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Itema is a world recognised brand synonymous with versatility and production of high quality fabrics.

Lorenzo Maffioli, Managing Director ITEMA China

Glance at Itema today

Itema is a leading global provider of advanced weaving solutions, including best-in-class weaving machines, spare parts and integrated services. The Company is the only manufacturer in the world to provide the top three weft insertion technologies: Rapier, Airjet and Projectile, with an ample product portfolio and a commitment to continuous innovation and technological advancement of its weaving machines.

Itema guarantees the right weaving machine for any type of woven fabric: from commodity to high-end fashion, to heavy-duty, high-performance industrial fabrics, Itema has the right weaving machine for any application.

Weaving machines with the well-known brand name Itema leave assembly lines in Italy, Switzerland and China every day.

Itema has a tradition of almost 200 years with an installed base of over 300,000 weaving machines in operation. A global presence in more than 100 countries ensures a fast and reliable service.

Itema has been present in China since 2003 and now boasts a comprehensive organization with sales and after-sales teams, assembly and, last but not least, technical support to ensure

the highest possible standard of weaving solutions, with a complete offering and service to customers in the Chinese market.

On March 6, 2014, in a memorable inauguration ceremony, Itema opened the brand-new Company premises in Shanghai and unveiled latest advancements in weaving technology to allow its Customers to produce high quality fabrics and achieve maximum success.

PTJ Editor caught up with Mr. Maffioli, Managing Director, Itema China at the Shanghai assembly facility, which has followed closely the Lean Manufacturing example of the Colzate facility. Following are the excerpts from the interview. This report is part of a series of articles to commemorate the 50th year anniversary of the establishment of Somet – one of the historic brands that make up Itema.

Lean Manufacturing Systems at Itema Group

In the organization of a modern production system there are three or four main systems called continuous improvement systems to manage the supply chain. These continuous improvement systems and lean manufacturing systems are based on the Japanese approach developed in the 1970s and '80s in the automotive



factories. Now these systems of production management are considered to be model systems of production. The Toyota lean manufacturing system or the Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) System are example of these methods. Another well known reference in literature is the General Electric TPM system where all aspects of business are taken into account.

At Itema we have what is called the Itema Lean Manufacturing System. Our production management team, including myself have come from Fiat Chrysler Group. We were trained by the renowned Japanese professor Yamashina who ran a consultancy firm providing lean manufacturing know how to many companies in the world, most of them outside Japan. Volvo motors, Fiat and Royal Mail in the UK are some of the clients of Prof Yamashina.

When we moved to Itema we applied the lean manufacturing concepts and standardized systems to the three



factories of Colzate, Switzerland and China, and “lean” is now part of our corporate culture.

I would like to mention that the system is a perfect fit with the policies of our group. One of the main policies of our group is that the machining of the core mechanical components should remain concentrated in Colzate – the main production plant of Itema Group – in order to safeguard the stringent quality requirements. In Colzate there is a two-step process comprising of:

1. Machining with 2 machining departments for key core components of our machines.
2. The sub assembly and assembly departments.

In the other divisions of the company, especially here in China, we do not perform machining activities and we import the components from Italy.

Other than that, it is the same lean production system, but on a somewhat smaller scale.

Itema in China

Currently, our Itema China activities include” says Maffioli,” besides the assembly unit, other key functions similar

to peer branches of Itema Group in India, Japan, Hong Kong, the United States and now Dubai. These departments are established to provide sales and dedicated after sales services to our global customers in the local markets.

When Itema decided to establish a branch in China back in 2003, it first set up a representative office. Soon after, the company decided to start the production of a machine in China that would be specifically designed for and suitable to the local market. At the same time it would cater to the domestic customers who did not have access to international financial credit. At that time the Chinese market was mainly divided between some high level companies that already had the organization to open international letters of credit and a growing number of companies that did not have this access.

This provided a very interesting opportunity for foreign investors like Itema to target, among others, entrepreneurs who wanted to enter the weaving business but could not do so using imported equipment, because they could only buy locally made machines by paying cash or applying for financing from Chinese banks.

Here enters the K88 - the first sample batch machine – which was first produced in Italy in 2004 and from 2005 its production was transferred to China.

At the same time, the company moved from the first representative office and invested in property and plant in an industrial area where we set up our first production facility in China. We invested again, in a second step, in order to double the factory and the capacity until we reached the peak production when we had sold more 1500 sets of the K88 machines in China.

While K88 was a rapier machine that was simpler in technology and engineering in comparison to the Italian-made machines, many of our customers even today nostalgically remind us that they had started their successful businesses with their first K88 rapier machines from Itema. We are glad to have been there for our customers since the very beginning.

Itema’s unification of brands

In 2012 we launched the new rapier machine R9500 under the guidance and leadership of the new CEO, Mr. Carlo Rogora. After careful evaluation, but with



ITEMA Shanghai Team



courage and vision, Mr. Rogora decided at that time that we were mature enough to promote our brand Iteima not only as a corporate brand, but also as a product brand. For 12 years before that Iteima was a company that was producing a vast number of different brands. Consequently, in 2013 the marketing approach of Iteima also changed. This unification has become a new source of inspiration for us.

The Iteima rapier R9500 machine became the new platform to launch our other machines under the Iteima brand. Then, step by step, we started to close the production lines of our previous models also in China. After the rapier K88 machine in China, the counterpart of Leonardo Silver was the rapier R880 weaving machine. With the introduction of A9500 at ITMA Barcellona 2011 and the A9500p at ITMA ASIA 2014 we decided to unify all products under the same platform. This was an important internal revolution for our company. In 2013 we embraced the principle that the core engineering of our machines should follow the same requirements of performance no matter where they are produced, assembled or marketed.

Improved know-how and skills of Chinese suppliers

We no longer have localized drawing and engineering at our international branches including China. It is true that earlier there was a need to redraw and adapt in order to meet the local demand and also to fit the technology available with the Chinese suppliers. Today our Chinese vendors are well capable of meeting our stringent requirements. In 2013, we introduced the principle of **"same drawing, same piece"**. I can say that many of our Chinese suppliers have now grown and prospered with us. On the other hand, some of Chinese suppliers were selected to benefit from their experience as suppliers of the leading European brands not necessarily in the textile machinery business such as ABB.

The Chinese are now focusing on the R&D and efficient manufacturing, but are lacking in the design aspect. Since 2008 China is promoting policies to encourage the transition from "manufacturing only" to "manufacturing plus R&D." High level



policies in China have helped establish research centers for all the big companies which have their own R&D centers in China. I think what perhaps is the missing step is the element of design. Big Chinese companies are now strong in R&D but not yet in design and style.

Success of Iteima Group since 2012

The last four years have been, in my opinion, a great improvement for the Iteima Group under the leadership of Mr. Rogora. In our business we are not an enormous company. We are a medium sized company but with the challenge and pleasure to work everywhere in the world. One of the beautiful reasons to work at Iteima is that we have in front of us clear principles and directives from the Headquarter, which makes it easier for the different branches to stay aligned with the policies. There is a very strong emphasis on internal communications. The first message from Mr. Rogora, to the six Managing Directors of local branches is to "ensure communication." In the evaluation of the CEO of Iteima Group the communication and

coordination comes before the results. There is logic to it as without efficient communication and coordination good results cannot be sustainable.

Every year Iteima makes offers in 120 countries and sells machines in some 45-50 countries in the world. We are a medium sized company with a global approach. And we have our branches as hubs to serve different markets. Due to clear strategy and leadership we work better together. About ten years ago an employee may have felt the difference between being an employee of Iteima China or Iteima Italy. Not anymore. The basic principles of Iteima are very clear to all employees of Iteima and are followed by all. This culture has brought a big change in the last four to five years.

Today, we have a product that is recognized around the world and appreciated for its versatility and fabric quality. Our customers are relying upon us for production of better quality fabrics and high profitability particularly in the countries where cotton is an important raw material such as China, India and Pakistan. ♦