



UITIC's Footwear Congress was held in Chennai, India

CREDIT: WTP

19th UITIC Congress

The 19th International Technical Footwear Congress of UITIC (International Union of Shoe Industry Technicians) was held in Chennai, India at the end of February and attended by some 170 international delegates from 28 countries. Organised by UITIC in conjunction with the Council for Leather Exports (CLE) India, the theme for this Congress was the Future Footwear Factory.

The general introduction for this conference was made jointly by Jayne Esteve Cure of Jayne Fashion Agency, Paris, and Sergio Dulio, head of research and innovation at ATOM Group. Between them, they demonstrated just how demanding consumers are becoming and the effect this will have on footwear manufacture in the future.

The modern fashion consumer increasingly expects to encounter a personalised and seamless purchasing process whatever the retail channel. He or she loves fashion and particularly shoes they buy increasingly online. They are however, also drawn to physical stores that provide both an interactive and fluid process that optimises the in-store customer experience.

Jayne Esteve Cure says, "Brands therefore need strategies that aim to achieve a 360° customer relationship and experience. In this context, brands are challenged by the need to redefine the contours of the type of relationship they

want to build with their customers and develop means and actions that will enable them to enrich their commercial performances."

They will need to place consumers at the heart of a multi-channel strategy to establish a more direct relationship with them. Both physical stores and digital channels will putting them at the heart of the strategy. Success in the store will come through adopting a 'personal shopper' approach so trained sales teams become the best possible ambassadors for their brand and capable of optimising customer experience to the full.

If dealing with new consumer habits and trends and new purchase attitudes will pose major challenges to fashion and shoe brands in the future, they will also have an equal effect on manufacturing as we know it today and on the way shoe factories will look in the future. Such a change will create an 'on demand challenge' where consumers with fast changing desires and a growing sustainability push will call for a capability to produce only what is really needed, with limited waste and low energy consumption. Factories will need to be transparent places where consumers can see the value of what they buy.

They will also have to be attractive places in which to work; healthy and safe, where workers are offered rewarding jobs with repetitive and alienating ones

left to machines. . These will become common sights in the "glass factories" of the future.

And finally, additive manufacturing and 3D printing have the power to revolutionise manufacturing in its entirety by enabling consumers to create their own products such that they become a new breed of worker who is, at the same time, an informed and aware consumer. Barriers fade away in a continuum that will have profound effects on companies and factories.

Originally established in 1972, UITIC is active in 27 countries. Its membership is composed of experts and technicians from associations, research centres and private companies covering all aspects of the industry. Its aim is to develop technical knowledge within the industry by organising international conferences and facilitating the exchange of information on new ideas and technical innovations between members.

UITIC's conferences are recognised as being of great benefit to the industry and feature serious and thought provoking papers for further discussion and development. As only a limited number of people from the industry are able to attend and hear them at first hand, World Footwear has selected two, with the generous assistance of the authors, as the basis for articles in this issue.

More will hopefully be published in future issues. ■