

# Engage or become a burden

This time, the column is less about our adaptation to the known future framework conditions and more about the fact that dialog is taking place and important signals are already being sent out today. In the last week of September, the Afera annual conference on the European adhesive tape market took place in Thessaloniki, Greece. And if you listened carefully, you quickly realized where the journey is heading or where it needs to go. This year's event was attended by almost 150 interested parties, including executives, technical experts and marketing specialists, who all shared a common goal: to "explore" and discuss the future of the adhesive tape industry in terms of sustainability, compliance with regulations and market trends. After receiving constructive feedback last year, we made significant adjustments to ensure that this year's conference would be more dynamic, inclusive and relevant to all aspects of the industry.

Looking back over the last few years, we have admittedly neglected packaging tapes, which account for more than half of the industry's volume. Even though the specialty tapes business may be larger in terms of sales, we cannot afford to overlook the importance of standard tapes. The same applies to the processing of adhesive tapes, the complexity of which should not be underestimated and which has been illustrated here.

Topics such as sustainability, raw materials and future trends in adhesives affect every sector of our industry. And this is where we need to involve the younger generations to a greater extent, which we are fortunately succeeding in doing. The meeting of the Afera Flagship Sustainability Project (AFSP) was at the center of many discussions. What made this meeting remarkable was its openness - members who were not directly involved in the work processes were invited as observers, which is a clear sign of our commitment to transparency and inclusivity. The focus of the discussion

The main focus of the AFSP meeting was on strategies to reduce the CO<sub>2</sub> footprint, develop environmentally friendly products and improve waste management. This open and forward-looking approach ensures that the adhesive tape industry meets increasing regulatory requirements while continuing to lead the way in sustainable innovation. The "TACK" tool, which we developed in collaboration with our members and the IVK, was presented and met with great interest. Find out more on the Afera website.

In the "Market Data & Trends" session, it became clear how important it is to reconcile innovation and sustainability. One result: sustainability is no longer just an option, but a necessity for the future success of the industry.

The keynote presentation by Christina Stathopoulos, founder of Dare to Data, on the topic of artificial intelligence was particularly thought-provoking. She focused on how AI is changing production and other areas of a company. The potential of AI to increase efficiency, reduce waste and promote sustainability throughout the value chain became clear. AI could therefore offer many opportunities for the adhesive tape industry. One key message was: "AI is not the "enemy"! and does not compete with the way companies work. The-

***"Many decisions are currently being made and companies have to decide whether they want to make a serious commitment or not. become a burden in the long term. The decision on this can also be made from very different directions."***

***Dr. Evert Smit,  
President AFERA***



Those who can and do use AI are powerful competitors.

A comprehensive analysis of the global market for pressure-sensitive specialty adhesive tapes with growth trends from 2024 to 2029 provided valuable information for companies that want to face the challenges and opportunities that the adhesive tape market will offer in the future.

In addition to these future-oriented discussions, we also addressed the immediate challenges facing the industry. One topic was the raw material situation for the adhesives industry and the growing complexity of resource management. Here, too, the need for sustainable procurement and the need for material innovation to cushion disruptions in the supply chain and rising costs were discussed. The topics were then explored in greater depth in a lively panel discussion.

The same applied to the topic of "sustainability" and the regulations to be observed - e.g. ESG practices - with a particular focus on CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive). The CSRD specifies which companies are obliged to report on sustainability from 2024 and how this reporting should be structured. What was interesting here was the positioning of the financial and insurance world, which can be summarized briefly and succinctly: "Companies that are not committed will become a burden."

What the conference showed: If we face up to the current issues and work hard on solutions, the adhesive tapes industry will remain relevant, sustainable and innovative in the coming years. I am confident that we are well equipped to lead this industry into a promising, sustainable and integrative future. If we don't engage in an appropriate and diverse way, there is a risk that we will become a burden. And we should be more than the boulder shown above for the next generation.