goal – 'to promote the use of energy-curing technology' -- and to bring this diverse industry together as a whole because, he said, 'we network, we learn'.

Conference keynote: enlightening, entertaining

Dawn Skinner, conference chairman, of Heraeus Noblelight (GB), then welcomed keynote speaker Gordon Crichton (GB) of the Institut du Management de l'Achat International, whose role was to identify the future challenges for the industry because, he said, 'the way companies are working with their suppliers is dramatically changing'. In the past, the focus of company buyers was on **price**, but today there is a new centre of interest: **growth**, 'and the preferred **customer**, as opposed to the preferred supplier, is the key to achieving the goal.' Suppliers, therefore, must feel comfortable and at ease in their relationships with the brand owners, especially FMCG companies, and not the victims of the old-established three-point agenda – 'price, price, price'. Today, apparently, brands are all about innovation and speed to market but, Mr Crichton underlined, '75% of so-called innovation is NOT – it's simply product change'.

In a presentation that was both enlightening and entertaining, he emphasised the importance of people and ideas in driving successful and growing business in any industry – including UV/EB curing.

The North American market

A detailed report on the market perspective on radiation curing in North America was presented by David Harbourne of Harbourne Consulting Services (US), focussing specifically on the developments in UV LED chemistry, equipment and formulations, as well as relevant regulations. Given the progress, he noted that UV LED is at or beyond the tipping point for widescale adoption.

The European market

Then it was the run of Nick Gruber of BASF (DE) to provide a similar analysis of the industry in Europe which, he said, is expected to grow to 2021 across all its markets at 3.5%, with UV and EB growth outpacing GDP by 2 to 3% for the last 5 years. He identified trends in both the coatings and printing and packaging arenas, and highlighted growth drivers, which today are led by the developing conversion technologies – including digital inkjet and 3D printing. These are creating new market segments, including cosmetics, optical materials,

and coatings on plant seeds. Healthy organic growth in established market segments such as parquet, laminate and PVC flooring, and electronics will, he said, continue.

The association's agenda

Mark Macaré, Secretary-General of RadTech Europe, underlined the importance of the wide-ranging 'mixture' of the association's membership, spanning academics, technical specialists at all levels of the value chain, and representatives from the established and developing end-use markets. He noted that all these aspects of the membership were physically represented, both at the conference and the exhibition, and he urged all present to promote a continuation of the lively nature of this event by attracting even more newcomers to benefit from its deeply-integrated blend of technical, academic, and market-oriented content.

He reminded delegates, too, of the upcoming Food Packaging Seminar in Stuttgart on the 25th of October next year, which -- in the face of increasing health and safety and regulatory issues -- has become a 'must attend' event on the calendar for all concerned in the packaged food chain.

Award winners

The RadTech Europe Awards Ceremony concluded the plenary conference session. David Helsby presented the coveted RTE Advanced Development Award to Javier Portillo Casado (DE) from Fraunhofer FED, Dresden, for his innovative and outstanding work on low-energy electron beam irradiation of liquids for medical applications. On behalf of the conference programme committee, Dawn Skinner presented the Paul Dufour Award for the best paper given at the conference to Judith Radebner (AT), Graz University (AT) for her presentation on germanium-based photoinitiators for free-radical polymerisation.

The RadTech Europe poster competition provides university students with the opportunity to share their radiation curing research with conference delegates in live presentations at the Business Information Theatre situated in the exhibition area. This year's worthy winner was Yazgan Mete (AT) from the Technische Universität Wien (AT) for her work on NIR-initiated photopolymerization for lithography-based ceramic manufacturing.

Parallel conference sessions

Then it was time for the in-depth agenda to get underway. Over ten subject-specific parallel sessions, each supported by multiple papers, RadTech Europe demonstrated its outstandingly-inclusive span of industry partners, embracing strong representation from worldwide academic institutions as well as chemical, raw material, and end-user companies across the broad applications spectrum. Session topics ranged from advances in photopolymerisation; developments in printing and 3D printing; health and safety legislation, including REACH and RoHS; UV LED equipment and measurement and formulations; developments in photoinitiators; coatings innovations; and new materials and end-use applications. It was a notable feature of the individual session presentations that there was real communication between speakers and participants, and a strong willingness to share knowledge – providing more evidence of the unique nature of this multi-faceted event.

Prague's Clarion Congress Hotel's useful layout supported easy movement for delegates between the many conference rooms to attend presentations of specific personal interest and relevance, or to visit the extensive exhibition, which featured leading commercial companies in the broad radiation curing arena from around the world.

The exhibition

The exhibition, this year featuring 26 stands, is a major feature of the event. According to exhibitors, it represents a first-class venue at which to network with suppliers and existing customers, and to explore new avenues of opportunity with delegates. It was also the centre for refreshments during conference breaks.

Evening entertainment

Delegates and exhibitors came together again to enjoy the 'after-work party' on the first day in the conference lobby and exhibition area, enjoying informal food and drinks and dancing to live jazz. The more formal networking dinner, held in Prague's U Fleka, and representing a delightful gastronomic and social networking occasion, took place on the second evening and was very well attended.

Challenging, exciting, innovative

Defining the atmosphere pervading the 2017 event as a whole, RadTech Europe President David Helsby aptly summed up the industry status quo. 'These are challenging and exciting times for the energy curing industry', he commented; and General Secretary Mark Macaré added: 'This conference and exhibition is a true reflection of the high levels of innovation, increasing sophistication, and widening adoption of radiation curing today, and both delegates and exhibitors tell us it is a key event in the business agenda.'

More information is available on www.radtech2017.com. For questions, please contact RadTech Europe's secretariat.