

'We have to stay optimistic'

Development efforts in the marketplace over recent years have enabled CONDAT to reduce the impact of the global pandemic on its business activities. The company has been busy changing the way it works and relying upon online platforms to communicate with its customers, says **Franck Dufresne***

1. How are things going at CONDAT?

It could be worst. The development efforts of our worldwide network allow us to reduce the impact of the pandemic. As with most of the activities in the world, the health situation obliges us to work differently by using the means of communication at our disposal (webinar, online training, information on professional networks etc.), to stay in touch with customers.

The reduction of sales trips generates an 'effective' time saving allowing us to work more on the background and to take a step back from various topics (communication, strategy, products...). Changing our way of working in a very short time keeps me busy!

2. What is your view on the current state of the global steel industry?

We have to stay optimistic. It's just a bad time that we all hope to be as short as possible, but we all know that due to population growth forecasted worldwide, this will consequently increase the needs of steel for building construction, infrastructure and transport in the future. CONDAT is still targeting this market as a priority for its range of industrial lubricants.

3. In which sector of the steel industry does CONDAT mostly conduct its business?

CONDAT business is mainly oriented on the hot processes of the steel industry: steel making plants and hot rolling lines. We supply fire-resistant fluids and heavy loads greases that answer the constraints and demands of major actors in this field. Indeed, among our fire-resistant hydraulic fluids range, CONDAT D is certified FM approved, biodegradable and non-toxic and our greases are specially formulated to withstand water and temperature, they enable a decrease in lubricants

consumption and recycling costs; these characteristics are mostly demanded by our customers. In every product development we try to introduce our CSR policy, linked to non-toxicity, biodegradability, or consumption reduction.



4. Where in the world are you busiest at present?

The EMEASEA area is for sure the biggest part of our market for the steel sector, but as we have production subsidiaries in the USA, Brazil and China, we invest a lot of time, training and product development on the four continents to be able to achieve the same successes.

5. Can you discuss any steel contracts you are working on now?

Directly or not (through distributors) we are working with all main actors in this application field, such as Arcelor Mittal, Posco, Tata Steel, Riva Group. We are also in contact with the main states companies that administrate steel plants like in the Middle East for example.

6. Where do you stand on the aluminium versus steel argument?

There will always be demand and set-aside markets for both products. The steel industry has invested a lot in R&D in recent years to produce thinner, lighter and more resistant steel alloy finished products. I think that there is room for each technology.

7. Is aluminium 'greener' than steel?

I think both are equivalent in terms of environmental impact. Both have invested in making their processes greener. For many years, Condat has understood the need to protect the environment and can help both industries become greener with its Condat D fire-resistant fluid, a biodegradable and non-toxic product.

8. "...any hint of doubt when it comes to predictions of climate doom is evidence of greed, stupidity, moral turpitude or psychological derangement." This is a quote from Bret Stephens writing in The Wall Street Journal. Do you sympathise with his view?

The climate must be a major concern for everyone, and also for every industry, worldwide. At Condat, we have taken this into consideration. The commitments we made within the framework of our CSR policy, contribute to sustainable development. We are also engaged in the UN GLOBAL COMPACT [a non-binding pact to encourage businesses worldwide to adopt sustainable and socially responsible policies]. ECOVADIS has certified us as a Silver level business. With 65/100 points, this places us among the top 25% of best-rated global companies and among the top 6% of companies within our business sector.

9. Why is Industry 4.0 so important to the future of steel production?

* Steel industry business developer

The current period gives legitimacy to 4.0 and accelerates the process. Our methods of communication must change because face-to-face has become more difficult and will be less and less used. Digitalisation and data exchange will be used for better management of resources, energy and, for sure, to remain competitive. Digitalisation processes will increase the traceability of the product.

10. Are steelmakers looking to companies like CONDAT to offer them digital manufacturing solutions?

CONDAT is studying some opportunities. Imagine if we could follow our lubricant remotely with an integrated sensor, to inform customers live and to help them anticipate maintenance operations.

11. Is the steel industry well-placed to take advantage of digital manufacturing?

Digital manufacturing has already been applied to the manufacturing process, quality control and process chain, but could also be used for online control of fluids and effluents (air, water, oil, emulsions) and for sure will be used on predictive maintenance.

12. Where does CONDAT lead the field?

CONDAT is active on maintenance lubricants. We focus on technical applications where we can propose added values regarding safety for people and equipment, longevity and protection of the machines, optimized maintenance costs, and respect for workers and the environment with biodegradable and non-toxic lubricants.

We are one of the main actors on fire-resistant fluids and technical greases for continuous casting and hot rolling lines.

13. How do you view CONDAT's development over the short-to-medium term?

The performance of our lubricants and the gratefulness of our customers and OEM, make us very optimistic. The important growth we have experienced confirm that we are moving in the right direction.

14. How would you solve global overcapacity?

Like for a lot of different things, we saw in the past that it is naturally auto regulated

by itself. The market is going also to adjust and adapt by producing less but with better quality.

15. What is CONDAT's experience of the Chinese steel industry?

CONDAT has a subsidiary in Shanghai to serve the local market. I have visited several Chinese steel plants and it is true that most are built with European technology. China is moving fast and now you can find local equipment producers. We are working with some of them, but in some cases, environmental and safety parameters are not always aligned with our requirements. The same applies to lubricants (fire-resistant fluids for example). But everybody knows that the adaptation capacity of this country is high, and they will progress quickly.

16. Which breakthrough technologies will have a revolutionary impact and will it be something that is 'one



size fits all' or a number of different technologies?

All the technologies that will drive an economical/environmental gain like, for example, EAF low electrical consumption. Regarding our activities, the longer life in use and the 'greener' lubricant is the future. One main change will come from data management, which will improve all the production chain and help reduce the environmental impact through better management of lubricant consumption and a pollution reduction.

17. Where do you see most innovation in terms of production technologies – primary, secondary or more downstream?

Our product fulfilled 100% of the

requirement of the primary production sector as it is here that you find temperature, heavy loads, water and fire risk. In this area our products demonstrate that they are totally aligned with the needs of primary steelmakers. For example, our Condat Millennium grease can reduce lubricant consumption by 40% compared to other technologies.

Just like most innovative equipment (electric arc furnace, ladle furnace or continuous casting line) the main concern is reducing energy consumption.

18. How important is reputation management to the steel industry?

At Condat, we share our expertise for 30 years in the steel industry and are recognized by all the main actors and OEMs thanks to a dedicated technical sale team.

19. How optimistic are you for the global steel industry?

We are really optimistic. The main challenge will be linked to competitiveness, costs reduction, safety and environmental impact.

20. What keeps you awake at night?

Sometimes the solution to a problem arises in the middle of the night.

21. If you possessed a superpower, how would you use it to improve the global steel industry?

I would ensure that all steelmaking plants and hot rolling lines used Condat lubricants. In this way, every company could realise the benefit of using Condat in their equipment. My 24 years working at Condat have allowed me to acquire certainties. I never say our products are the best. They are simply the best suited! ■