

ITALY'S IMA SPA STAYS AFLOAT AND CONFIDENT IN PANDEMIC; BELIEVES DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION WILL BE SAVIOUR OF THE INDUSTRY

For over 40 years, Italian cutting technology giant IMA Spa has been developing its own technologies and expertise to offer integrated software solutions and automated hardware solutions. All these breakthrough developments perfectly meet the philosophy of Industry 4.0 of automated and interconnected production, facilitating the digital transformation of companies all over the world not just in Fashion, but also in other sectors such as Furniture and Automotive. The aspects of organisation and integrated management in the Cutting Room has always played a primary role in IMA's vision and today more than ever its importance, superiority and necessity are recognised and for this reason the company has always been very committed and dedicated to in-house software and hardware development to make a difference and propose cutting-edge solutions. In discussion with Team Apparel Online, Mirella Sardini, President, IMA Spa spoke in detail about the vision of the company in tough pandemic time, technology developments, strategic plans, and her leadership especially after she took charge of the company post her visionary father and the Founder of IMA Spa – Mr. Luciano Sardini. Not just Italy office, Mirella and her team are perfectly in sync with its Indian subsidiary IMA Asia – handled by Guna Sekaran, Managing Director and Krutika Garg, Business Development Director – to lay out plans of growth in the Indian subcontinent and drive the company's collective growth. Here are the excerpts of our interview with Mirella Sardini.

AOI: What it takes to lead a tech-advanced company like IMA Spa and carrying forward the legacy of Mr. Luciano Sardini?

Mirella: It is a question that I asked myself many times immediately after the sudden demise of my father. The responsibility of carry on a very important legacy and, at the same time the fear of not being up to it, was playing on my mind. Mr. Sardini was a person of technical extraction which I am not and, therefore, I often thought

I had great gaps to fill. In reality my father, who had always been a very far-sighted man, had long ago prepared the ground for this step to come painlessly. Despite the blow I must say that IMA team, even if unconsciously, was ready to firmly take the lead and continue the projects he had started.

In 2017, IMA became independent from Macpi, inaugurated a new headquarters, expanded production and that event was not only a milestone, but above all a new starting point – forty years after the start of the IMA project which saw in Mr. Sardini its true soul. He had imagined a new, modern, welcoming venue for customers and at the same time tech-advanced showroom. So we had built it precisely to amaze those who come to visit us and are always impressed by a welcoming environment, and well-organised production department with optimised and functional spaces.

AOI: 2020 felt the brunt of Covid-19 and 2021 is even worse in some parts of the world. How has IMA been catering to fluctuations in the business due to the pandemic?

Mirella: 2020 was the year of the emergency, in which everyone thought all about health. The business was penalised but we were prepared and accepted the fact that, in general, we would have recorded negative budgets and losing revenues. However, in the hope of recovering in 2021, we were confident that the Covid situation will normalise. Unfortunately, this was not the case and today the business is suffering a greater backlash because many countries in which we operate and which were our main reference markets are still experiencing serious difficulties such as India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka which are still closed. For IMA, India and Bangladesh have always been two of the reference markets for business, especially in the last 10 years, even if they have never been easy markets, not even in the past. Unfortunately, this pandemic has severely affected our business in these countries. These situations

AMI – developed by IMA under its Industry 4.0 efforts – is all set to be installed on the new-gen IMA cutting machines

AMI stands for Advanced Machine Interface, it is the latest HMI entirely developed by the IMA Software Department and will be installed exclusively on the new generation of IMA cutting machines that will be introduced on the market in the next months. Here below some of the main features of latest IMA software:

- Fully customisable graphic interface, to give each operator the proper tools
- A unique application for ISO file processing and cutting machine control
- Different access levels for better access to machine parameters and cutting profiles
- Advanced sharpening criteria
- Massive use of Microsoft SQL Server database for data archiving and report consultation
- Dynamic translation of the cutting window, based on vacuum efficiency
- Continuous cutting during cutting window translation
- ISO files editing at runtime; the changes are automatically applied to the remaining pieces
- Improved diagnostics and error reporting



AMI - developed by IMA - will be installed on the latest generation of automatic cutting machines



Tempest Plus 30 is an automatic cutting machine for lays up to 30 mm and is based on the ETHERCAT communication protocol

obviously have repercussions on our business and the rapid changes will no longer make us go back to certain situations. I refer to the digital revolution that we have experienced in all these months that will bring with it new business models.

AOI: What is the driving force behind the investment of apparel companies in high-end automation?

Mirella: What we are witnessing is an epochal change! Those who have invested in this pandemic period in digitisation at all levels will be the ones who come out best. Certain things will never return and this is positive because, if we think about it, we realise that certain business trips are no longer indispensable. Certain situations can be managed and solved even at a distance with a huge economic and energies saving. At the same time, investment in technology is essential. Financing for Industry 4.0 is attracting more and more companies.

AOI: Have you launched (or upgraded) any new technology (in hardware or software) recently? If yes, please share detail.

Mirella: We have never really stopped in this pandemic. There are many new technologies that have already been developed and presented during our first digital event back in December '20. The event itself was a proof that IMA has also always sought a bridge of communication with its customers and collaborators to shorten distances. Right from the start, we pressed the accelerator of digitalisation in its various forms. First of all by developing new highly technological products, then by proposing new ways of connecting such as the "I AM IMA" App which is continuing to be loved by the industry as we are inserting different material in it including the videos of our webinars 2021 which are having great success and a participation that satisfies us a lot. As far as technological developments are concerned, for example, we are completing the new AMI (Advance Machine Interface) software which is



"The more socially responsible the company, the more supportive the community and consumers become. Even during the pandemic, IMA helped its community with donations of masks in local schools; for several years it has been promoting scholarships in collaboration with a local Rotary for students of the Engineering faculty of Brescia University. There are many more initiatives we have taken for the society."

– Mirella Sardini
President, IMA Spa

also the opposite of IMA (a letter game that we like to use) and which will be installed on the latest generation of automatic cutting machines that will be presented in a few months with very high performance and new features. Another new product is the new fully digital labeling machine, with a view to Industry 4.0 with p.c. on board and with the possibility of printing Cyrillic and Chinese characters.

AOI: Let's talk about IMA's Maxima – an MTM CAD software which is much loved by the industry. How is this software technology different from its counterparts? What are the core benefits of using it?

Mirella: MAXIMA is one of the most complete suite of modelling programmes in the market. Thanks to the graphic interface and the functions built on the model of the most popular design programmes, such as Autocad, it guarantees a very intuitive use with extremely short learning times for the new operator. The graphic interface can be customised as well as the shortcuts and the macro that allow the user to create a model from scratch in seconds. Added to this are the proprietary file importers of some of the most common CADs. Another aspect that makes Maxima unique is the sophisticated automatic nesting algorithm that guarantees very accurate efficiency rates with processing times within minutes. Finally, MTM is a programme that allows the automation of made-to-measure garments. The bespoke tailoring consists of different and complex processing phases. Today it is possible to collect database of all the personal information, measurements, models and orders of infinite customers, integrate this information with PLM or ERP and automate the production of the garment, from design to placement and cutting. All this is possible with a single programme thanks to MAXIMA.

AOI: I also heard that first 5 TYPHOON cutters after its launch were installed in India. How is TYPHOON performing now worldwide? How is it compared with other cutters in the same segment? Is it a knit factory that's more open to solutions of IMA or woven factory?

Mirella: IMA TYPHOON model has really given us great satisfaction. It is true that the first batch of TYPHOON automatic cutters sold by IMA were destined for the Indian market and have responded well, but today this model is present

