The French Market for Technical Textiles

Summary:

Technical textiles are an innovative and high value-add sector. Any textile, fiber, material, or support material that has been designed to serve a functional purpose rather than an aesthetic one is considered to be a technical textile. Technical textiles are carefully designed to have certain properties such as lightness, durability, strength, filtration capabilities, fire-retardant, conductivity, insulation, flexibility, absorption, and many more.

France is the third largest producer of technical textiles in Europe after Germany and Italy, with a sales volume of approximately 5 billion Euros, which represents over 30% of total textile production in France. Sales volumes are expected to see an annual increase of approximately 3%.

The French technical textile industry is composed of about 370 companies and employs about 20,000 people. In France, there are two major regions that contribute heavily to the global technical textile market: the North of France, known as the “Hauts de France” region, with Lille/Roubaix/Tourcoing metropolitan area and the Rhone Alps/Auvergne region in the South East of France which includes the Greater Lyon metropolitan area.

France is among the world leaders in technical textile production and exports to a wide variety of markets around the world. The success of the technical textile industry can be compared to the success of other prominent French ventures like the High Speed Train (TGV), Airbus, and the Ariane rocket. French Technical textile production amounts to 600,000 tons of textiles, annually.

The market shares of Industries that are using technical textiles:

- Transportation – 25%
- Medical and hygiene industries – 18%
- Automotive industry – 14%
- Aeronautics – 13%
- Safety – 10%
- Construction – 10%
- Sports and Leisure – 10%;
Best Prospects & Opportunities in France

The U.S. technical textiles manufacturers have a strong reputation for their technological know-how on functional textiles called “textiles of the future” for the transportation, construction, and industrial protection industries.

Technical textiles, also called “Textiles of the Future”, make up approximately 25% of the European textile industry and is expected to increase in coming years. There are many end-users needs that are driving market opportunities in the technical textile market at current time:

- Health and well-being
- Better comfort and monitoring solutions for active wear
- Reducing carbon emissions from transportation (by reducing vehicle weight)
- Improving energy efficiency in buildings (through thermal insulation)
- Improvement of medical technology
- Lightweight-yet-durable textiles that have the strength equivalent to metals like steel.

Best prospects within the technical textile sector are:

- Sportswear (i.e.: anti-bacterial, anti-odor, insect repellent, breathable)
- “Techno-textiles” (garments with electronic devices and communication systems incorporated into the fabric)
- “Cosmeto textiles”: some women expect clothing to have a positive effect on the conditions of their skin. Therefore, manufacturers are being asked to create products that offer new and/or improved functions. In recent years, textile materials with special applications in the cosmetic field have been developed
- Technical textiles for transportation (automotive and aeronautics) and for packaging industries;

Textile Equipment Manufacturing

French manufacturers of textile-producing equipment hold an important share of the French market with small and medium sized companies like Laroche, Superba, Calemard/Decoup, Ecc/Platt. There are also some larger companies, like NSC, Lectra, Porcher, and Fredenberg that hold a significant market share. Additionally, there are also subsidiaries of international groups operating on the market, like Rieter and Staubli (Swiss-owned). According to the French trade association for textile equipment manufacturers; these equipment manufacturing companies count about 30 firms with a registered sales volume of about 1 billion euros. They employ approximately 4,000 employees and export more than 90% of their production.

Market Issues and Obstacles

Potential entrants to the technical textile industry must have equal or greater technical know-how when compared to their competitors. Similarly, companies that have already entered the market must continually update their knowledge if they want to remain competitive.
Innovation & Competitiveness Clusters

Techtera is an innovation and competitiveness cluster for technical textiles that was approved by the French government on July 12th, 2005. Its mission is to increase business competitiveness through cooperative innovation. (See: https://www.techtera.org/en/le-pole/la-filiere-textile/#).

UP-Tex is another competitiveness cluster that was approved in 2005. They are based in the French Nord Pas de Calais region and their work focuses on advanced textile materials. UP-Tex is committed to the economic development of its members, the industrial renewal of textiles by using R&D, and the marketing of innovative products. The cluster is now shared by a network of 140 UP-Tex members, large and small innovative companies, research laboratories, schools, and universities. UP-Tex supports the development of new products, services, and processes that create market value and new jobs. (See: http://en.lillesagency.com/investir-a-lille/lille-metros-business-clusters/pole-up-tex/).

Sources:

Union des Industries Textiles – U.I.T.  


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