

Custom Compounding Expertise in Singapore

Specialty compounding for customised applications has always been one of the market niches for RTP Company (www.rtpcompany.com) globally. It is hardly surprising then to find RTP Company's operations in Singapore to be fully capable of developing and producing a wide range of customised compounds for specific applications.

Now housing more than ten compounding lines, the Singapore site has been in operations since 2002 and is the larger of RTP Company's two production facilities in Asia (the other is in Suzhou, China), based on both revenue and volume. The product research and development capabilities established in Singapore also put the plant in a unique position to tailor their products specifically to customer needs.

"When RTP first opened the plant in 2002, it was mainly a regional facility but we have continued to expand," says Tom Cordes, RTP Company director of sales for Asia and global general manager for RTP's conductive and wear products. "Our Suzhou factory in China, first set up in 2005, is also seeing good expansions, but as of right now, the Singapore plant still maintains its leadership role and it is still our Asian headquarters. We are fully committed to our plant here in Singapore."

Customised edge

As with RTP Company's customer-oriented approach, the Singapore compounding plant has seen rapid growth particularly in conductive polymers and, increasingly over the last three years, colour products. Cordes says: "Even in the downturn we are facing today, we have to maintain what makes RTP successful: innovations; customising formulations; working with customers on a personal level to help them develop their product applications. It's a fairly simple statement, but the experience level we provide can be critical to helping the customers."

While both of RTP's compounding plants in Asia have full production capabilities, the Singapore plant has developed very niche capabilities in conductive compounds, specifically carbon black, carbon fibre and nanotube products. Cordes explains: "Based on the region's market needs, we put a lot of emphasis on our conductive products. In South East Asia and South China, that has been a very important product line."

And in higher end markets such as carbon nanotube (CNT) compounds, RTP Company has worked successfully with customers to commercialise applications using CNT materials compounded in Singapore.

Since opening in 2002, specialty compounder RTP Company's Singapore facility has gone through several phases of capacity expansion through the years and operates more than ten lines today, all the while keeping its focus on building up its custom compounding capabilities. APN reports

"Probably the most unique feature about the Singapore plant is that this facility does emphasize a lot on conductive products, and this has been our focus all along," Cordes explains. "It is as capable as any plant that RTP has, whether in terms of quality record or production capability. It is consistently one of our best plants in the world."

When it comes to growth in its colour products, RTP's strategy for Asia is twofold: both in fulfilling current market requirements by supplying both masterbatch and precoloured materials and at the same time expanding more into consumer-oriented markets where RTP can offer more innovative products.

"The colour business has been a product area where we have continued to see a lot of growth in, supporting a lot of multinationals and OEMs in the region," Cordes says. "The business has done well and seen growth in both masterbatches and precoloured compounds."

Critically, RTP Company's strategic edge in colour is the firm's ability to objectively advise customers on whether it is more appropriate to use masterbatches or precoloured compounds.



Use of advanced equipment

Fern Meng Teck, RTP Company Singapore operations manager, emphasised how the installation of leading-edge equipment as being key to the firm's success as well. Fern says: "On the compounding equipment, we have more than ten lines, both single- and twin-screw extruders. We are planning to add two more lines as well, for the ongoing capacity expansion."

Fern also notes that a lot of the newer, more high-end demands from customers – such as those using RTP-compounded materials for medical applications – have led to an emerging need for RTP Company to install a highly sophisticated set of metal separation system developed by German-based S+S Inspection Asia Pte Ltd.

"We are seeing more high-purity product demands from our customers, for which we really need a system to effectively trace and remove metal contaminants in our product batches. This is crucial because those higher end market applications cannot tolerate any form of metal contamination," Fern explains.



A 30mm diameter S+S metal separator has been installed because it was highly sensitive and most suited for RTP's operation efficiency, what's also noteworthy is that the S+S metal separator is effective for both ferrous and non-ferrous materials," Fern adds.

From left: Tom Cordes, Director of Sales (Asia), Fern Meng Teck and Wilkin Tang, MD (Asia Pacific)

"The market trend is that our customers need things quickly," says Cordes. "Colours can change with every new model or product line, and we have to be constantly developing and updating new colour products. This is a fast moving product line, and we have to support lead times that are very short. Both Asian facilities in Singapore and Suzhou have strong colour teams who are very capable of working with customer on the applications."

A large part of RTP's R&D efforts in Singapore is directed towards the development of new application technologies in Asia.

Cordes touches on automotive applications that delve into metal replacement as one example of how RTP's expertise can perhaps help drive innovative use of engineered compounds. "We can use our experience, maybe from the US, to help service and guide our customers," he says.

"Automotive has been a growing market in Asia, particularly in China," Cordes adds. "The long fibre production lines in Suzhou have been running successfully, and this is definitely an area of growth. If you go back five or ten years ago, so much is driven by the US and Europe. But we find now with the troubles everywhere in the automotive industry, more and more control is being given locally. We have to be able to cover things more efficiently by having a person in East China focusing only on the automotive business. The automotive industry is obviously on a downturn even in China but over the long term, we still aggressively pursue new applications and work with the engineers on material specifications."

The automotive industry in India is also spurring growth opportunities, in the form of tier supplier businesses that are starting to emerge in the country.



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