

SYMBIO:

a new business that proves that Sappi can venture into new markets

As Symbio moves out of its developmental stage, it is attracting increased interest

Three years after it started as an Oscar project, Symbio has commenced production at an external partner's facility in Belgium. "We've seen increased interest and we are also getting in larger sample orders of up to 1.5 tons – significantly bigger than the volumes we've shipped before," says Jacob Hartstra, New Business Development Manager.

Symbio is a cellulose fibre plastics composite that currently uses polypropylene. It is sold in pellets and available in variations, depending on the degree of rigidity that customers require.

It can be used for a range of products, from cars and furniture to a variety of consumer electronics. No matter which application, customers look at Symbio to achieve tangible product improvements. Symbio's strength is that it can do this in several ways.

One benefit that potential customers are increasingly interested in is its touch and feel. We received positive feedback both from car manufacturers and appliance producers. In fact, touch and feel is so important for some companies that they organise touching tests with focus groups who judge a product solely by its haptics.

It is this sense of touch that Symbio will be highlighting in its marketing materials. "In the first years, our marketing was all about 'push'," says Jacob. "We had to find and contact every single company that we thought could benefit from our product. Our goal is to have more 'pull' in the future: we want more companies to take the first step and contact us." To achieve that, the Symbio team visits fairs and is designing an in-depth marketing campaign with an external agency. A good part of the business will still need to come from 'push', but more 'pull' is realistic. Sappi has already had enquiries from companies that have heard about Symbio through word of mouth, leading to unforeseen opportunities. "A producer of toothpicks is currently trialling our product," says Jacob. "It's an application that we maybe would never have thought of."

SYMBIO'S STRENGTHS

IN CARS:

- Rigidity at low weight
- Better durability
- Softer and warmer touch

IN LOUDSPEAKERS:

- Better acoustics, notably a better bass response
- Soft and warm touch

IN COFFEE MACHINES:

- Possible noise reduction
- Nice touch and feel
- A more natural look

What is the difference between Symbio and nanocellulose?

Symbio is a mixture of Cellulose fibre and Plastic. It is currently made using cellulose fibres that are much longer than nanocellulose. The ultimate building block of the tree, nanofibrils leave you with more ways to influence the properties of the cellulose and of the products it is used for – be it composites or other applications.



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