Always present

This year Finland, the country where Walki was founded, celebrates 100 years of independence. Walki, founded in 1930, shares many of the events and trends that have shaped the country.

Making relevant products and solutions has ensured Walki’s success through the years, and this is our guiding star for us still today. And while everybody talks about customer-centricity these days, for us it has always been a life condition. We focus on making solutions that satisfy our customers’ customers’ needs. In the end, it’s the end users, the man on the street, that decides what works or what does not. Walki is present in everyone’s everyday life in several ways. How we package our food affects our daily lives very much. Efficient packaging has made our lives more effortless, as we can rely on the food staying fresh even though we do not go grocery shopping daily. We have to make sure that the packaging is not only hygienic, but also environmentally sustainable. In this magazine you can read about our new solution for oven trays, used in stores where we buy delicious bread baked on site.

Our solutions are also at the very core of how we live. We know that moisture leads to mould which can have terrible consequences for our health. The dangerous gas radon is another issue that we need to address as we build the houses where we live with our families. Our radon barriers are efficient in hindering this dangerous gas from seeping into our homes.

Farmers, upon whom we all depend for food, have long been waiting for a biodegradable mulch that really works. Our new mulching product is the result of tireless research and innovation work. Persistence and an innovative attitude aiming at answering to our everyday needs have been of paramount importance to make independent Finland a prosperous country. The same spirit resides at Walki too and inspires us to make sure that we remain relevant in everyday life in a sustainable manner in the future too.

I hope our magazines will give you useful and interesting insights.

Leif Frilund
CEO

OUTDOOR ADVERTISING GOES GREEN

Walki Group has developed new ‘green’ print media that is better for the environment.
Eating fresh food is crucial for one’s well-being and is key to a healthy lifestyle. Unfortunately, today’s fast-paced world makes that a difficult task. A large number of single and two-member households demand fast and convenient service, leading to ever-larger quantities of frozen and chilled foods being consumed.

This trend is evident in the bread and baked foods category. Take Western Europe for instance. It is the world’s largest consumer of baked foods and has seen consumer preferences change dramatically over the past decade. “Ten years ago, in Germany, baked products were mainly available in traditional bakeries. But today, they only account for 40% of the market with the rest distributed between supermarkets, fast food restaurants and other players in the food business,” claims Elke Wolf, Sales Manager at Walki.

As a result, consumers have so far been forced to choose between store-bought frozen and chilled foods, and their more expensive gourmet options. However, new options have emerged with companies like Walki developing products that allow people to buy freshly baked food right off the shelves.

Introducing Walki®Pack Tray and Walki®Pack Tray Lid

Walki has developed Walki®Pack Tray and Walki®Pack Tray Lid to be used by bakeries and supermarkets for precisely this purpose. Raw, prepared food can be stored and shipped to various supermarkets and bakeries in these protective, heat-resistant containers. Once it reaches its destination, it can then be baked at the supermarket itself.

“For this particular product, we combine a board (or paper/liner for corrugated board end use) and PET film which is a polymer which can withstand high heat. The board is pure enough to be placed in an oven without creating odour or smell at 200 degrees,” says Stefan Erdmann, Technical Service Manager – Consumer Packaging at Walki.

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“The producer of the raw pastry can ship the unbaked products to the client, and the client can bake fresh products in the same tray. They just have to take the bakery item out of the secondary packaging and then put the tray directly into the oven. This saves them both time and also personnel costs,” explains Wolf.

And if those qualities by themselves were not enough, the recyclable Walki®Pack Tray and Walki®Pack Tray Lid can be discarded by supermarkets and bakeries as paper waste. This is considered crucial especially in parts of Europe where there is a monetary charge for discarding of non-paper waste by companies.

At a time when consumers have become increasingly eco-conscious, these products are sure to get the ball rolling, helping people enjoy fresh food while doing their bit for the environment.
Mulching is a process that involves placing a thin layer of material over soil, to improve its fertility and health.

Farmers the world over use a process called ‘mulching’ to improve the fertility and health of their plots. It involves laying a thin layer of material over the soil which helps stabilize soil temperature and moisture.

Every year, more than a million tonnes of plastic film is used for mulching with this plastic mulch eventually turned into waste material that has to be removed from the field or recycled at a high cost. It also leaves behind a plastic residue that pollutes the soil, reducing its future growth potential with yields estimated to be up to 20% lower than from non-polluted soil.

As the world’s first organic mulching solution made from natural, biodegradable fibres, Walki®Agripap holds a great deal of promise for environmentally aware farmers. What makes it unique is that unlike traditional soil mulching solutions which are typically made from polyethylene film, Walki®Agripap is made from paper.

In order to prove its advantages over conventional mulching solutions, Walki®Agripap underwent its first round of field-testing in Finland last year. The tests proved that Walki®Agripap was easy to lay in the fields and delivered excellent weed control, as well as good yield and durability. All of which paved the way to test it out in other markets.

“Our next challenge was to put the product to the test in one of Europe’s main mulching markets: namely France,” says Markus Ääri, Regional Sales Manager at Walki.

Put to the test

The field test was carried out at the Station d’Expérimentation Rhône-Alpes Information Légumes (SERAIL), a specialist vegetable-testing station near Lyon. Three types of mulch were compared, including a traditional polyethylene mulch, a biodegradable polyethylene mulch and Walki®Agripap on a field used to cultivate Batavia lettuce.
Tests show impressing results for the performance of Walki®Agripap.

“We chose the Batavia lettuce because it’s one of the most typical products grown by local farmers with a medium-term growing period of five to six weeks. This makes it a very representative crop for this part of France,” says Ääri.

Based on the results so far, Alexandre Burlet, the technician responsible for carrying out the field tests at SERAIL, says he is already impressed with the performance of Walki®Agripap.

“I have had a good impression, especially since it is a biodegradable product that has survived long enough to produce a lettuce crop at this time of year,” declares Burlet. “It has withstood high temperatures, extensive irrigation, as well as wind forces. Moreover, the black colour of the mulch ensures that no weeds are able to grow under it.”

The sustainable alternative
Burlet also admits that he was surprised by the ease with which Walki’s paper mulch was laid out on the fields.

“I didn’t think it would be possible to lay it mechanically with a conventional unwinder for plastic mulch, especially since paper mulch is supposed to be far less elastic than plastic mulch. But the mechanical installation didn’t tear or weaken it. This was a real surprise for me,” he adds.

The test is still ongoing, but Burlet explains that as far as he can see, Walki®Agripap has produced results equivalent to those of the two polyethylene mulches. He confirmed that no difference in the weight, size or volume of the lettuce had been observed and that all three mulches protected the lettuce from being attacked by the fungi in the soil. While that is great news by itself, Burlet emphasized that the eco-friendly aspect of Walki®Agripap would be its biggest strength.

“We expect the real advantage of this paper mulch to be that fact that it won’t leave any petroleum residue in the soil,” he says. “Producers using biodegradable plastic mulch can see that their soil still contains and accumulates microfragments of biodegradable plastic mulch. Meanwhile, Walki®Agripap is totally biodegradable. It should enable the soils to become virgin soils again.”

The Walki®Agripap trial was one of eight on-going tests presented to local farmers and distributors at the SERAIL testing station, and the results so far have gained it a great deal of interest.

“Farmers are waiting for someone to deliver a truly biodegradable mulch that really works,” says Ääri. “We hope this test will enable us to find a local distributor who can help deliver Walki®Agripap to these environmentally conscious French farmers.”

Walki®Agripap is totally biodegradable. It should enable the soils to become virgin soils again.
When Boris Miksic arrived in the United States in 1974, he had 35 dollars in his pocket. Today, the chemical business he started from scratch in his garage has evolved into a 100-million dollar multinational enterprise. This is the story of a young man from Croatia who made the American dream his reality.

Boris Miksic grew up in humble circumstances in Zagreb, Croatia, in the country that was then known as Yugoslavia. Having excelled at school, he went on to obtain a Masters degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Zagreb. In 1972, just as he was about to graduate, Miksic’s life changed forever.

An active member of the student movement against the Communist regime that ruled Yugoslavia at the time, Miksic had been identified as an agitator and blacklisted by the government. In practice, this meant he would never be able to work in Yugoslavia. He made a decision then and there to emigrate to the United States.

“I picked up my degree and fled the country, skiing across the border into Austria, before purchasing a one-way ticket to New York for me and my first wife, who was pregnant at the time,” he recalls.

He arrived in New York in February 1974, with $35 in his pocket.

“I did what all immigrants do, tried to find work. After three months of cleaning floors at McDonald’s, I landed a job as an engineer with a company in Minnesota.”

Hard work in the cold
Miksic soon grew tired of working for the small construction company in St. Paul, Minnesota. He resigned, thinking he would find another opportunity.

“Turns out I was wrong, I couldn’t find another job,” he admits. “In the end I started mixing chemicals in my garage. It was the winter of 1977, when temperatures reached -35 Celsius, and all I can say is that being that cold certainly makes you work harder.”

Fast-forward to 2017 and the business Miksic started in his garage has just celebrated its 40th anniversary. Cortec Corporation and its subsidiaries is the world’s largest privately held corrosion protection enterprise. Today, it has an annual turnover of USD 120 million, 350 employees, nine plants, distribution in over 100 countries on all continents, and has amassed more than 60 patents. In addition to the basic metals and mining, Cortec serves the automotive, oil and gas, metalworking, construction, electronics, MRO (maintenance, repair and operation), military, water treatment, heavy industry and packaging segments.

“I think you can succeed anywhere if you have the right mix of ambition and perseverance but, of course, being in the U.S. has its advantages,” says Miksic. “Firstly, it’s a pretty big pond, so, even if you’re a little fish, you’re doing ok. Another plus is that people here like it if you have something new and different to offer.”

Simple formula
Miksic says the secret to his success is a rule he calls “20-20-20.” “Every year, we aim for 20 per cent growth, 20 per cent investment in new technologies and 20 per cent cost reduction. It’s a simple formula but it works!”

As an innovator and an entrepreneur, Boris Miksic is always open to new ideas. Last year, he started looking for a supplier of high-quality steel wrap. He soon came across Walki – a company he had previously got to know in the 1980s when it was called Meuwissen Industrie and he had been looking into the reinforced paper market.

“Most suppliers of these products come from Asia, but, when I looked at what they’re selling, I wasn’t impressed with the level of quality. U.S. manufacturers aren’t making products like this any more, so I had to go to Europe to find a supplier with a product that was both competitive and good quality. I found that Walki offers the right mix of both,” says Miksic.

Walki’s Steelex metal wrap products are already well known in the steel market for their ability to meet the highest standard protective demands, providing effective moisture and rust protection during transport and storage.

“I think you can succeed anywhere if you have the right mix of ambition and perseverance.”

A variety of solutions are available for different end uses and metal applications.

Protecting covering for steel coils
Boris Miksic’s idea is to purchase Walki’s Steelex product, treat it with Cortec’s patented Volatile Corrosion Inhibitors (VCI), and sell it to the U.S. steel industry for use as protective covering for steel coils and steel sheets, as well as parts and components for heavy machinery.

“Slowly but surely customers are recognising the benefits of Cortec and Walki’s joint offering. Customers are shipping parts that are very expensive, so they need to be well protected. Walki’s metal wrap paper, combined with our anti-corrosion technology, offers an outstanding level of protection,” continues Miksic. “I call this a win-win-win partnership, because it benefits Cortec, it benefits Walki and it benefits the customers.”

I thought you could succeed anywhere if you have the right mix of ambition and perseverance.
Going green is no longer a want, it is a necessity. People today are acutely aware of the need to make the right choices and as a result, companies and big businesses are switching over to green products. A trend that has affected the packaging industry, which has begun to embrace biopolymers in a big way. Here’s why.

Nikhil Narayan Sivadas

Whether you are buying a car, a computer or even food, the production, processing and use of these products have an environmental impact. That is especially true when it comes to the material that these products are packaged in. Most of these are sourced from non-renewable materials and are non-biodegradable, sometimes ending up in landfills and in the world’s oceans, causing huge problems.

This has prompted companies like PepsiCo, Target and Nestle among others, to come together through the project – the New Plastics Economy, to build a more sustainable value chain. This along with increasing awareness among consumers to make clean and green choices is forcing a radical rethink by the packaging industry. And the introduction of biopolymers is opening up a whole new world of possibilities for companies to lessen their carbon footprint.

“The discussion these days is all about the finite resources we have on our planet and how best to utilise it in a sustainable way. This is where biopolymer is having a big impact since their origin is its main feature,” says Rune Skåtar, Director of Development and Innovations at Walki.

Hitting the right notes

Traditionally, packaging materials use polymers made from non-renewable oil and petrochemical sources to provide barrier properties which protect the product. Materials like polystyrene and polyethylene are traditional examples of petrochemical polymer used in packaging. Today more and more polymers, even polyethylene, are made from renewable, naturally occurring sources such as plant starch, sugar cane, wood residues etc., making it a great choice for companies looking to ramp up their green initiatives.

“It has proven to be especially popular in consumer packaging, where a lot of companies are looking at sustainability. Food packaging, drinks packaging, etc. are a few of the areas where biopolymer use has increased steadily,” says Skåtar.

However, one of the biggest challenges in using such biopolymers which are biodegradable, has been the lack of moisture and vapour barriers, an essential feature in food packaging. This is a problem that Walki has tackled through intense research and development.

The discussion these days is all about the finite resources we have on our planet and how best to utilise it in a sustainable way.
As effective as polymers
A big factor in Walki creating these different kinds of products has been its pilot line, a feature unique to the company. Unlike industrial lines, the pilot line allows Walki to experiment with different materials, allowing it to be perfectly matched with different products, says Inkeri Perttu, Product Development Engineer at Walki.

“We only need about 3 kilograms of material for testing if we are using the pilot line. This makes it easy for us to switch between different polymers when we are searching for an optimal solution for our customers. We recently had to figure out the adhesive properties of coating for a product and managed to test 15 different kinds of material to find the right fit. You need much more material, time and money to do that in an industrial line, plus you will be taking time away from production,” says Perttu.

The adoption of biopolymers by the packaging industry has grown steadily over the past couple of years, says Sklitar, who believes that its adoption by the European markets will set the pace for the whole world to pick it up. “Both from a utility and brand point-of-view, it makes sense for some companies to want to use biopolymers. And so, they are ready to pay a small premium to ensure that their packaging is eco-friendly,” he explains.

In the future thanks to economies of scale, widespread adoption of biopolymers may also cause its production costs to rationalise even further, making it as cost-effective as petrochemical-based packaging.

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Radon gas is invisible and odourless, and chances are, you are exposed to it every day. Yet, people seem remarkably unaware of its effects on human health and the need to protect themselves. Read on to find out why this is important.

Radon gas can be found all over the world and is considered to be present in higher quantities in mountainous areas like Scandinavia, France, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. For instance, the average level of radon in Ireland is 89 Bq/m³; compared to 39 Bq/m³ in the rest of the world.

As governments and authorities wake up to its danger, they are scrambling to prepare maps to pinpoint locations which have a concentration of the gas, while at the same time, enacting policies to make structures radon-proof. Advisories have been issued, asking people to check Radon levels in an area before building their homes. If the levels are high, it is recommended to use Radon barriers in the foundation of the building.

“During construction, care must be taken to keep radon gas levels to their lowest point,” explains Janis Kraak, Business Development Manager - Membranes at Walki. “You must install a radon-proof membrane in the foundation to prevent the gas from coming into the house.”

The use of these barriers and membranes have been proven to reduce radon exposure considerably. In fact, countries like Ireland have put in place policies mandating the use of these barriers in high-exposure areas. Walki has a range of products to help protect buildings from this threat.

“We have fully certified radon barriers and methane barriers to prevent all these dangerous gases from entering your homes and work places,” explains Kraak. “We have protective layers which can be laid onto the walls of these buildings as well, so if you are refurbishing a building, you are protected and don’t have to tear it down.”

Walki’s product range consists of distinct products such as the Walki®Radon Block and Walki®Radon Block 500, which are elastic, scrim-reinforced polymer coatings and membranes that offer protection from Radon and water vapour. On the other hand, the Walki®Gas Block and Walki®Methane Tight solutions are designed to prevent these gases from seeping into buildings, while acting as a moisture barrier.

“These products are highly durable and are built to last a lifetime,” emphasizes Hyytiäinen. “They are elastic, and can be used on different kinds of foundations, from rocky to other forms. They contract and distort as needed during the lifetime of the building.”

What makes Walki’s products different from others is the level of customization that can be introduced into the product. Unlike other membrane suppliers, Walki has a dedicated pilot line which they use to manufacture membrane samples to the customers’ specifications.

“This allows people to test samples, make changes as needed, and have the finished product ready for installation, all in rapid time. Something that is simply not possible with industrial lines.

“We can run samples within a few weeks to show to our clients. If they require something more specific, like an extremely strong gas barrier which is resistant to the impact of trucks before it is covered with concrete, we could create a new sample in three weeks. In eight to nine weeks after approval it is possible to supply the first industrial order,” explains Kraak.

As more and more people become aware of the dangers of radon gas, this speed and efficiency will prove essential. With more countries contemplating mandating the installation of these barriers, demand is expected to soar exponentially in the future.

Think lung cancer and cigarettes are likely to come to mind. And while people are well-informed about the dangers of smoking, they are not so aware about the effects of a gas that they are exposed to every day.

Silent, colourless and odourless, radon gas is a naturally occurring gas created from the disintegration of Uranium. It is today considered as the biggest cause of lung cancer in the United States, with the U.S. Center for Disease Control estimating that it causes over 20,000 deaths each year.

Radon gas seeps into homes and buildings through the pores and cracks present in the foundations of different structures. Since the air pressure indoors is lower than the pressure outside, it creates a suction of sorts, which pulls radon and other gases like methane from the soil.

“The half-life is very short, but on the other hand, radon accumulates. It builds up – as fast as the air and the time and the flow does not decrease as in other materials. So, you are constantly exposed to it,” explains Juho Hyytiäinen, Technical Services and Development Manager - Membranes at Walki.

The use of radon proof membranes in building foundations has been proven to considerably reduce Radon exposure.

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Environmental awareness from Walki

For decades, OOH advertising had to depend on using either pulped blueback paper panels or heavyweight PVC-based billboard & banners for their products. While they do serve their purpose, the industry today is consciously switching over to more environmentally sound options.

The reasons for this are many. Take the case of blueback paper panels for instance. Most are chemically treated and have poor visual quality. There is the high cost of labour involved in piecing together smaller panels into a bigger one.

The other favoured material for OOH advertising has been Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) internally reinforced with a pet-based scrim, which is mainly used in big displays and mounted with bungees onto giant metal frames. It is widely known that PVC poses substantial environmental risks, with the manufacture and releasing chlorine gas. Disposal is an even bigger problem since PVC is not bio-degradable, leaving incineration or dumping it in landfills as the only option. This in turn releases dangerous toxins when they are disposed and the impact that the manufacturing and disposal process will have on various eco-systems. But that trend has begun to change, with consumers becoming more discerning about choosing sustainable products.

Luxury product manufacturers are following suit. Luxury brands worldwide, from cosmetics giants to champagne houses, are increasingly focusing on more sustainable packaging to reduce their environmental footprint. The pressure on luxury packaging manufacturers to go green has never been as intense.

Companies in the luxury packaging segment are today looking for sustainable products for general development. It is an added advantage for them to be able to advertise to their end-customers that they too are doing their bit for the environment,” explains Manfred Ertle, Business Line Manager at Walki group process.

As an added benefit, Walki also offers a film-free-edge component that is of particular use to brands that require barcodes on their packaging.

The durability and beverage industry are required to print a barcode on their products. Very often, in metalized packaging of heavy boxes like whiskey, the barcodes get scratched or damaged in transit and storage,” says Ertle. “Our film-free edge component will allow them to add an area of non-metallization that will solve this problem.

Thanks to their upgraded glue laminator and efficient production lines, Walki is able to deliver tailor-made luxury packaging requests at standard delivery times of four to six weeks, helping the luxury industry deliver on its goals of sustainability.

Gourmet chocolates, luxe cosmetics, fine liquor and beverages, all these luxury products have one thing in common, brilliant and eye-catching packaging. After all, companies have always been ready to invest in luxury packaging, using the best designs and finest material to attract consumers.

However, this comes at a great cost to the environment. For decades now, most luxury products have been packaged lavishly with little concern paid to the amount of material being used, how they are disposed and the impact that the manufacturing and disposal process will have on various eco-systems. But that trend has begun to change, with consumers becoming more discerning about choosing sustainable products.

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With these products, Walki has taken a lead in providing the OOH sector with cleaner and greener materials and developing eco-sensitive business practices. But that is just the beginning. The company’s dedicated R&D team in Finland is also concentrating on a whole range of options for the indoor printing media market, with innovative flame-resistant products being developed. The future is here as far as Walki is concerned.

And producing them locally in the European market within the proximity of our customer base also adds important value,” explains Luk Moya, Category Manager, Imaging - Technical Products at Walki Group.

Using ultra-light, tear resistant and recyclable raw materials, the Walki Group has developed new green print media by combining specific base materials and functional polymers. What’s more, they weigh less than 50% of the weight of traditional PVC products, making transportation, storage and handling a much easier task.

There are three products available within the Walki®Print Media XXL range. The first is the Walki®Backlit, a reinforced coated paper that has been established in the graphics market for about a decade. This is useful for long-term usage in outdoors scrol boxes and is exclusively sold via select media wholesalers. The second is the Walki®Billboard, a PP or PET-based coated multi-purpose nonwoven product for mid-term outdoor advertising on panels, nip-up banner stands, and for home decoration. And last, but not the least is the Walki®Banner, a HDPE or PP-based coated woven material for short-term outdoor advertising on frames and fences such as at sports events, exhibitions etc.

The development of these cutting-edge and innovative products has also taken into account the unique needs of the OOH sector when it comes to printing applications. For example, Walki’s solutions can be used for both front-lit and back-lit applications, with a non-reflective, inkjet-receptive layer which is suitable for both UV-curable and Latex inks.

“The Walki®Print Media XXL range has been tested by established printer OEMs and is available in master roll sizes. Widths range upwards of >3200 mm, making it a unique offering in Europe,” explains Meys.

Walki has one coextrusion production line available that is dedicated to the Walki®Print Media XXL product range. Two other similar lines are available to function as back-up solutions and to secure lines of supply. All three production lines have optional printing and lacquering capabilities that can be provided as needed.

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In order to do this effectively, Walki uses its pilot lines to test different multi-layer laminate structures, Rinkinen says. Walki’s R&D is responsible for insulation products. “By juggling with all the different raw materials, we are able to create an almost endless number of facings with all kinds of different properties,” he adds. Another factor that makes this so-called playground even more exciting for Walki is that it already works with such a large number of different raw materials across all its various business lines.

“We get our R&D people talking to their colleagues from the other business lines, and looking at all the materials they’re using for various applications, that’s when things really start getting exciting because we get to juggle with so many different combinations,” Lucas adds.

Why do we need pipe insulation?

In buildings, the air and water used for heating and cooling is transported in pipes. Pipe insulation helps conserve energy as it reduces heat flow from pipes that often operate in conditions far removed from the ambient temperature.

The pipe insulation facings that Walki produces and delivers are custom-made, specifically designed to complement the application and raw material used by each individual customer.

For many years, Walki has been producing facings for insulation pipes. More recently, it has extended more extensively into the pipe insulation market, producing multi-layer facings for pipe insulation made from a variety of materials, ranging from polyurethane and phenolic foams to mineral and glass wool.

“At Walki we have an incredibly innovative R&D & Development team and this dynamic new market is like a playground for them,” says Olivier Lucas, Walki’s Business Line Manager responsible for insulation products. “By juggling with all our customers’ various insulation materials and matching them with a wide variety of combinations of raw materials – ranging from technical films, to macromolecular chemistry, woven and non-woven fabrics, and protective coatings – they can create an almost endless number of facings with all kinds of different properties.”

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Jussi Rinkinen is the Technical Service and Development Manager for Walki’s construction facings business. As a company with a passion for innovation, Walki’s R&D team is one of the reasons why Walki’s insulation facings business is a world leader. Rinkinen explains that Walki relies on the opportunity to operate in a market in which fast-paced advances are the name of the game.

“Customers’ requirements differ depending on the conditions in which the insulation is used and the properties it needs, so we develop every facing from scratch,” he says.

Extensive testing

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In buildings, the air and water used for heating and cooling is transported in pipes. Pipe insulation helps conserve energy as it reduces heat flow from pipes that often operate in conditions far removed from the ambient temperature.

The pipe insulation facings that Walki produces and delivers are custom-made, specifically designed to complement the application and raw material used by each individual customer. The facings contribute additional protective properties to the insulation material.

Jussi Rinkinen is the Technical Service and Development Manager for Walki’s construction facings business. As a company with a passion for innovation, Walki’s R&D team is one of the reasons why Walki’s insulation facings business is a world leader. Rinkinen explains that Walki relies on the opportunity to operate in a market in which fast-paced advances are the name of the game.

“Customers’ requirements differ depending on the conditions in which the insulation is used and the properties it needs, so we develop every facing from scratch,” he says.

Extensive testing

In order to do this effectively, Walki uses its pilot lines to test different multi-layer laminate structures, Rinkinen says. Walki’s R&D is responsible for insulation products. “By juggling with all the different raw materials, we are able to create an almost endless number of facings with all kinds of different properties.”

Another factor that makes this so-called playground even more exciting for Walki is that it already works with such a large number of different raw materials across all its various business lines.

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Although Jan van den Brink has been sailing since he was a little boy, he truly got bitten by the sailing bug at the age of ten. “My father used to have an 18-metre ‘Skûtsje’ sailboat – a traditional type of sailing vessel that was historically used to transport cargo on the canals in the Netherlands. There’s still an annual race for these boats on the lakes in Frisland,” Jan says. It was on one of those boats where he experienced his first storm. These days, Jan and his wife Yolanda, to whom he has been married for 25 years, mainly sail their two fast dinghies, but also spend a couple of weeks abroad every year, mainly at beach clubs that organise sailing training and races. The first time Jan and Yolanda went out together on a dinghy, they set the gennaker sail, which is a huge, asymmetrical type of sail made from parachute material that can only be used when sailing downwind. “The wind was high and the boat just took off and doubled its speed. It turned into an incredibly exhilarating ride that gave us a huge adrenaline rush together and put a smile on our faces for a long time,” Jan recalls.

High performance sailing skiffs are his thing

“I’m really passionate about sailing in high performance sailing skiffs, which is much more acrobatic than sailing a yacht,” he continues. “I still do this on occasion, either whilst on holiday when we rent a boat either in the Netherlands or abroad.”

Jan’s most memorable sailing experience was when he participated in the world championships that were held in the Netherlands in 2015, sailing in his RS500 double-handed trapeze skiff. “It was an incredibly intensive week, during which all my focus was on sailing – at exhilarating speeds and in high winds, as well as on days when there was almost no wind at all,” he adds.

Continuous improvement

The most important lesson Jan has learnt from sailing is that performance is continuously improved through preparation and training, as well as learning from experience – an insight that serves him well in his work at Walki. “The wind was high and the boat just took off and doubled its speed. It turned into an incredibly exhilarating ride that gave us a huge adrenaline rush together and put a smile on our faces for a long time,” Jan recalls.

As the Plant Manager for Walki BV in Haarlem, the Netherlands, Jan looks after the day-to-day performance of the plant, with responsibility for everything from finance to safety, quality, costs and delivery. He says there is never a dull moment in his job, which involves working with a variety of different products and machines. “The most important and satisfying part of my job is working with the team to help the company improve from year to year. We do this through information-sharing, constant learning and by involving everyone in improving our performance,” he says.

Looking after the seas

Jan has also experienced first hand the changing state of the environment and the seas. He says that, on the one hand, we are diluting the resources on the planet, while, on the other, the water quality in the Netherlands has actually improved. “This is causing the vegetation to grow again in the major lakes, making it difficult to sail due to the plants that catch the keel of the boat. “In my view, we need to find a way to switch away from plastics in favour of bio-degradable materials. In the meantime we have to look for lighter, smarter solutions,” he says. “I’m proud to work for a company like Walki that innovates and develops materials that produce less waste and support recycling efforts.”

3 QUESTIONS

What is needed to be a good sailor? As a keen amateur sailor, Jan says, “Having the right knowledge of aerodynamics, weather, boat tactics and race rules. He or she has to have a winning mentality and be willing to invest a lot of practice time to reach the desired level.”

Is there a famous sailor you look up to? Why? Jan says, “My idol is Giovanni Cozzolino, an Italian dinghy sailor to becoming a captain in the huge ‘Skûtsje’ sailboat.”

Do you have any as yet unrealised dreams in sailing that you would still like to achieve? Jan says, “I would like to develop my skills in the musto skiff, which is an extremely sensitive one-person high-performance in which you have to handle a genoa sheet, mainsheet, trapeze hook and tiller with just two hands.”
Walki

- Operates in 11 countries
- Has 10 production plants
- Over 900 employees
- And over 300 million euros in annual sales

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