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PlasticsEurope
Association of Plastics Manufacturers

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“...We are all sailing in the same boat and it is our common responsibility to steer it to a safe haven, for the benefit of all plastics ...”



Josef Ertl
CEO Vinnolit

Who is Josef Ertl?

I hold a PhD degree in chemistry and started my career with Hoechst AG (the former German chemical company), with assignments in R&D, production and various staff functions. I became global production manager for inorganic chemicals before assuming overall responsibility for the entire chlorine chemistry business of Hoechst. Accordingly, I played an active role in the restructuring of the chemical business at Hoechst and afterwards at Celanese, when Hoechst was split into the life science and chemical sectors. In 1998, I joined Vinnolit and was in charge of the business unit monomers and PVC for thermoplastic applications. In 2001, I joined the Vinnolit Management Board and pushed on the company's transformation into an integrated producer of chlorine, PVC and intermediates. In this capacity, I represent Vinnolit and the PVC industry in various industry associations. I am a member of the PlasticsEurope Steering Board, a board member of PlasticsEurope Germany, and of the ECVM and the Vinyl 2010 boards. I served as Chairman of ECVM and Vinyl 2010 for several years. I am married with two children.

In your opinion, what is the added-value of an association such as PlasticsEurope to its membership?

Is there an added-value? There may be some scepticism in these turbulent and economically difficult times as to the added-value of our industry associations, but I definitely say and vote yes! There is no doubt in my mind about the added-value of PlasticsEurope. What we have with PlasticsEurope is one single voice for the plastics industry in Europe to spread the word about the fantastic material and the valuable resource it represents. PlasticsEurope is a voice which is recognised as a reliable partner of the European institutions, the national governments, the scientific world and the public. We rely on vital product groups like ECVM to push forward specific issues and specific interests, but we benefit a lot from bringing together our voices, experience and strength for the entire plastics industry. We are all sailing in the same boat and it is our common responsibility to steer it to a safe haven, for the benefit of all plastics. It is also the role of PlasticsEurope to collate the national and product specific views and to develop them further into a truly overall European plastics strategy. This is the indispensable outside impact. On the other hand, PlasticsEurope also provides legitimate opportunities for networking and exchange between our industries; it contributes to setting the right goals for the future of plastics and to serve society by bringing together the expertise of all plastics companies. In my experience the more proactive we as members are, the more value we can get out of PlasticsEurope.

To what extent does the association meet the expectations of its membership?

PlasticsEurope went through structural and organisational changes in the last couple of years, redefining the vision, mission and strategy; and rebalancing the responsibilities and resources of the European, as well as national entities. Naturally this did not occur without any frictions but most importantly we were successful in creating a highly visible, increasingly powerful pan-European association. I personally believe that PlasticsEurope is on the right track but we are not at the finish line yet. I think it is worthwhile to collect the members' views on a regular basis to step up the discussion.

In your opinion, how can PlasticsEurope contribute better to the success of its members?

PlasticsEurope is doing a great job but never say you can't do something better. There are three areas where we might improve:

- We need to continuously sharpen our strategic focus with respect to responding to trends with programmes like Energy Efficiency & Climate Protection, Resource Efficiency and Consumer protection. We need to monitor closely the changing consumption patterns and the effects of the ongoing globalisation to adapt our strategy accordingly.
- To shape the future of plastics, it is essential to strengthen the cooperation between the entire plastics industry, including the polymer producers, the converters and the machine manufacturers. None of the three would be successful without the others. A good example for this improved cooperation is the newly formed German Association WVK (Wirtschaftsvereinigung Kunststoff).
- Internally PlasticsEurope needs to continuously improve its organisational structure to strive for more efficiency and refine the team-play between the European and the national associations. We must be powerful and convincing at both, the national and the European level.

What are the specific needs that VINNOLIT would like to have PlasticsEurope respond to?

Vinnolit is very much interested in the improvement PlasticsEurope can make in positioning plastics as a problem solving material, increasing consumer confidence and strengthening the political acceptance of plastics in general, and PVC in particular. As a manufacturer of PVC we also need a level playing field for our material with respect to green public procurement, green building and eco-labelling. Balanced legislation should be based on factual risk assessment and sound science to avoid unfounded discrimination and de-selection of PVC or other materials.

More globally, in what useful way can PlasticsEurope contribute to help the industry overcome this difficult period?

Securing the industry's global competitiveness is key to overcome the crisis. PlasticsEurope, in collaboration with CEFIC and other industry associations, should maintain its ongoing effort to promote a wise economic policy. The economic crisis is not the ideal timing for political decision-makers to be able to unfairly promote the so-called "green" industry versus the "traditional" one. We are very much supportive of the EU's 2020 targets for energy efficiency and emissions reductions. We believe our material will significantly contribute to being able to reach these targets and, as such, policy-makers should be wary not to unreasonably further stretch the burden on the industry. It is a common error, in some circles, to believe that the EU industry can survive despite adverse conditions. Political decisions made upon such a belief could lead to the European industry becoming only a service based one, unable to maintain our current societal model. The industrial landscape has already changed and will continue to do so at an accelerated speed, hence PlasticsEurope should actively strive to inform the policy makers, who shape the regulatory framework, in order to limit unilateral European regulations and therefore possible distortion of global competition. From my personal point of view, Europe must strengthen its broad industrial base - including the plastics industry - to master a transition to a more sustainable economy.

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