

Sustainable growth

After a difficult period of no growth, composites producers are optimistic about the future. Healthy business in traditional segments like marine has brought new growth in the last two years.

Investment in new applications and a targeted approach to new markets will make this growth sustainable - according to Eucia (European Composites Industry Association), which is now a sector group of EuPC (the European federation of plastics converters).

The period 2000 to 2004 was a difficult time for the composites industry. The market was stagnant, there was no investment and every market player was fighting for volume. Added to this, other materials like thermoplastics were eating into established composites markets.

Since 2005 though, the industry has seen a change in its fortunes. Traditional composites segments like marine do well in better economic times. As a result, healthy business in these sectors has brought new growth (6%) in the European composites industry.

To sustain this growth, major players like DSM Composite Resins are now reinvesting profits. They are investing in innovative technologies and products to open up new market segments, which will bring future growth irrespective of how well the traditional segments are doing.

These players are also actively supporting the association, since they believe a strong industry association is crucial to create favourable conditions for growth. For example, to make engineers aware of the great benefits of composites in traditional steel applications and to make it easy for them to start designing in composites, EUCIA coordinates the setting-up of educational programs, engineering handbooks and datasets. The association believes that measures like these and innovation that targets traditional metal markets will mean sustained growth for the industry.

The market for composites is still relatively small, but there is a lot of potential for composites in the steel market and that is 2,000 times bigger. If this period of growth can be used to invest in new composite applications that replace metal and gain 3% of the steel market, the composites industry will more than double.

At the end of July EPTA, the European branch association for the pultrusion industry, has decided to become a formal member of EuCIA. While EPTA will retain an own membership base, the two associations align their portfolio of activities towards a larger scope and/or a lower cost. A financial structure will be proposed in which EPTA can continue to operate under certain autonomy.