

Industry 4.0 in the time of the Coronavirus

Packaging machine manufacturers offer remote assistance through technology. The industry is taking the strain quite well, but the border blockade is taking its toll: associations call for a pass

Continuing to provide assistance and maintenance services, even abroad, when even reaching your workplace can be complicated seems an impossible challenge to say the least. Yet Italian manufacturers of packaging, printing and converting machines (which export about 60 percent of their output) are succeeding in the endeavor. State-of-the-art technology, built-in sensors and, most importantly, connectivity with and between machines are a powerful weapon for Italian manufacturers against Covid-19 and restrictions on movement.

How the industry is facing the Coronavirus emergency

According to early data (constantly updated) collected with a survey by Acimga, the Confindustria association representing manufacturers of machinery for the graphic, paper and converting industry, about two in three companies report no increase in staff absence rates due to illness, strikes or difficulties in getting to work. Almost 9 in ten companies did not resort to furlough. However, numbers could go up if the crisis were to continue (50% intend to resort to social safety nets in this scenario).

The situation is different if we look at machinery manufacturing. About one in three companies are seeing a reduction in production from 50 to 75%; one in four report a slow-down ranging from 25 to 50 percent. On the other hand, about one in ten have had no repercussions and one in three are experiencing only a slight drop in production (from 0 to 25%). This apparent contradiction between staff presence and production capacity can be explained by a decrease in orders, the difficulty in reaching customers inside and outside national borders, and a reduction in incoming buyers from abroad. In this scenario, half of companies are suffering a drop in revenues of at least 20%, one in four report no major impact on the balance sheet while 19% are experiencing substantial losses (at least 50% of revenues). However, the situation is widely expected to grow worse should the crisis last for an entire quarter - 94% of interviewees believe that in that case losses could range from at least 20% to at least 50% of total revenues.

"It is a difficult scenario - explains Aldo Peretti - president of Acimga. Our technicians and sales agents are unable to travel. Fortunately, in view of the Industry 4.0 many companies have long equipped themselves to provide remote assistance. Many Italian machines are equipped with remote monitoring sensors, and several companies have predictive maintenance programs to avoid blocking production and preempt breakdowns. Thanks to these services, we can ensure that packaging machines will not stop in case of problems. This is no longer just a commercial service; it has become almost a social service. The food and drug supply chain must not stop and we too must do our part. Now that the problem has spread to a global scale, Italy



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ITALIAN MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION OF MACHINERY FOR THE GRAPHIC, CONVERTING AND PAPER INDUSTRY

must get out of the crisis as soon as possible and contribute to supporting the supply chain all over the world. For this reason, Acimga, together with Federmacchine and Confindustria, has asked the relevant ministries to issue an internationally recognized medical pass that certifies the state of good health of our technicians as soon as possible. When, hopefully soon, the contagion curve in Italy starts falling and the rest of Europe is still in the midst of the crisis, this will enable us to resume machine installations, currently on hold, and when required on-site assistance outside of Italy. We will ensure that the packaging supply chain, now more vital than ever, does not stop elsewhere and we will give new impetus to the industry".

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