

Top 10 challenges to tackle for successful technical textile ventures

Technical textiles are developed for high performance & attribute-specific functionality. In-depth knowledge of the product is what will help a true business person to innovate his existing product basket & meet the challenges of changing world dynamics, says Avinash Mayekar.



The importance & growing market of technical textiles is no stranger to India. Textile stalwarts & bunch of new progressive entrepreneurs are all venturing & exploring the possibilities for technical textile business. Our sudden number 2 stature in medical textiles showcases the vast capability of India. In order to acquire the stature across all segments of technical textiles and increase the current share of India from mere 3% to a much dominating position in global technical textiles market we need to overcome the various challenges & find innovative solutions that will open new avenues for success in this segment. Major challenges for successful ventures in technical textiles are:

1. Innovative products

Technical textiles emerged to meet specialised needs & deliver high performance. Naturally, as the world around is evolving & growing every second, new & better product needs are being developed day in & day out. Smart & unconventional thinking is what will help enrich market

leaders in this segment. These products being the necessity of niche markets or customization for the different market is why a strategy of being a market leader is the most appropriate one. Leading rather than following the herd is what will help for success in this segment.

Some innovative directions can be:

- A) **Replacement products:** Focus on replacement products distinctly for producing products through non-conventional technology to encash on reduced operating cost and higher production speeds. This is possible due to use of nonwoven technologies over conventional technology.
- B) **New outlooks for products:** For example, nonwoven disposable innovative curtains in place of traditional curtains. These disposables are more suitable with hygiene necessities specifically for the hospitality industry. India can especially encash on this opportunity by innovating disposable bedsheets & blankets. Disposables having the main feature of “use & throw” are highly demanded by travelers. Also, the pandemic has led to the non-provision of the bedsheets & blankets in the railway trains. There is a larger scope for commercializing & introducing comfortable disposables bedsheets, blankets & other products.
- C) **Identification of product mix:** Identify the exact product mix is must. It will ensure that the technology levels selected will deliver higher production levels at optimum operating cost for a new line. The product mix selected need to have a consistent demand for many years to come and should be derived from market gap analysis. The products selected should be such that they have certain benefits over competition. Product mix can be identified by finding answers to the following among many other considerations:
 - Whether the product manufactured is having the lowest per-unit cost of production? If so whether it is profitable?

- Whether this particular product mix is the right one?
- Are we targeting the right marketing segments?
- Am I getting rightly paid for the product manufactured by the selected market?

2. Detailed Product Engineering

In the case of technical textiles, there is a need of doing product engineering. For example, if we are talking of filter fabric we need to understand various sizes of particles that need to be filtered. It is different for the cement industry and totally different for the textile industry.

Hence a manufacturer should have detailed knowledge to whom he is supplying to and accordingly design the product by selecting the right raw material, technology, and technical specifications.

3. Research & development

A ground-breaking innovation in the field of medical science or construction or any other gives an array of opportunities for technical textiles materials development. A constant watch out for such advancements & equivalent research for modification or complete development of new textiles to meet the advances is what will help keep the businesses running & prevent the product from being obsolete in the market. Continuous research & development to increase the functional properties of the product will help to maintain the product to be in line with the needs of tomorrow.

Trial runs & creating a portfolio is the most essential step for the technical textile product business to soar to great heights. With trial runs you not only get the complete know-how of the product but it is an essential step for developing marketing channels way before the actual commercial productions.

4. non-conventional marketing

Being unique, these products demand special attention when it comes to marketing. It is not just the challenge in explaining the technical properties of the product but more so in explaining how these products are the replacement to the conventional products currently in the market. These products demand marketing tie-ups. The tie-up can be with international brands or government agencies. For technical textiles, the marketing channels

need to develop first hand. As marketing is the reason for the success & failure of the product we will discuss the various non-conventional marketing methods as a separate challenge.

5. Global market push

The major challenge of technical textiles is that it is a specialized function so awareness of the product needs to be created. The product has to be showcased on the right platform for the actual users be it a construction textile material, medical textiles, or any other. International shows in Europe & the USA are where the innovations are displayed & channels of marketing ventures are signed. IDEA show in Miami by INDA & INDEX show at Geneva are major exhibitions. Today all major shows also have virtual platform created. But as we all know marketing budget cuts practiced by businessman over the years often keeps these shows on the outskirts & thus a major tie-up or brand venture is often lost especially for Indian players. A thorough research & specialised budget for participation in international exhibitions is the key to unlock success for the technical textiles business. Presentations on the products use in seminars, conferences & roadshows are the best ways to promote products utilisation & develop new markets. Advertise aggressively in magazines, newsletters & other platforms especially for industrial products.

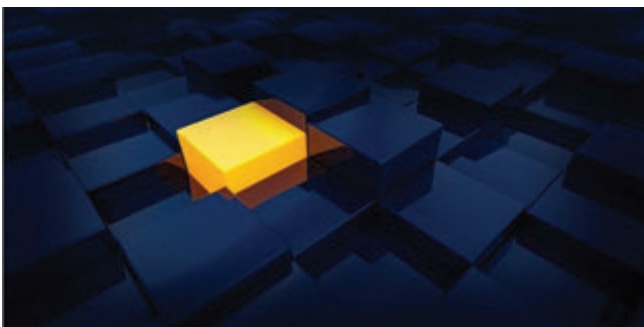
6. Untapped market segments

There is a developed market like EU & USA which are always the first go by entrepreneurs, especially for technical textiles products. But there are also developing markets that are completely untapped with huge requirements that are waiting to be explored. In India itself there are geographic regions or other niche markets completely unexplored. These markets can be easily tapped the only challenge is to research the actual need of the market & twig the product basket & then only launch the product in ways that appeal to the need of the market. The product often remains the same with minor alteration it is however essential to answer the dire need necessitated of these markets. Research on local markets is key for unlocking unexplored markets. For consumer products marketing appeal as per the local perception is the answer.

7. Technology selection

Advance technology or low price isn't the main deciding factor. Technology advancement demands a higher price whereas compromise on the technology front will reduce our profit margins as it will affect the quality parameter of products. This is where the research & answers to the questions of our product mix will help us achieve a win-win solution.

A detailed analysis of the market demands of quality, price, etc. to technological requirements for manufacturing the product will help come out with the techno-



commercially viable option.

An option of new v/s second hand machinery should also be evaluated. For second hand machines, we must analyse the residual life, financial evaluation of assets, present replacement value, technology level & market value. Second hand machine will help bring technology from developed countries at reduce capital investments by almost 50%. Plants will be operational in less time span. It will minimise payback period & also it will have minimal financial cost.

Selection of the optimum combination is the answer, one may target completely new & EU machines if it aims for the highest quality to serve in top markets. Or depending on its quality requirement & market to serve, one may opt for the main EU machine with a Chinese assembly line or second-hand conversion machines or any other combination, taking trial runs of the product & testing the required parameters on the selected machine is the best solution. So, compare “technology” vis-a-vis “markets” & compare technologies from

- Developed countries
- Underdeveloped countries
- Explore collaborations

8. Certification & testing

As they offer functional properties it is of utmost necessity for pre-testing & using the raw materials from certified suppliers. This will help to maintain the quality standard of the finished product. Also, to meet the international standards & mandate acquiring certification is the first towards sourcing international markets.

9. Professional mindset

As you must have noticed, throughout the article a strong emphasis has been given to the quality standards, naturally stressing its importance. It is this varied need that requires a professional mindset for operations in this segment. These are highly technical products that are essential to the masses as well as to different industries. There is often a practice of negligence or over-promising of functional parameters thus leading to failure in the delivery of products. This 19-20 ratio scale practiced for other textile products doesn't work for the technical functional products hence it needs complete transparency on the quality parameters as they often are deciding factors for the end product of the industry segment targeted. A true & honest professional mindset will only reap profits in the long run as it will establish relations internationally.

10. Sustainability

“Care” is the new key factor that has gained importance in today's lifestyle. Be it a self-care or care for the environment, people have started practicing & following these practices in their day-to-day routine. The



earlier concept of “Cheap is Saleable” has somewhat side-lined and the quality of products & their impact on the environment has started gaining importance. The latter though not practiced on a broader scale but with stringent government regulations & mandates there is no way around ethically following them. It is the only way forward as one way government mandates will shut down polluting practices also the certifications by the international body are now more stringent than ever before to regulate this practice.

Conclusion

There is a lot of scope for utilising the existing resources to develop into functional products. Thorough in-depth knowledge of the product is what will help a true business person to innovate his existing product basket & meet the challenges of changing world dynamics. Since technical textiles are developed for high performance & attribute-specific functionality, there is zero-tolerance on quality compromise. Complete technical know-how right from selection of suitable technology to suitable market selection that will help distinguish successors from followers. For India, acquiring technology know-how from international bodies for a production base in India can be a way forward. We are known for rising to the occasion so the unexplored.

In today's scenario, entrepreneurs may not consider taking huge-scale investments risk as it is an uncertain period where unlock & lockdown phases are intervening. But in due course, the smartest survivor will be the one who will drive the business.

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About the author:

Avinash Mayekar is the Managing Director & CEO, Suvin Advisors Pvt Ltd. Suvin - having experts who have worked in the textile industry for more than 30 years - carries out market research, techno-economic feasibility & technology selection. The company offers business models with refreshing ideas and techniques that will help in identifying weak areas that remain unnoticeable but play a vital role in increasing profitability & global competitiveness. Suvin supports a customer till implementation of the project & also assists in manpower recruitment & marketing assistance.

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