

DIGITALISATION

Steals the Show!

Digitalisation is the new mantra for the next phase in textile production. It is slowly and steadily entering every aspect of textile machinery industry, and the recently-held ITMA Asia showed a glimpse of the digital era waiting to happen in textile production, reports **ITJ Editor**.

Driving Digital Business Transformation in the Textile Machine Business

There are not many market segments being more traditional than the textile machine business. Industrialisation of the yarn spinning process already started around 1750. Since then, a wide range of innovations were realised. However, the textile machine business and its customer base still remained quite traditional.

Autumn 2016 I was mandated by a leading textile machine manufacturer to evaluate and to introduce a new generation of programmable logic controllers (PLC) and in parallel headed towards digitalisation in order to reflect the general trend in the industry. In 2017, IoT and “Industry 4.0” for Europe as well as “Industry 2025” for China were representing a hype on one hand but also a major disruption risk on the other.

Gathering data from commercially available as well as from specifically developed sensors and actors, establishing communication concepts, modern edge- and cloud-node-functionality and a mobile app were the following steps. At the end we launched an open platform for spinning mills to support spinning mill operators in a role-based manner to optimally control, maintain and enhance all activities linked to the yarn spinning process. This system was presented at the largest annual textile fair, the ITMA Asia in October 2018 in Shanghai. Reactions of the international textile press (see title of “Indian Textile Journal”) as well as from the market were very positive.

For most traditional industry firms digitalisation is representing a major challenge. Skills are missing, the time to build them up is scares and suited resources might not be attracted by some industry segments with their individual culture. They might rather head to start-ups or to the “Googles” of this world. Thus, looking for an interimistic CDO-solution and development partnerships might be the elegant solution. Needless to say that afterwards, the internalization of digital business know-how needs to be a part of such an exercise since digitalisation has come to stay, also in industrial firms. After 30 months of digital business transformation my mandate will end soon. It’s time to summarise the learnings before heading on to next challenges.

The beauty of digital business transformation is that there are so many aspects to be handled and managed in parallel: Digital business vision, digital technologies as major enablers, skilled resources, sensor and software development, development partnerships, business process optimizations, user experience, artificial intelligence, process automation, intellectual property, transformational leadership, culture, internal and external

communication, stakeholder management, DevOps, ecosystems, edge, cloud, platforms, business models or purchasing decisions to name just a few. All these aspects are linked to each other. The challenge is to predict and balance interdependencies. On top, the speed in “Digital” is fast, very fast. Innovation cycles are 3 to 6 times shorter compared to the rest of the traditional machine industry. Standing the pressure going along with this was not always easy for all the contributors involved. Managing digital business transformation is never boring, in contrary, it’s exciting and a challenge every day.

Factors that helped me managing digital business transformation were my natural curiosity, the motivation to daily learn from others, from digital programs at IMD as well as from books or blogs. In addition, I do like conceptual work, benchmarking ideas with the vision which was established as a general guideline and being ready to orchestrate the transformation even in fields that were previously unknown. Launching and managing focused initiatives was really helpful and was generating early success stories. Finally, two slogans were always driving the team: “The Winner Takes It All” and “Demo or Die”. I am happy we all survived, still going strong!

What is your experience from leading digital business transformation?

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