

TECHNICAL PAPER

Cascades happy with ATMOS and market happy with Cascades

Cascades is the first company in North America to install the new ATMOS technology, which offers through-air-dried (TAD) quality with a green profile. So far the results have been excellent, although it took lots of hard work to get where they are. Cascades has now trademarked its new premium products as 'TADe' to show that they are equal to traditional TAD products.

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"Of course we call it 'TADe'," explains Suzanne Blanchet, President and CEO of Cascades, when asked if the company is actually marketing its new ATMOS bathroom tissue as a TAD product. "It truly is a 'TAD-equivalent' product and we want to emphasize that. We are very pleased with the quality and have registered TADe as our trademark. Each package carries a short note about the superior quality our TADe offers, with lower impact on the environment during production."

Cascades became the first tissue producer in the North America to run ATMOS technology when it started production in late 2010. And it was number 2 in the world with ATMOS, after CMPC in Chile which started its unit in 2006. Previously, Cascades had been making structured tissue for a number of years with STT technology but, says Blanchet, it was mainly for towel and not bath tissue.

"WE HAD SEVERAL REASONS WHY WE CHOSE ATMOS," SAYS BLANCHET. "We have seen a very clear trend of increasing quality, both in Canada and in the USA, and we wanted to raise our quality especially for bath tissue. At the same time we want to do it in a sustainable, environmentally friendly manner and we saw ATMOS as a great solution. We can use recycled fiber to make high-quality structure tissue with a lot less energy, and also have the ability to swing from TAD back to conventional as needed. On top of it all, we could do it via a rebuild."

LOTS OF WORK AND PERSEVERANCE. So with all those reasons motivating the choice of ATMOS technology, Cascades went ahead. And it has turned out to be an excellent decision, says Blanchet, but also "a lot of work to get all of the benefits that we were seeking, for all the different categories such as bath, towel and facial. So lots of time went into getting the right properties like bulk, softness and absorption for each category. I really give a lot of credit to our talented people here at Cascades, and also certainly to the support we got from Voith people, for making it work."

Blanchet adds that in her opinion there really isn't any option to hard work and perseverance when it comes to developing a TAD-equivalent product. "There are many things that work differently on a rebuilt commercial machine than they do on a pilot line. So we did a lot of work, with difficult days and nights at times, to develop the process and the products working closely with Voith. Now I can honestly say we are very happy with the results."

THE ATMOS SYSTEM WAS INSTALLED ON TISSUE MACHINE TM NUMBER 2 AT THE CANDIAC, QUEBEC, mill just outside Montreal, Canada during a shutdown taking 33 days in August 2010. Following the C\$22 million project, TM 2 restarted production started in the conventional production mode in September 2010 and then switched to the ATMOS production mode in November 2010. TM 2 is a 3.45-m (136 inch) wide machine with top speed of 1300 m/min and production of 125 tons/day. Furnish can be up to 100% deinked pulp.

TM 2 has been swinging between ATMOS and conventional every couple months, as it takes time to build the market demand for the new structured products. This also makes for a challenging situation of managing the jumbo roll inventory and logistics, Blanchet says, adding that she hopes that within the not too distant future to be running 100% ATMOS all the time.

QUALITY CLEARLY MOVING UP. The trend to higher quality tissue in the North American market, especially in the USA, is very clear. "There is a real movement to higher quality," explains Blanchet. "In away-from-home we see that

Wausau and SCA are both investing in ATMOS technology. And in consumer tissue First Quality has several TAD machines, Irving has added a new one as well, Clearwater is doing the same and Kruger will no doubt announce something soon. So consumers and AFH customers are demanding superior quality and the tissue producers are responding."

The acceptance on the market to the ATMOS bath tissue product has been good, says Blanchet, with the quality deemed to be on par with Charmin soft and Charmin strong grades, which are the target.

CASCADES IS THE BRAND. Cascades brand structure is fairly simple with all its own products sold under the Cascades brand. It also uses labels such as Ultra and Extreme for high-end products. Cascades is now the number four tissue producer in North America after Georgia-Pacific, Kimberly-Clark, and Procter & Gamble.

Among the acquisitions it has made on its tissue growth path have been the 1995 purchase of tissue maker and converter Perkins Paper in Montreal, Canada; Plainwell Paper's mills in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania in 2001; American Tissue's Waterford, New York, Mechanicville, New York and St. Helen's, Oregon, mills in 2002 and the Memphis, Tennessee, mill in 2003. A very recent addition was Atlantic Packaging's tissue assets in 2009 and in 2011, Papersource in Granby, QC.

GROWTH AREAS: WEST COAST AND AFH. As far as the next steps to grow in the future, Blanchet says the company will continue to invest on a regular basis. She wants to grow further in the USA where Cascades today has about 60% of its business. "The US tissue market is 10 times as big as Canada, with about 8 million tons consumed annually versus 800,000 in Canada. We already have a lot of assets in the US and have been operating tissue mills there for nearly 30 years, so it is very natural that we will aim to grow more there."

One white spot on the map for Cascades tissue group is the West Coast of the USA and Canada. There is tissue jumbo roll production at St. Helens, Oregon, but no converting. "We are long on paper on the West Coast so it makes sense that we will consider doing something about it."

SECOND ATMOS MACHINE IS A POSSIBILITY.

Asked about the possibility of installing a second ATMOS machine, Blanchet says that it will soon begin shipping the ATMOS premium products to the USA and therefore it may in a few years make sense to invest in ATMOS in the USA. "The bottom line is that ATMOS gives us a great combination of premium and ultra quality product and green production together." •