

Really optimistic for steel

CONDAT is a leading player in the field of fire-resistant technology. The company's range of products are already well known to the global steel industry, says **Franck Dufresne***

1. How are things going at CONDAT? Is the steel industry keeping you busy?

Concerning the steel industry, we have made a lot of effort for some years on this market and we reap the benefits. We have increased our market share in this sector thanks to our wide offer of technical lubricants. Being present worldwide, our growth is, however, mainly driven by Middle East countries.

2. What is your view on the current state of the global steel industry?

Specialised steel organisations forecast a growth of 50% by 2050 and global steel use has grown more than seven-fold since 1950. By 2050, steel use is projected to increase by 1.5 times that of present levels, to meet the needs of our growing global population. All this has encouraged CONDAT to make this market a priority for its range of industrial lubricants.

3. In which sector of the steel industry does CONDAT mostly conduct its business?

CONDAT's business is mainly oriented on steel making plants and hot rolling lines. We supply fire-resistant fluids and heavy loads greases answering the constraints and demands of major actors in this field. Our FRF hydraulic fluids range, CONDAT D, is certified FM approved, biodegradable and non-toxic and our greases are specially formulated to resist water and temperature, they enable a decrease in lubricants consumption and recycling costs.

4. Where in the world are you busiest at present?

We are busy on the four continents, but countries in the Middle East are investing a

lot in the steel sector and show the greatest growth.

5. Can you discuss any major steel contracts you are currently working on?

We are supplying all major steel players in the field, such as ArcelorMittal, Posco, Tata Steel and Riva Group. We are also in contact with the main state-owned steel companies.



6. Where do you stand on the aluminium versus steel argument, especially in relation to the automotive industry?

I think there is room for both technologies depending on the sought requirements. The steel industry has invested a lot in R&D these last years and is now able to produce thinner, lighter and more resistant steel alloy finished products. These latter are able to compete with aluminium parts in the automotive industry. At the moment, steel is still the main component in the

automotive industry and I think that it will stay that way for a while.

7. Is aluminium 'greener' than steel?

In my opinion, both are equivalent in terms of environmental impact. Both industries have been able to set up efficient recycling chains and have invested a lot in making their production process greener, such as effluent treatment on smoke and water. For sure, some countries have to make improvements on that point, but they will have no other choice to adapt to this constraint over the next few years. Condat also helps these industries to become greener with its Condat D fire resistant fluid which is biodegradable and non-toxic.

8. "...any hint of doubt when it comes to predictions of climate doom is evidence of greed, stupidity, moral turpitude or psychological derangement." This is a quote from Bret Stephens writing in The Wall Street Journal. Do you sympathise with his view?

The climate must be a major concern for the steel industry, just like all other worldwide industries (aluminium, chemistry, automotive). For many years, environment has been a main concern at CONDAT and we have worked and invested to respond in a reliable, responsible and sustainable way to our customers' needs.

Our product regulatory affairs department monitors meticulously international regulations and ensures continuity in CONDAT's offer. Being proactive and anticipating future regulations, the group endeavours to offer its customers technical solutions allowing them to reduce the impact on workers and environment.

9. Why is Industry 4.0 so important to the future of steel production?

Industry 4.0 is more a concept than a technology. All the efforts are based on digitalisation and data exchange for better management of resources, energy and, for sure, to remain competitive. This philosophy could allow better communication between plants and customers all along the supply chain. Using digitalisation processes could help in dealing with traceability (quality and production history).

10. In your dealings with steel producers, are you finding that they are looking to companies like CONDAT to offer them digital manufacturing solutions?

We haven't had so many requests on the subject. However we already support our customers in digitalisation by providing them solutions with appropriate equipment for lubricants.

11. Is the steel industry well-placed to take advantage of digital manufacturing?

The steel industry has modernised over the years and it is certain that digital manufacturing will play an increasingly important role in the years ahead. Digital will certainly have its place in the future of the industry. There are a lot of possible applications for the steel manufacturing process, like quality control on finished products, control of the process chain, online control of the fluids (air, water, oil, emulsions) and predictive maintenance.

12. Where does CONDAT lead the field in terms of steel production technology?

CONDAT is a main actor with its fire-resistant technology based on 4 points: Safety for people and equipment; longevity and protection of the machines; optimised maintenance costs; and respect for workers and the environment with biodegradable and non-toxic lubricants.

13. How do you view CONDAT's development over the short-to-medium term in relation to the global steel industry?

These last years, CONDAT has reinforced its presence and its technical offer dedicated to the steel industry. Relationships have been

strengthened with steel's main actors and OEMs, so our future development in this field is really optimistic.

14. How would you solve the issue of global overcapacity?

This is a main issue, but in the past it was naturally auto-regulated by itself.

15. The Chinese industry still relies heavily upon Western steel production technology. What is CONDAT's experience of the Chinese steel industry?

We are relying on our Chinese subsidiary to supply the local market. In the past, we faced some troubles due to overcapacity in China, but it seems like the market is reshaped further to government impulse.

16. Which breakthrough technologies will have a revolutionary impact and will it be something that is 'one size fits all' or a number of different technologies?

The main changes will obviously come from data management and it will impact different processes such as production improvement, supply chain and information flow. It will probably be addressed by several types of technology and specific software.

17. Where do you see most innovation in terms of production technologies – primary, secondary or more downstream?

We are mainly involved in the primary production sector and have noticed that the main concern is to reduce energy and resources consumption. CONDAT's latest grease technology (CONDAT MILLENNIUM grease) meets this request as it reduces lubricant consumption by 40% compared to previous technologies.

18. How important is reputation management to the steel industry?

The steel industry is a well-established and conservative market based on trust and expertise. Risks can be high and costly when it comes to machine downtime so the reliability of lubricants is essential. We have built our reputation over the past 30 years and are recognised as a specialist in the field of lubrication.

19. How optimistic are you for the global steel industry going forward and what challenges face global producers in the short-to-medium term?

As already said in question 13, we are really optimistic and think that the main challenges remain linked to competitiveness, cost reduction, safety and environmental impact. Our product development totally fits with these requirements.

20. CONDAT is based in the USA, but how is the domestic steel industry performing?

US imports of steel mill products have increased in recent months after declining in the second half of 2016, while exports have remained relatively flat. Part of our business growth in the US is expected to be linked to our actions on this market, especially with our fire resistant hydraulic fluids range.

21. What exhibitions and conferences will CONDAT be attending this year?

We are present at the main steel events, but not as exhibitors. We are strong believers in one-to-one relationships and are more than willing to supply on-site support close to end users.

22. Apart from strong coffee, what keeps you awake at night?

As a good French guy, I drink a lot of coffee! I usually just need a couple of hours sleep. Being very active and on business trips most of the time, the jetlag also keeps me awake. I take advantage of this time at night to answer my customers' mails as they can be located on the opposite side of the world.

23. If you possessed a superpower, how would you use it to improve the global steel industry?

I will use it to make this industry cleaner and make all governments worldwide have the same level of requirements in terms of environmental impact. I will also use this power to improve safety for the workers as it remains a really difficult and risky job. Thank god, companies are not waiting for my superpower as they have already committed a lot of resources in this action.

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