



27.-29. APRIL 2016



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**12th Interbrush
27th–29th April 2016, Messe Freiburg**

Interbrush 2016 in Freiburg: Meeting point of the brush and broom industry

Little known, but indispensable

The excitement kicks off again at the end of April 2016. The 12th Interbrush, the most important trade fair and global meeting point of the entire brush and broom industry, returns to Freiburg. Around 200 exhibitors from 30 countries will be presenting raw materials, semi-finished products and machines across an exhibition area of 21,500 m². Some 7,000 experts from around 85 different countries are expected at the industry meeting point, which takes place every four years. By the end of 2015, over 95 percent of exhibition space had been booked. This goes to show that Marco Minelli, CEO of the Minelli Group, is right in saying that “being here is an absolute must: Interbrush represents our industry’s most important meeting point!” The exhibition features semi-finished products, raw materials and the latest developments in machines.

According to the Federal Statistical Office, the German brush and broom industry has been generating sales of around 721 million euros since 2014 (companies with over 50 employees), 60 percent of which are attributable to Germany, and 40 percent to international – mostly European – sales. The German Brush Manufacturers’ Association represents the interests of German manufacturers, and is itself a member of the European Brushware Federation. Dieter Lessmann, President of the German Association, answered some questions about Interbrush, the leading international industry trade fair, and about the brush and broom industry in general.



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?: Interbrush is held every four years: What has changed since 2012? What are going to be the hot topics at the 2016 trade fair in Freiburg?

Dieter Lessmann: Machines for brush and broom production are becoming more and more connected with each other – our industry is also being changed by industry 4.0. I am expecting to see innovations in raw materials, particularly in synthetic brush fibres.

?: Interbrush is said to be the meeting point of the global brush and broom industry. Could you explain what this means? How large is the industry? How many companies and how many jobs does the industry count globally? How important and how large is the industry within Germany? Who does the German Brush Manufacturers' Association represent?

Lessmann: We are unable to say exactly how big the industry as a whole is. Our association has around 100 member companies across Germany, including suppliers such as machine manufacturers, raw material producers (for synthetic fibres for tooth brushes or brushes, for instance), or importers of materials which are practically only available from abroad (such as the bristles for paint brushes). Our member companies employ some 4,000 people in total.

?: Laypersons will likely have trouble distinguishing the various products. Which brushes, brooms or paint rollers are used for what purpose? Which is the largest segment?

Lessmann: In general terms, we distinguish between manufacturers of paint brushes, including fine brushes (such as artists' brushes or cosmetic brushes), paint rollers, household brushes (ranging from washing up brushes to shoe brushes, every household has at least 10 of them), dental brushes (tooth



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brushes as well as brushes used for dental gaps or by dental technicians), hygiene brushes (household brushes that are used in professional kitchens, food processing applications or medical institutions) and technical brushes. The largest segment in terms of the number of units sold is doubtlessly tooth-brushes. In terms of sales, technical brushes are at the top.

?: Looking at small brushes, such as those used for applying make-up, these products are so small that it is difficult to imagine that automated machine production is possible – what is the degree of automation across the industry? Is there still manual work?

Lessmann: If you have a look around the trade fair, you will see that there are excellent machines for the production of very small brushes, in particular. Mascara brushes are exclusively produced by machines. There is still some manual work, but its share is decreasing. In the past, bristles were almost always inserted by hand, which was painstaking manual work. Such manual labour is not even used in low-wage countries for series production today. However, there still are requirements for some products which can only be met by manual work. This is the case with technical brushes, where bundles of bristles need to be anchored in a metal body. This is work for traditional brushmakers. Also, most fine hair brushes are still predominantly hand-made.

?: Once upon a time, the products of your industry were mainly made from natural materials. What about today? What materials are being used? Are there any issues with environmental protection regulations?

Lessmann: Handles are still predominantly made of wood, but household brushes or hygiene products are made of plastic for reasons of cost and hygiene. Many household brushes also follow design trends. Even today, there are still brushes made



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with natural bristle, such as high-quality paint brushes, or with hair, such as artists' brushes, or even with horse hair for household brushes. Plastic fibres have a much higher volume, though. Many technical brushes consist of metallic wires, as well as abrasive nylon bristles, in other words polyamide fibres encasing corundum. These types of brushes have the same effect as very fine files.

There are various hair types, which can longer be imported or exported for conservation reasons, such as Kolinsky hair, which is used for artists' brushes. The brush manufacturing industry is also struggling with ready-made brushes imported from China; these are cheaper than pure bristle, which also predominantly comes from China. As a result, synthetic fibres are made to substitute natural fibres more and more. Nevertheless, brushes made from coconut fibres or the abrasive fibres of the Mexican yucca tree, still have their place in the market.

?: Anyone can picture a paint roller, a paint brush, a carpet brush, a shaving brush or an eyeliner brush. But what about those industry products which would be surprising to a layperson, or even to an expert? Do you have any examples?

Lessmann: The least-known area of application is probably that of technical brushes. They are frequently needed in production processes for smoothing burrs, transporting parts, cleaning surfaces, removing coatings, etc. Areas of application may be in the production of injection nozzles for car engines, or in the construction of pipes for pipelines, or the transport of sheet metal on machine tables, for minimal noise and no scratching. For medical applications, brushes with diameters of less than 1mm are needed in order to clean cannulas, while steel works use roller brushes with a diameter of five metres.



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