

Competitive horizons

Optimism evident within British plastics industry

The latest survey conducted by the British Plastics Federation (BPF) has revealed growing optimism among firms about prospects in 2017. Of the 102 members that participated, 78 per cent were confident that sales would increase during the year. Only 7 per cent anticipated a decline in sales. The survey, as reported by www.plasticsnewseurope.com, also reported a significant increase in the number of companies predicting growth in export sales. The figure of 63 per cent is over double the 28 per cent indicating this in the corresponding survey one year ago. More firms also expect profitability in 2017 than previously indicated. In this respect, the figure of 20 per cent revealed in the aftermath of the Brexit vote has now increased to 34 per cent. Another positive sign is that the majority of members expressed an intention to invest at least a little, whereas 31 per cent plan considerable investment. While almost half the companies want to hire more staff, the number of those finding it difficult to recruit has soared well above previous highs.

Skin cancer fears stimulate greater demand for UV protective clothing

Increases in skin cancer rates and greater consumer awareness of the dangers of over-exposure to sunlight are stimulating growth in the protective UV clothing market. According to Textiles Intelligence, product enhancement in terms of both functionality and appearance is also helping the cause. The global business information company points out that such products have become trendier and are now offered in a wider variety of colors and styles. And as reported by www.innovationintextiles.com, UV clothing has become available for a whole array of sporting activities and pastimes. Products at the premium end of the market benefit further by the inclusion of additional features to enhance comfort and performance. Versatility in how garments can be worn further increases their appeal. The report also notes that market presence of sports retailers, clothing brands and suppliers of outdoor wear has increased competition for sales of products incorporating UV technologies. Australia is regarded as a market offering considerable scope. Skin cancer levels in the country are prompting moves to incorporate UV protective clothing into police uniforms and those worn by other outdoor workers. Textiles Intelligence believes that sales can be increased further if companies engage in campaigns to make consumers more aware of how UV clothing can protect them from the sun's harmful rays.

European Union to set stricter recycling targets

A report published by www.eubusiness.com points out that the European Union (EU) aims to ensure that recycling of waste generated by member states should reach 70 per cent by 2030. At present, the rate is 44 per cent. This figure applies to municipal waste from businesses and households. By the same time, it is intended that 80 per cent of paper, cardboard, plastics, glass, and other packaging materials is recyclable. The EU Environment Committee intends to set 2025 interim targets for each individual material within this category. Food waste is a particular problem in the region and is currently around 89 tons. Under the new proposals, it is hoped that this will be 30 per cent lower by 2025 and 50 per cent lower by 2030. Another key aim is to significantly reduce landfill and the report suggests that quotas will be stricter for nations that are currently still sending over 65 per cent of their municipal waste to landfill sites.

The niche market route to success

Small businesses can increase their chance of succeeding by finding a niche market to operate in, an article published by www.thebalance.com claims. It is argued that operating in such markets enables smaller concerns to gain a significant edge over their larger rivals. The reason is that these operators are much better positioned to meet the requirements of certain consumer segments. Satisfying these unmet needs can be achieved by small companies with offerings that are exclusive. Uniqueness alone is not

enough though because the products or services also have to be marketable. There must be an acceptable level of demand too. The report additionally recommends only entering niche markets where spaces are available. Scope is limited in those already crowded with other firms. Doing one's research before making any move to enter the market is therefore imperative. By definition, consumers lack knowledge about niche markets. Hence, it is critical that small companies place a substantial emphasis on marketing and use relevant strategies to reach potential buyers and properly inform them about what they have to offer.