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Professional networking in the nonwovens and technical textiles sector

Nonwovens and technical textiles (NWTT) is a relatively a young field within the textiles sector and has tremendous growth opportunity. In fact, the growth in this sector has historically performed well above or on par with the gross domestic product (GDP) of nations, specifically in developed economies. Particularly, in developing nations such as India, good growth is expected for the next few years.

Unlike commodity and conventional textiles, which are predominantly determined by aesthetics, fashion and consumer appeal, NWTT is determined by its functional and high-performance properties. Therefore, this industry is heavily dependent on research and development and, in particular, on the development of new and innovative products.

NWTT's need for global platforms, organizations

In general, the functional textiles sector to which the nonwovens and technical textiles belongs can be conveniently grouped into three major segments: 1) consumer, 2) institutional, and 3) government procurement-based products. Within these three broad categories, specific products like filtration, geotextiles, hygiene and medical, coated textiles, etc., can be easily grouped. These sectors are burgeoning, and therefore not much product know-how and process information are available to new entrants, small businesses, and startups. This necessitates the need for global platforms and organizations to disseminate timely and relevant technical information. Also, for the sake of key players, such platforms are needed to exchange ideas and market their products.

The NWTT sector is blessed to have associations such as the Nonwovens Engineers & Technologists (NET) Division of TAPPI, INDIA, EDANA, IFAL, and the Materials Interest Group of AATCC. The NET division of TAPPI is the only professional home for individual professionals in the field of nonwovens, which makes it an extremely necessary group to advance the interest of the industry and more importantly, individual professionals working in the field. Due to the nature of the industry, which is heavily driven

by new products and competitive pricing, free exchange of technical information is vital for individual professionals in this sector for both individual career growth and the advancement of the sector.

Groups like TAPPI provide necessary resources for professionals and industry in the growing field in many different ways. A noteworthy effort is the annual nonwovens conference hosted by the NET Division, the NETInc Innovative Nonwovens Conference, along with many technical webinars and regular committee gatherings offered throughout the year. These avenues provide opportunities to create professional friendships among people in the sector, which may come handy in terms of career moves and advancements.

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As the nonwovens and technical textiles sector is truly interdisciplinary, involving scientific disciplines such as chemistry and materials science, manufacturing technologies such as mechanical and chemical engineering, and management disciplines, the way to move forward is to provide interactions with allied disciplines like tissue and paper, nanotechnology, advanced manufacturing, functional finishes, etc. To provide such multidisciplinary avenues, TAPPI has in the past few years co-located NETInc with the largest gathering of the pulp and paper science industry, the PaperCon conference. This year's event was held in April in Minneapolis, which provided an opportunity for nonwo-