

INDUSTRIAL SECTORS and THE COVID TEST

Environmentally-sustainable packaging

The pandemic has increased the use of packaged products. The challenge of innovation versus a path toward reduction
by *Alessandro Piu*

One of the side effects of Covid is the increase in the consumption of packaged products, which, according to Ismea Nielsen data, represent 70.6% of Italian household spending. The increase was 7.8% in the first six months of 2020. This contrasts with the ongoing environmental revolution, but the perception of greater safety offered by packaged products seems to justify the consumer's choice. This is good news for one of the leading Italian industrial sectors: packaging machines.

"Packaging has become one of the most debated sectors worldwide," said **Antonio Cerciello, president of Nordmeccanica, to WSI**, "Especially concerning environmental sustainability and plastic tax" (the tax on packaging is expected to enter into force in July 2021 n.d.r.). Continues Cerciello: "One of the main reasons plastic packaging was born was to protect food and allow all companies to transport and export food products, guaranteeing their quality, fragrance and hygienic safety. The Covid emergency - with the need to use packaged single portions and discouraging the use of bulk products - has proven the essential functionality of packaging, and the packaging sector comes out further reinforced".

What may seem like a step backwards from an environmental protection standpoint, could instead drive an acceleration in the search for less polluting packaging, from production to recycling. This will be the way forward for the industries in the sector, as Cerciello confirms: "For years, together with partners and customers, we have undertaken a series of initiatives to design and create increasingly recyclable and sustainable products. We, as Nordmeccanica, devote 5% of our turnover to research and development, especially at a time like this - continues the president of Nordmeccanica -. The pandemic exacerbated the demand for safety for food packaging worldwide; however, to respect the industry's commitment to sustainability, traditional answers are not enough. All our investments in research and development are focused on innovations that can promote food packaging recycling and composting."

Digitisation, environmental sustainability and social responsibility are essential aspects: "Along with our Siemens partners - says Cerciello - we supported the Company's conversion into a company 4.0 right from the start. For over than ten years, we have been producing completely digital machines that can be used remotely, with an operator from a single station controlling the entire operating process and interacting with machines located on the other side of the world. With regard to social and environmental sustainability, we pay great attention in pursuing the objective of reducing the energy consumption of our machines and the production fumes generated."

70.6%

OF THE SPENDING OF ITALIAN FAMILIES
CONSISTS OF PACKAGED PRODUCTS



Nordmeccanica's latest packer reduces electric consumption, processing times and production waste

Thus the packaging reduces the environmental impact

The latest food packaging machine designed by Nordmeccanica is called Triple One Shot.

It is the first machine in the world capable of managing multiple flexible packaging operating modes. “It can assemble two or three films in a single step - explained Antonio Cerciello to WSI - without using any chemical solvents and cutting down on power consumption by 80% and on processing times and waste by 50%.

This machine allows integrating technologies that were the prerogative of dedicated devices until yesterday, with consequent rigid uses and high operating costs. One of its features is offering Industry 4.0 augmented reality technology, which grants access to all controls via tablet, to make and store settings and to connect remotely”.

Italy among the world leaders. The sector, which has its reference district in Emilia (Nordmeccanica is based in the province of Piacenza n.d.r.), sees Italy leading the world along with Germany. According to data from Ucima (Union of Italian manufacturers of automatic packaging machines), Italian production covers a quarter of the total world production. In this particular sector, Covid has affected turnover less than elsewhere, by 5% in 2020 according to data from Mecs-Centro Studi Ucima. Out of 7.6 billion Euro in total turnover, about 80% comes from exports. For Nordmeccanica, this percentage rises to 95%.

“During the emergency - says Cerciello - we had to activate ourselves with new dedicated resources, to prevent this 95% from shrinking. Thanks to the capillary structure built internationally over the years through agents and partner companies, we managed to maintain our business results and also our turnover, which is confirmed to be the same as that of the previous year.”

The effort made by Nordmeccanica and many other Italian companies - pocket-sized multinationals as they are often defined - has, however, so far been limited by politics. Covid has broken global supply chains, making it difficult for exporters to move. Cerciello has already launched an appeal to policy-makers last year for the creation of a “centralized direction at national level that allows companies to better understand how to extricate themselves among countless regulations, and that gives clear rules regarding the emergency. In particular, I am referring to work trips abroad of technicians and commercial agents, shipments and receipt of goods, and the different quarantine rules applied in the various countries. The government should help us by devoting resources and support staff locally to help businesses lay down clear and universally applicable rules. For instance, the Farnesina website, which is quite well organised, should devote more space to companies with priority channels for business trips and exports. In this, we see Italy more disadvantaged than the rest of Europe, for example against Germany that with its local consulates works very well around the world at the service of its customers - that is, German citizens and companies.

For any operation, we come across a slow and cumbersome bureaucracy that damages the business and ultimately damages Made in Italy. It takes a lot of time and dedication to build a market leadership, but it takes very little to lose it, and this is the risk that Italy is currently running in many sectors.”



Antonio Cerciello
Chairman of
Nordmeccanica