

# SOFTAL

## adhesion guaranteed

There is a new sense of purpose at web treatment specialist Softal. It is epitomized by the enthusiasm of managing director and ceo of the family owned company Dr Philipp Lichtenauer.

"We have managed a generation change," he told *Converting Today*. "I came from a management position at Philips, because I was attracted by Softal's technology potential, and I brought in technical director Dr Peter Palm to develop it. He is bringing fresh drive to the existing technology base. We had been a little tame for a few years - not now, now we are the pacemaker in the industry, expert in adhesion," he boasted.

"Corona technology is our bread and butter, but we have opened the door for substituting that with liquid gas technology - creating an atmosphere using nitrogen dioxide in combination with plasma - that offers a totally new dimension in adhesion." Developed in co-operation with French company Air Liquide, this Aldyne technology creates a plasma to achieve different effects on the treated surface.

"It's not about dyne levels, but adhesion," Philipp Lichtenauer emphasized. "It's controlling the chemistry on the surface - a controlled gas atmosphere for the treatment of film. The Aldyne process has now moved from the laboratory to several dedicated installations (see picture). We cannot name the users yet. It is a much better adhesion primer - five to 10 times cheaper than liquid chemistry. It is also a much cleaner operation and easier to use than liquid - it's more environmentally friendly, and the treated material can be recycled, if required."



As to the future: "Our goal is to go into other materials as well as plastics - metal and wovens. We are looking at higher speeds and wider applications. We are not selling just hardware - it's the effect and the insurance it provides - adhesion guaranteed. You can't do without corona, it's an insurance."

He claimed Softal is the only supplier to provide a worldwide service. "We have invested in global service companies who also like to consult with customers. We build in modules that can integrate into the mother machine. People usually think we only do wide lines - in fact, we do from wide to small lines, everything two-dimensional. We haven't always told people enough about what we can do, and want to be more open about our capabilities. 'Brainware' - process engineering - is our most important resource, more so than software or hardware."

Dr Peter Palm has streamlined the organization of the company with the

watchword: "Make sure you deliver what you promise". He stressed: "Quality is paramount; in the end, all that counts is what you deliver. There is always the challenge to improve treatment for our customers." Softal has four people working full time on process development in the technikum at its Hamburg site, which has several machines for work on materials and applications. In all, no less than 10 out of a total of 70 staff are dedicated to R&D functions.

"The focus is on discharge - that's the key," said Philipp Lichtenauer. "Homogenous discharge with low kilowatts is what you aim for to ensure optimum bonding strength for each application."

For Softal, the electrode is "the core of corona", and one development Dr Peter Palm has recently overseen is the Intelliblade electrode. He has adjusted the spacing between the blades to boost its performance.

"Intelliblade is our cornerstone in converting and film production, while Aldyne is the product to develop new markets," he remarked.

In conclusion, Philipp Lichtenauer commented: "We are now in a good business position for orders, but we always want more. Global coverage is a key - it's important having a network of people on the spot in the countries we serve." □

### CONTACTS

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