

Pulp #21 Focus

The Rottneros customer newsletter

Pulpwood from frozen forests



Stronger corporate structure



Customer survey results



Environmental enlightenment

The forest industry has been under attack from environmentalists for decades – more often than not without any efforts being made by the industry itself to correct misconceptions and misunderstandings. A positive example of a contrary approach is Belgium's Paper Chain Forum.

TEXT: L-O Mattsson PHOTO: COBELPA

The target group for the Paper Chain Forum is primarily schoolchildren. They are reached in different ways. Some examples include the provision of teaching materials, use of the media and arranging excursions to forests and industries.

"We are very thorough in telling only facts and truths," says Mr. Firmin François, who heads the Paper Chain Forum. "Our credibility is the key to success, so we never cross the line to propaganda.

"There is no need to do that, either," he continues. "There are so many misconceptions around that we can counter them just with facts. There are many people in Belgium who believe that we just cut down trees to make paper, and think no further."

A major strength of the organisation is that its members represent the whole industry, from forest owners to printers. Only associations are members, a fact that further enhances its credibility.

Why have schoolchildren been chosen as the main target group?

"There are several reasons," says Mr. François. "Teachers in Belgium are generally speaking very 'green', which often

means that children get the wrong information from an early start. And something you have learned as a child is difficult to change when you are older. Children are also the consumers of tomorrow and therefore they are very important.

Misconceptions

"However, we usually have good cooperation with teachers once they realise that we are just after communicating facts and nothing else."

One of the activities arranged by the Paper Chain Forum is 'eco-trips'. These are excursions made to forests, paper mills and recycling plants where, on each trip, 40-50 pupils and their teachers can see for themselves how the chain works.

In connection with these trips, each child receives a booklet containing facts about the industry. Sometimes journalists are also invited, which has resulted in many articles and television broadcasts.

A small newspaper has also been produced and 300,000 copies distributed to schools around Belgium, an impressive number for a country with only 10 million inhabitants.

"At the beginning, a papermaking kit was also designed and offered to schools. This was a success and therefore, logistically, difficult to manage," Mr. François explains.

"The participating schools received educational boxes containing the material to produce handmade paper and information on the relationship between paper and the environment."

Environmental Charter

The Paper Chain Forum does not just work vis-à-vis the public. It also has an agenda to improve the environmental performance of the industry. This has been formulated in the 'Environmental Charter'. The Charter contains three commitments: to contribute to the expansion of forest certification, to further

improve an already high degree of recycling of waste paper, and to improve energy efficiency and take other measures to improve the CO₂ balance.

"We are lucky to have products that are renewable and that allow us to close the CO₂ loop," says Mr. François.

The Paper Chain Forum is an organisation that works with very limited resources. Mr. François is the director-general of COBELPA, the association of the Belgian pulp, paper and board industries, and can only devote a few hours of work each week to the Paper Chain Forum. Other work is carried out entirely by voluntary staff in the member organisations.

"It is of course a bit strange that we do not get more funding, considering the turnover in the industry and the importance of this work, but our industry has never been very 'communication-minded'," comments Mr. François.

Friendlier green movement

Despite limited resources, however, the Paper Chain Forum's efforts seem to have paid off:

"I believe that opinions are changing," says Mr. François. "People have a much better perception of the recycling side now. Forestry, however, still has a somewhat bad image that we need to put our efforts into. But perhaps the most important indicator is that I have received indications from the green movement here in Belgium that our industry is now perceived more and more as an environmentally friendly industry. I take this as a very good sign and I know we are on the right track."



Mr. Firmin François has, among other things, initiated good contact with environmental organisations in Belgium to improve the industry's reputation.



The Environmental Charter of the Paper Chain Forum.