

# First response

With Simac Tanning Tech successfully completed, *Leather Naturally* sits down with Assomac president **Gabriella Marchioni Bocca** to discuss the impact of the event, and what it means for sustainability, process automation and CSR across the industry.

**Leather Naturally:** What was your impression of Tanning Tech this year and what statistics can you provide to support the consensus that it was a success?

**Gabriella Marchioni Bocca:** Once again, at the end of this latest edition, the effort poured into year-long preparations has paid off admirably. We are happy to record a two-figure percentage increase in visitor numbers and all found concrete answers to their production needs at the exhibition. These results encourage us to continue to pursue renewal and provide a unique rendezvous again in 2017, offering the right services custom designed for a better event experience for exhibitors and visitors alike. One of our strong points is that we represent a compact and niche system with a large production capacity. Partly thanks to our concurrence with Lineapelle, this attracts some of the demand and links it directly to the supply.

**How did this year's event compare with the 2015 edition?**

Compared with last year, this edition highlighted one interesting fact in particular: as well as an increase in the number and quality of the operators, they spent longer at the exhibition. This is a direct reflection on the quality offered by our exhibitors who, without any doubt, met the expectations of even the most demanding visitors. Every year, we try to innovate and deliver an exhibition product in step with the times and that does not fall short of operator expectations. To this end, we worked hard on communication and promoted the event all year round, successfully intercepting potential new visitors. Nor can we forget the support of organisations and national bodies, particularly our ongoing collaboration with the ITA, which enables us to invite hundreds of foreign delegates and make ourselves known in all our target markets.

**What especially attracted people to this year's edition and how**



**much business was conducted, showing encouraging signs of industrial stimulus?**

What most dictated the success of the 2016 exhibition were the proposals centred on sustainability, as well as those regarding process simplification/automation and innovation (the so-called 'Industry 4.0'), which have been steering technology production in our sector for some time. Technology that responds to the need to save energy and protect the environment have polarised the attention of visitors and they have highlighted this as a growing need in recent years.

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Many contacts were made at the exhibition; it was certainly the ideal opportunity to lay the bases of profitable and lasting medium and long-term relationships. After the three days of the event, people went straight back to work, following up contacts and getting to grips with relationships forged at the exhibition.

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will find a comprehensive range of innovations they cannot see elsewhere.

**What momentum has the industry gained since this latest Tanning Tech as we prepare for MM&T and, indeed, for the rest of the year?**

We embark on this phase in the face of all the potential market doubts. MM&T is, of course, a major event to attend and at which to meet specialist operators. Every exhibition is important for contacting your clients, although we never know beforehand what will happen.

**What are your predictions for next year's Tanning Tech?**

Having taken stock of Simac Tanning Tech 2016, we are already working on the 2017 exhibition. We will continue to boost our response to market and exhibitor demands as we improve our exhibition offer. Nevertheless, we do not have a crystal ball and are unable to say how political and economic changes may

impact our work. We hope to continue doing a good job, as we have done so far, achieving ever new targets with the right amount of faith in the future, thanks also to the cooperation of all the exhibitors, who renew their consensus every year and always manage to turn their ongoing research into attractive solutions for the market.

**What trends are you seeing in European leather in terms of a rebound after a difficult 2015? What is allowing the industry to recover and what challenges still remain?**

The current market situation is still evolving. We have come from years of constant and substantial change, and this will certainly continue and impact on our activities. We hope the tanners can successfully interpret the market and that we can fully satisfy the needs and demands from clients, established and potential. I refer primarily, as I was saying earlier, to issues linked to sustainability, process automation and innovation, which are the only weapons with which we can be truly competitive today.

**We heard a lot of demands from customers at Tanning Tech that sustainability, CSR and transparency throughout the supply chain are becoming more important to businesses. Why are these the central issues for manufacturers and customers alike?**

We noticed this need some time ago and are working strongly in terms of innovative proposals that guarantee a good basis of eco-friendliness, production-chain transparency and product traceability. This is what the market wants and we must work as hard as possible to provide a concrete response to our clients, who have proved more demanding over time.

**Do you see improving cohesion among various international governmental bodies and associations to advance a positive perception of leather in order to bolster business?**

The leather industry is a niche sector. Knowing this forces us to remain united and act as one at all levels. That is the only way we can cope with the changes and challenges of the economic context we work in. It is fundamental to continue to work together with the associations, organisations

and all the players with whom we speak every day, such as the ITA, increasingly engaging foreign associations and institutions at all levels such as UNIDO. In this way, we can effectively help improve the perception of leather worldwide. It is a difficult but not impossible task if we all keep looking in the same direction.

**Can you detail Assomac's role and inspiration to advance the leather industry? What are the primary challenges the sector is facing, from your perspective, and what solutions and partners are involved in strengthening leather's status in Europe and around the world?**

The Assomac position has been recognised by the market for years. It acts as a point of reference for technological innovation, with state-of-the-art proposals that form part of that Industry 4.0 I mentioned earlier.

All our members are moving in this direction, with a strong drive towards

robotics. What we are finding is that many clients request innovation in response to their own customer demands. We are at the start of the whole chain and cannot ignore this.

**We're seeing Turkey, for example, struggling right now due to Russian sanctions that are crippling its leather industry, and IDF last November paled in comparison with the 2014 edition. What steps can Turkey take to regain its status in leather and how can other countries help?**

Every economic and geopolitical event inevitably has repercussions on businesses and, yes, Turkey is suffering because of Russian sanctions. What I would like to say is that all change can lead to something new and positive. Markets may close but others open. At Assomac, we suggest fielding as many safeguards as possible so as to intercept market changes and effectively act in advance. ■

