

66th Afera Annual Conference brought tape industry leaders and innovators to Malta

120 participants from 15 countries attended the 66th Afera Annual Conference, which focussed on “Taping our future: redefining value – reinventing industry collaboration”. From 4 to 6 October, we were exclusively face-to-face at the Westin Dragonara Resort in St. Julian’s, Malta, for networking and deep diving into hottest tape business issues. The Conference Working Programme was preceded by Afera’s biannual Committee and Flagship Sustainability Project Meetings.

5 October: Day 1 Wrap-Up



The first day of our working programme of Afera’s “Taping Our Future” Conference in Malta offered insights on how to learn to collaborate to reach sustainability and in particular, circularity ‘next level’, and how to deal with the (perceived) barriers. Strategist moderator Bert van Loon and Afera President Evert Smit discussed the value of bringing the shakers and movers of the Industry together. This exercise in itself is contributing to future-proofing the Industry.

This event is more than the content of a programme in itself; it is about the business magic that comes out of collaboration and co-creation. Mr. Smit also highlighted Afera’s top accomplishments and activities presently running, including the development of [a sector-wide web-based PCF calculation tool for adhesive tape manufacturers](#), this backed up by supplier data and third-party validation. Afera will also participate and contribute to the [7th Global Tape Forum and Global Test Methods Committee Meetings](#) organised in Shanghai in April 2024.

First up, Dr. Felix Schultz discussed via recorded presentation research findings on systemic eco-innovation for a circular economy. He shared lessons learned from the European polyurethane industry, having mapped the key barriers and drivers to a circular economy. He said what is key will be understanding the changing rules of the game with a cross-industry network involving multiple stakeholders (scholars, politicians, and business practitioners) operating under governance-oriented rather than company-centric strategies.

Then Afera Regulatory Affairs and Sustainability Manager Pablo Englebienne covered the strategic priorities for a circular tape industry manifested within [Afera’s Flagship Sustainability](#)





[Project](#). He shared key updates from the Workstreams, which are focusing on initiatives to support environmental objectives and translating regulation coming out of the European Green Deal – their goals, activities, and connections with expert groups and government bodies, that are benefiting our Member Companies.

Next, Dr. Anja Eisenreich, who has published in *The Journal of Circular Economy*, told us why we “cannot go circular alone”. From her presentation “An open innovation approach involving stakeholders in

co-creation,” we learned we must foster innovation with pioneering companies and choose just the partners we need to make disruptive circular innovation happen, looking for the sweet spots of sustainability and profitability. In doing this, companies will stick to innovation in the long run.

Leaving any kind of greenwashing behind... Afera Member Company Loparex’s Sonja Haug, who has just been elected chairperson of [Afera’s Marketing Committee](#), discussed “Promoting circularity in material selection and product lifestyle management,” covering ISCC Plus certification, drop-in solutions, sustainable (bio-based) material sourcing, keeping all waste within the material loop and the value of stakeholders’ joining forces in performing with excellence/achieving measurable impact, reducing CO₂, and reaching our targets.

Mr. Englebienne, Ms. Haug and Afera Member Company Novacel’s Jean-Loup Masson, also a Member of the Steering Committee, engaged in a panel debate on the “why” and “how” of circularity in the adhesive tapes industry – which are both coming into focus. Probably less than 10% of the tapes industry is really circular so far. This is about value chains across industries, and we must work on each and every aspect of the circular loop,” said Mr. Masson. “We are going to have to work closely with customers on this, the downstream sector.” Ms. Haug explained that we are trying to become a serving industry which adds to and facilitates circularity in the larger product incorporating tape.



artimelt's Ian Grace mentioned the importance of developing differing circularity approaches for specialty and commodity tapes. "The tape industry is very diverse, with products which have to last varying amounts of time, so LCAs must be made for complete tapes and not the end products in which they are incorporated," commented Mr. Englebienne. Mr. Van Loon reminded us that solutions at industry level are complex, and we need different strategies for different parts of the Industry, zeroing in on what the sustainability factors are for each type of tape, including the downstream converted part. Ms. Haug emphasised the importance of product innovation.



Lastly, Mr. Masson led the session's interactive session on how to circularise tape. The audience, sitting at 15 different tables, formed smaller groups and worked together to map the circularity challenges, readiness, and potential collaborative solutions for different types of tapes (recyclable, difficult-to-recycle, containing a liner...) with a focus on key areas like the 9Rs, material sourcing, production, and waste management (reduction, collection, recycling...).

The enriching session was followed by lunch and the afternoon's programme was a group walking tour of Valletta after riding there in classic Maltese busses. Dinner was a magical evening spent having drinks overlooking Valletta across the harbour, said to be one of the finest in Europe, followed by a delicious dinner at Chophouse.



6 October: Day 2 Wrap-Up

Day 2 of Afera's Malta Conference Working Programme was about the art of thinking in various value propositions and the potential it can offer both individual companies and the adhesive tapes industry as a whole. The morning was dominated by another lively interactive session on collaboratively creating VPs for various industry segments and profiles (which will be very useful for everyone at the company-level and all the way down the value chain).

Innovator Denis Oakley, who “transforms engineers into entrepreneurs with mentor-led accelerators,” delivered an introductory presentation on “the why”, the theory, models and real-life examples to illustrate the power of VPs. With attendees spread over ten tables, Mr. Oakley then led a workshop on crafting industry-level personas representing the collective jobs to be done (JTBD) and customers pains and gains of their sectors.

This was followed by another workshop on developing industry-level value proposition with analysis of pain killers, gain creators and products and services. Not only did we cover various types of specialty and packaging tapes, but we managed to integrate the challenges of achieving sustainability and preparing for the next generation workforce with key insights and methodology.

“If you take away anything today—if you return and start to think about doing this within your companies—think about the eventual customer of each piece of tape or product portfolio that you care about; then think about the consumer or end user and all the pains that they’ve got,” emphasised Mr. Oakley. “And then think about how you could use tapes in a different way within the product lifecycle to reduce those pains. That is where you are going to get the most value from having spent time in this session.” Mr. Van Loon added his take that “it first has to get really messy before it can be cleaned up.” Formulating strategy takes core time and several stages of brainstorming and analysis.



Mr. Smit closed the entire event by discussing his development of the persona of the ideal tapes industry Conference goer: Joan Stick. She primarily attends the Annual Conference to network, learn and have fun. Her challenges are the difficulty in obtaining approval to travel and attend the Conference, and the

lack of time to create meaningful connections once she is there. Afera is currently working on this case study, to ever improve our offering to Members.



“We want to make this industry better, stronger, anti-fragile... with *circularity/sustainability* and a *better value proposition*,” concluded Mr. Smit. “So these two qualities related to future-proofing our business are invariably linked, ...so let’s find a way to make our industry *stick!*” He said that the pains of each of our businesses vary, depending on the part of the industry in which you operate. Some companies are closer to sustainability than others, because their



customers may be demanding it, while other companies are still focussed primarily on price. Afera needs to take all these differences into account.

Ultimately, working at an event such as this requires a “safe” feeling, a “safe space”, and Afera offers this: joining in Industry fellowship – even among tape company competitors – in a neutral environment. A closing buffet lunch followed.

Programme details, slide presentations and event content

For more information, visit <https://www.aferatapeconference.com/>. The proceedings and additional content of the 66th Annual Conference are made exclusively available to attendees.

Next year’s Conference

Afera’s 67th Annual Conference will be held 25-27 September 2024 at the Hyatt Regency in Thessaloniki, Greece. Be the first to learn about programme and registration information by signing up for our newsletter at the bottom of this page.