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CORMATEX, THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN OF PRATO-BASED TECHNICAL MECHANICS



The **Cormatex Company** has always operated in the textile district of Prato. This small-scale family business was founded in 1938 and initially concerned itself with the design and construction of self-acting spinning mules and carding machines for the

production of carded yarns. In the period after the Second World War it registered its first patents. The first big development came about in the early 1960's when Cormatex developed a range of machines for the non-woven fabric sector; the initial technology was for the production of felt and wadding. This machinery then evolved into modern systems for the production of technical textiles.

In 1978, with the second generation taking over the helm at the company, Cormatex moved into overseas markets, actively developing its sales networks in every corner of the globe. Nowadays the company, with an annual turnover of between 5 and 6 million Euros, exports 90 to 95% of its production.

We asked sales manager Luca Querci: "In which countries of the world are your machines most popular?"

Our main export markets are China, Russia, Brazil, Egypt, Turkey and the United States. Our business strategy is to concentrate, on the one hand, on the emerging economies like India, some parts of North Africa and the Arab nations, where the company does not yet have a presence. But at the same time, we want to increase our market share in Europe, particularly in France, Germany and Scandinavia.

"How have you structured your sales network over the years so as to ensure a presence in practically every continent?"

We have agents spread all over the world working under the direction of our commercial department in Italy. In places where we have been operating for a longer time, for example in China, we have set up locally based technical assistance teams. These people are active while the lines are being set up and offer maintenance and repair service afterwards, guaranteeing the customer professional and prompt help and advice. Thanks to our team of experienced technicians and specialized technological experts, Cormatex can offer direct post-sales assistance in every part of the world. Our ability to work in partnership with our clients throughout the whole life-cycle of our machines is certainly one of our strongest points.

"That's not bad: to be able to coordinate a worldwide network from the little town of Prato. But how difficult is it for a small-scale business to compete in such a huge market?"

It is hard especially when you consider that we are up against European competitors, mainly the French and the Germans. These are often multi-national companies who have been present in the market for years and who have much greater "fire-power" than we do. At Cormatex we just have to focus on our ability to be flexible in our production process, to listen to our customer and develop specific solutions for his requirements. We do not recognize the term "standard": on the contrary, we always develop tailor-made solutions. Thanks to this close and direct relationship with our clients, we can target our research and development at the specific needs of the market.

"That is to say, because your production is tailor-made, it is easier to make innovations according to the specific requirements of the customer. Am I right?"

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Exactly. The two last patents registered by our firm are evidence of our way of working in close contact with the final user. I am referring to a wool-cleaning machine called the "Slappolatrice", whose patent was registered in 2003, and a new aerodynamic system named "Lap Formair", patented in 2007. The Lap Formair system for the production of non-woven textiles allows one to cut the costs of production, and above all, to recycle some of the production waste. Investing in innovation is fundamental and our company is doing just that: in recent years we have managed to dedicate 15% of our turnover to research.

"Can you give us some more details of the technology behind the Lap Formair system?"

I will have to start with an introduction. "Non-woven textiles" is a generic term to describe an industrial product similar to a textile but made by different processes to traditional textiles and knitwear. The production of non-woven textiles normally requires the use of complicated machines called carders and cross-lappers, which are used to arrange the fibres in layers or crossways. The fibres are then put together mechanically, for example with needles or by the use of adhesives or heat processes. The Lap Formair system, on the other hand, which employs the so-called "Airlay" technology, allows one to produce the non-woven textile by aerodynamic means. This technology cuts costs dramatically because it is a simpler and more productive method, but, even more importantly, it allows for much greater versatility of production. In fact, it makes it possible to work with any type of material, from natural or synthetic fibres to non-fibrous products like polyurethane.

"So the Lap Formair system can be used with waste from industrial production, whether it is textile or non-textile?"

Precisely. The Lap Formair creates a "mattress of fibres" in a single process, using a sophisticated system to control the air flow and the pressure and gauging the density of the material per cubic centimeter. These fibres are then fused together mechanically, or by heat treatment, to produce the finished result. Thanks to the simplicity of the production process, one can work with any type of material, even waste from other industrial processes, and achieve a quality of production comparable to that of traditional processes using carders and cross-lappers.

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