

# ‘Tomorrow’s products today’ – new challenges for German materials and chemicals industry

By Frank Küber

The German chemicals and materials industry is facing growing competition and ever tighter margins, whilst demands for production quality are increasing. In Germany, our clients continuously need to identify new products to secure their future, products which use existing capital equipment for manufacturing.

In the last decade, however, the major chemical and materials conglomerates, with their massive R&D capabilities, have been split into smaller companies, with limited R&D resources. Businesses are focused on short term results, but also require medium and

long term product development, and to bring new products to market in three to five years time – the equivalent of tomorrow in this industry.

To meet this growing demand, companies are looking for creative and analytical solutions ‘beyond the brief’, and ask Sagentia to help identify opportunities available to them. For example, a German company active in the building industry approached us with their product – a polymeric foam able to manage the content of moisture. By pulling together a bespoke cross-functional, sector and discipline team, we discovered new applications in different industry sectors based

on the unique functionalities of the material. For example, we identified a medical application, demonstrating to the client that this foam addresses unmet needs in wound care – thereby opening up a new market sector and business opportunity for them. We used our established contacts in the medical industry to trial the product almost immediately, enabling a fast track market entry for the company. With no medical sector knowledge, this company would have found a similar process high-risk and time consuming, thereby missing a major opportunity.

Sagentia’s breadth of expertise is proving invaluable to German

companies facing these new competitive challenges. These ‘new’ challenges require both technical knowledge, but also strategic awareness and understanding, to enable companies to fully understand each stage of the value chain. The results can be huge, with companies in the chemicals and materials industry finding new ways to operate and to generate value in a highly challenging sector.

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## Portable laptop or mobile explosive? – Sagentia Catella calls for more stringent battery/device integration

By Annika Ahlberg Tidblad

Both Apple and Dell’s high profile product recalls of more than one million Sony-powered laptops has raised concerns over battery safety, affecting clients everywhere but particularly in the industrial, military and consumer sectors.

The battery has been considered safe for so long that we forget just how much energy it contains. Now, battery safety is being compromised in two main ways: cheap batteries manufactured under less than stringent quality control are entering the market;

and the drive to make more products cordless is resulting in applications which can cause serious battery stress.

We have experienced a significant rise in requests for battery quality testing, and advice on how to better specify battery-powered products. Clients wanting to sell own brand batteries are keen to find the cheapest supplier, but need to ensure safety is not compromised.

Clients also want advice on product specification; new products often use battery

power to provide differentiation, but power supply is usually thought of as a drop-in component, not an integral part of the overall design. As a result, the battery is stretched to its limits with potentially dangerous consequences. We work with product designers and battery manufacturers, providing a technical ‘bridge’ which greatly improves communication and results in successful, safe products.

Both product designers and battery manufacturers need to understand the full implications of cutting costs on

battery design, build, use and eventual disposal. Our deep understanding of this industry means we are well-placed to help in this area, but we all need to ensure that product manufacturers are aware of the impact that products with less-than-perfect power can have to the battery supplier, the end user and the environment.

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