

Digital assistant shines with paints and coatings expertise

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- Voice-operated COATINO™ lab assistant aims to reduce labor-intensive searches in the coatings industry
- First release to customers scheduled as early as 2020
- Innovative services are gaining importance

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Essen, Germany. Speak up and be heard—never before have these words pertained to lab work quite the way they do now: thanks to COATINO™, the first digital laboratory assistant that Evonik is developing especially for the coatings industry. Not only does this voice-activated digital assistant do as it's told, it also offers its wealth of expertise in support of the work of human experts in the world of paints, finishes, and coatings. Evonik has successfully equipped COATINO™ with technical knowledge and specialized expertise. As a result, COATINO™ can provide impressive, expert responses to even complicated questions in the area of coatings. Having now developed a prototype in close collaboration with European partners, Evonik is aiming to make the digital lab assistant available to the industry as early as 2020.

The market for paints and coatings is currently in the grips of profound change: consumers want coatings that are better, more sustainable, and more efficient. Compounding the situation are increasingly strict legal and regulatory requirements. All of that has generated a need for more innovation and shorter product life cycles.

A faster, more tailored and comprehensive response to customers' needs

This is precisely where COATINO™ comes in. According to Gaetano Blanda, head of Evonik's Coating Additives business line, "With our digital, voice-activated laboratory assistant we support the coatings industry in providing a faster, more tailored, comprehensive response to customers' needs than before."

When taken all together, opportunities in the colorful world of today's coatings are virtually unlimited. In terms of additives

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alone, the options for creating special properties in a given coating cover a wide range. Additives can make a coating more scratch resistant, for example. For paint manufacturers, the search for the right additive has, however, often felt like running a marathon: “There are thousands upon thousands of potential combinations, and hands-on experiments remain method of choice, even for trained coating experts. They pore over catalogs, study lists, and comb through complex registers in order to conduct labor-intensive tests aimed at once again precisely characterizing how the raw materials they’ve found will interact with the other components of the formulation,” reports Oliver Kröhl, who is head of Strategic Business Development within the Coating Additives business line and is responsible for the COATINO™ project.

A tablet or smartphone should be all you need to send your request

The COATINO™ digital assistant could potentially put an end to what has been a time-consuming and sometimes frustrating process: all coating developers will have to do is tell COATINO™ what properties they want in an additive—the lab assistant will then immediately provide suitable answers. In this way, COATINO™ offers paints and coatings manufacturers quick and easy access to solutions from Evonik’s extensive product portfolio. In-depth technical expertise is still a must, but COATINO™ makes it much easier to come by—anytime, anywhere. That’s because a tablet or smartphone will ideally be all anyone needs to use the digital assistant.

Data security has been a particular concern for Evonik throughout the development of the platform. “We’re working with European partners to develop COATINO™ with an eye to Europe’s strict data privacy requirements. High-performance cloud solutions protect stored data,” Kröhl stresses.

The COATINO™ team has taken great effort to make the system as easy as possible for users to work with. Thanks to this extensive work, the voice-activated digital assistant understands more than just day-to-day language—it also has a command of the technical

terminology used in the coatings industry. This is what lets COATINO™ really show its strengths as a specialist.

In its search results, COATINO™ provides a clear, reasoned, and comprehensible recommendation for a specific additive. The digital assistant does this by drawing upon a continuously updated, cloud-based database. In addition to many other sources, this database also houses the results of testing that Evonik has performed at its in-house, high-throughput plant for paints and coatings. “We utilize modern methods from big-data science and machine learning to ensure that COATINO™ always suggests the most suitable additive,” says Kröhl. That makes COATINO™ a smart, digital, turbocharged addition to the painstaking method of trial and error that has been available thus far.

Evonik sees itself as a pioneer in the digitalization of the chemical industry. At the same time, business line head Gaetano Blanda is convinced that “innovations in today’s chemical industry are about more than just finished products or processes. Services can be innovative too. COATINO™ is a good example of the kind of innovative service that would not have been possible this way before digitalization.”

From product supplier to comprehensive solution provider

The purpose of the digital assistant is to help coatings industry customers save time and effort—and that means saving money. COATINO™ will allow customers to work in a more targeted way and achieve successes more quickly. That, in turn, will make them more competitive. End consumers could benefit as well, with innovations from the coatings industry being made available more quickly, for example.

COATINO™ is a striking example of how Evonik has continued to grow its own business model from that of an experienced product supplier to that of a comprehensive solution provider. At the same time, Evonik confirms its role as an innovative, expert partner for the paints and coatings industry—a role that it continues to play in the era of digitalization. Blanda spells it out: “We offer

products—and we’re offering more and more services to go along with them. Taking a contemporary approach, we provide our customers with the material and the means to serve their own customers faster, better, and more sustainably.”

Company information

Evonik is one of the world leaders in specialty chemicals. The focus on more specialty businesses, customer-oriented innovative prowess and a trustful and performance-oriented corporate culture form the heart of Evonik’s corporate strategy. They are the lever for profitable growth and a sustained increase in the value of the company. Evonik benefits specifically from its customer proximity and leading market positions. Evonik is active in over 100 countries around the world. In fiscal 2018, the enterprise with more than 32,000 employees generated sales of €13.3 billion and an operating profit (adjusted EBITDA) of €2.15 billion from continuing operations.

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