

Inside story: Doing business during a pandemic

April 17, 2020



"We're Mediterranean. I miss being able to be physically close to my team!"

For Ester Maso, general manager of Retal Iberia, a manufacturer of PET preforms and containers, caps and films, social distancing caused by the coronavirus outbreak has lost her that important physical connection with her colleagues.

She is thankful, however, that there is "a big window between the main office and production area, so the team can talk on the phone and wave to each other while they chat". For businesses like Retal Iberia, which are reliant on in-person water cooler communication and brainstorming, finding new ways of working within or away from the office has been imperative.

"We are all in different circumstances with our families, maybe with young children or older relatives to care for, so we are making sure to stay connected through text messaging with production staff as they do not always have access to email or our intranet," said Maso. "I'm very proud of how our team has pulled together."

Plastics packaging manufacturers have gone from being defensive to essential businesses in a matter of weeks, as the food and beverage supply-chain is doing its bit to keep people fed and watered.

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When it comes to the production staff, Retal EU & US quality director Renata Smataviciene explained how the company quickly implemented additional best practice protocol across its ten production plants in the region, taking the lead from its Italian plant, which is located just north of Venice.

Smataviciene said: "As a manufacturer of preforms for the food and beverage sectors worldwide, we already worked to strict health and safety standards for food contact, so we have implemented additional rules for disinfection every two hours and between each shift, separating production workers into up to five shift teams in each location with no contact between shifts, and are maintaining separate coffee and canteen areas for each shift. We have also created a strict plan of action for if a production worker gets sick and we're taking temperatures before every shift."

It may be a while yet before Maso can regain that physical proximity to her colleagues that she longs for, but companies are finding new and imaginative ways to do business, both internally and externally with clients and suppliers.

By Steven Pacitti

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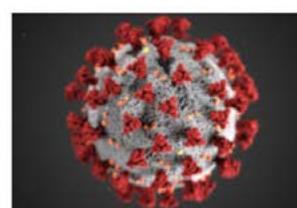
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