Catching up with Umicore's Martin Mack

This interview is with Martin Mack (Product Manager Taiyo Ink) who is our counterpart at Umicore.

Dan: Martin, thank you for taking part in another issue of Dan's Six Pack; it's been over six years since we last spoke in this setting. Can you tell us something about your company and your relationship with Taiyo?

Martin: The European based UMICORE, with headquarters in Brussels, is a global materials technology and recycling group, with more than 10,000 employees and a turnover of €10.4 billion.

The German Umicore Galvanotechnik is located in the group within the "Energy and Surface Technologies" division and is specialized in electroplating of precious metals. Before contacting Taiyo Ink, we were already successfully distributing ENIG-products as a PCB end-finish of the Japanese company UYEMURA. From our perspective, to distribute the soldermask of the market leader (Taiyo) was a perfect fit to our portfolio for the European PCB industry.

Twelve years ago, we signed the distribution agreement with Taiyo America, knowing only some individuals in the Taiyo organization and since than we have built a very close and strong partnership that benefits both sides.

Dan: So, as a distributor for Taiyo in Europe, how do you see things? Are Taiyo products well received in your part of the world?

Martin: YES! Taiyo's soldermasks are well-known, especially in the European automotive industry. We are the market leader in Europe when it comes to hole-plugging, thanks to the THP-series made by Taiyo America. The LEW-series white solder mask with its high reflectivity performance is a well-recognized name in the European LED-lighting industry, as well. Taiyo is well known to have innovative and special products.

Dan: How would you say the European market differs from the North American market these days?

Martin: Because of higher labor costs and reducing the impact on quality, PCB-companies, mainly in central Europe, are looking into a high degree of process automatization. In the case of soldermask application, this has led in the past to curtain coating and lately to spray coating, whereas in North America screen-printing seems to be more popular. In Europe it is very common for mid-size companies to have only one person per shift running the solder mask process, from panel pre-prep to curing. Every process which improves the level of automatization is greatly welcomed.

Dan: How is your business doing at this time?

Martin: In the first half of the year the European PCB-market was doing well, and we will again grow our Taiyo business, disproportionally to the market. We expect to have bigger turnover-boost with dry-film products and inkjet solder mask in 2019. Consequently, we have increased our technical-sales force for Taiyo products, effective October.

Dan: Looking into the future for a minute, which of Taiyo's products do you expect to become the most popular?

Martin: It will be the inkjet solder mask. This revolutionary technology of this solder mask's application in the PCB industry has so many advantages; e.g. short process time, high automation, traceability of the solder mask process (Industry 4.0), environmentally friendly aspects, ink availability globally, etc.

We are proud to work together with Taiyo, to introduce this disruptive solder mask technology to the European market.

Dan: With the world getting more global I see more Asian companies interested in making investments in the U.S. Market, including buying PCB facilities. Is this same trend happening in Europe, as well?

Martin: In Europe, we see that China is continuing to execute their strategic plan "Made in China 2025". Huge investments were, and are being made, in high-tech companies and have defined key industries throughout Europe. Recently it affected an EU semiconductor manufacturer, but so far no PCB facilities.

Dan: Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview with me today. I appreciate your time and your candor. Hopefully it will not be another six years before we talk again!

To learn more about UMICORE Galvanotechnik go to: www.ep.umicore.com