



NORDIC STRENGTH FROM NATURE

With a heritage spanning more than a century, Nordic Paper is today a leading specialist paper manufacturer with one of the strongest kraft papers on the market. CEO Mr Per Bjurbom and Corporate Communications/PR Manager Mrs Marie Stenquist sit down with Industry Networker to reveal more about the achievements of the business to date, recent investments, and how Nordic Paper's commitment to innovative collaboration is helping to power the paper and pulp sector.



Sweden has a reputation for being one of the world's most environmentally progressive nations – and with good reason. Over the past 90 years, the northern European nation has successfully managed to double its forest resource, with forestland today covering 70 per cent of the country. For Nordic Paper – a leading specialist paper manufacturer and owner of a paper mill far up in the north – such conditions provide a sustainable resource that is world-class in terms of its composition. “It's extremely cold up here, which means the trees grow at a particularly slow rate. That, in turn, means the fibres become very strong, which accounts for the exceptionally good quality of our paper,” remarks the firm's CEO, Mr Per Bjurbom. “In fact, we are proud to say that we have one of the strongest kraft papers on the market worldwide today.”

Headquartered in Bäckhammar in Sweden's west-central Värmland County,

Nordic Paper has four mills in operation – three in Sweden (the aforementioned Bäckhammar, as well as Säffle and Åmotfors), with the final mill located in Greåker, Norway. And all four plants have been in operation for over a century, signalling the rich heritage and expertise that the modern-day firm can draw upon. “It's fair to say that we have a long tradition of knowledge and knowhow in the paper industry,” the CEO continues. “We know how to make premium paper.”

In the case of the firm's kraft paper production, such expertise and the favourable Nordic growing conditions today combine with advanced technology at the company's Bäckhammar and Åmotfors pulp and paper mills (the other two sites focus on manufacturing natural greaseproof paper for the food industry). The Swedish company's kraft portfolio includes absorbent paper, paper steel interleaving, sack kraft paper, MG (machine glazed) kraft paper and biokraft



CEO Mr Per Bjurbom

(biodegradable paper), among other varieties. And while Nordic Paper sells its entire output to converters, such high-performance kraft papers find use in a truly mind-boggling array of end applications the world over – in industries as diverse as food, chemicals, waste handling, construction and even furniture production.

Strong backing

Over the decades, Nordic Paper's specialist kraft paper has gained huge popularity worldwide, with the company now distributing to nearly 80 countries. “Today we observe considerable growth opportunities in all markets,” Mrs Marie Stenquist reports. “We see particularly strong potential for expansion in Asia and Africa, although we are also looking to

grow further in Europe as our home market,” she advises. Regarding the former, Nordic Paper's new Chinese owners (it was acquired by Shanghai-based Shanying International in 2017) will undoubtedly prove instrumental in facilitating the firm's Asian ambitions, opening it up not only to China's enormous market but also the wider region beyond. Principally engaged in the manufacture and distribution of paper products across China, Nordic Paper's Shanghai Stock Exchange listed mother company is today one of the largest of its kind in China, and is clearly interested in becoming more international. “This is obviously great news for us since we see them as long-term owners with great knowledge of the business.”

Numerous recent investments demonstrate this, and are expected to augment Nordic Paper's production capacity in 2018. “One of our largest recent investments has been a new shoe-press, which will increase our capacity by an estimated 10-15 per cent,” describes Mrs Stenquist. “In recent years, predominantly incremental improvements and investments have led to really impressive results, having considerably increased our total production capacity for kraft paper,” she remarks, adding that annual production capacity on the kraft side stood at 190,000 tonnes in 2017.

Innovation for advancement

Aside from enhancing its own production through in-house innovations, Nordic Paper is a strong proponent of industrial advancement via collaboration, as demonstrated by its involvement in the so-called ‘LignoCity’ initiative. Together with numerous commercial and research partners, Nordic Paper is collaborating to develop the future forest-based bio-economy. “The first step has been to establish an open test bed called LignoCity – an innovation centre located just outside our Bäckhammar mill,” Mrs Stenquist reports. “Here, companies can develop and scale up technology that refines lignin – a by-product formed in the production



of pulp – to create new, sustainable bio-fuels, chemicals and materials.

“In the long-term, we believe that this new project will play an important part in developing a powerful paper and pulp industry – and crucially, in ensuring that this industry becomes a proactive player in the circular economy,” she adds. “Only through such collaborations can we help move things forward.”



Corporate Communications/PR Manager Mrs Marie Stenquist

Elsewhere, as part of its on-going corporate social responsibility drive, Nordic Paper is supporting local athlete Claudia Payton. The company will help the talented 19-year-old sprinter achieve her goal of competing at the 2020 Olympics. “The co-operation is a natural choice for Nordic Paper – the power and strength required in the sprint race is something that a pulp and paper company such as ours understands very well, given our kraft paper's status as one of the strongest on the market,” enthuses Mrs Stenquist.

Strengthening status

While Nordic Paper's natural greaseproof paper is already well known as a brand, realisation of the need for a similar strategy on the kraft side has spurred Nordic Paper into action. “Our customers might currently place orders for a particular dimension or type of paper, but we wish to make the process easier by giving

those kraft products names – this will obviously help people remember us as well, so we're really excited about the upcoming launch of numerous brands on the kraft side,” she points out.

With demand for Nordic Paper's diverse array of kraft products on the rise the world over, and with particular opportunity for expansion in emerging Asian markets, the future is looking bright for this dynamic pulp and paper player.

Reflecting on over a century of growth through four world-class mills, Nordic Paper's CEO believes a few key factors have been crucial to the company's success and longevity. “We have a really well developed niche strategy, alongside being a highly functioning organisation – one that is able to control its costs, and of course, always with an unerring focus on our customers' needs,” he asserts.

“Going forward, we aim to strengthen our status as the leading specialist paper manufacturer, offering superior quality and service to selected customers globally. This last point is very important – we manufacture and sell premium quality paper and service, and as a result we actively choose our customers. We don't sell to just anyone!” In both its commercial and innovative collaborations then, it appears Nordic Paper's keen ability to seek the right partners will serve this dynamic company well as it continues to expand its volumes and geographical reach, alongside collaborating to advance the sustainability of the wider pulp and paper industry in the years ahead. □