

# Evert Smit's New Year's message to Afera Members and the greater adhesive tapes industry



Ladies, gentlemen, esteemed colleagues and friends,

## A New Year's resolution for 2026 — choosing to stay intelligent

The world we step into in 2026 is not a calm one, and it is not unstable in one neat, identifiable way either. It is unstable in layers, many layers. Climate disruption accelerates, while political resolve wobbles. Regulation fragments just when coherence would help most. Geopolitics seeps into supply chains, energy systems, raw materials. And at

the same time, narratives become simpler, louder, more certain — exactly when reality grows more complex and less forgiving.

### Why instability rewards oversimplification

That combination matters. Because in such a world organisations face a very old temptation: simplify, centralise, look for the strong voice that promises clarity, speed, decisiveness. It feels reassuring. It is also a trap.

### The strong-voice trap: How organisations lose intelligence

The moment an organisation starts listening primarily to the limited voice of its leaders — however experienced, however convinced — it quietly reduces its own intelligence. Decision-making narrows, blind spots widen, and the organisation slowly becomes as smart as the few at the top. In a stable environment that might work for a while. In an unstable one, it very clearly does not. Complexity does not yield to authority; it yields to learning.

### Resilience comes from connectedness

Resilience, and certainly anti-fragility, do not come from strength or control. They come from connectedness: from many perspectives being heard early, not filtered out until failure forces them back in; from diversity of expertise; from disagreement handled with respect; from trust that allows inconvenient signals to surface before it is too late.

## What Afera leaned into in 2025

Over the past year, our Afera has leaned more consciously into this understanding. 2025 was less about promoting the industry in the classic sense and more about serving it — especially its future. That meant strengthening co-operation across company boundaries, including between direct competitors, because fragmentation weakens everyone when systems come under stress. It meant investing further in market intelligence, not to predict certainty — that illusion is gone — but to reduce collective blind spots. It meant deepening regulatory and sustainability work, not as defensive necessities, but as strategic capabilities, because pretending these pressures will disappear is no longer credible.

What made this work was not a strong centre, but the collective itself: committees, expert groups, chairs, Members — people bringing knowledge, experience, and sometimes uncomfortable questions into shared spaces. This kind of governance is slower, messier, occasionally frustrating. But it resembles what political philosophers call a thick democracy: not rule by volume or dominance, but a system where the majority carries responsibility — responsibility to protect minority voices, expert insight and long-term interests. In complex systems, that is not idealism. It is a survival mechanism.

Our companies do not exist to optimise the next quarter in isolation. They exist to remain relevant over decades, in a world that will not become simpler just because spreadsheets would prefer it that way. Anyone telling you otherwise confuses accounting cycles with reality. Nature, inconveniently, does not optimise for quarterly returns. Neither do resilient industries.

## Why industry organisations matter more now

Industry organisations exist precisely to bridge that gap. Not to decorate the industry or amplify easy narratives, but to create pre-competitive spaces where trust can exist without contracts, where learning travels faster than incentives, and where long-term thinking is protected from short-term pressure. In a world drifting toward strongman reflexes, they keep systems intelligent by keeping them plural.

Looking ahead to 2026, this matters more, not less. Instability is no longer a phase; it is the operating environment. Resilience will require co-operation across companies, countries, and cultures. Anti-fragility will require listening more widely, not narrowing authority. Sustainability will have to be treated not as an aspiration, but as a boundary condition for continuity. And leadership — at every level — will need to resist the seductive simplicity of central control.



## **Looking ahead: The 2026 commitment**

So the resolution for 2026 is clear, even if the path remains complex: We choose co-operation over fragmentation, shared intelligence over dominant voices, expertise over hierarchy, and long-term relevance over short-term reassurance. Not because this sounds noble, but because in an unstable world it is the only approach that still works — quietly, collectively and with open ears.

Thank you, and I wish you all a prosperous and innovative year.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Evert".

Evert Smit  
President of Afera