

France

Alteo:**Investment in New High-Performance Products**

In January 2021, Alteo became a member of the United Mining Supply Group (UMS). Since then, various investments have been made. One result of these is a new product range for refractory producers and an increased grinding capacity for super-ground products in Gardanne/FR and also Korea (Busan) for various applications.

As part of the France Relance plan, Alteo received nearly EUR 5,7 million from the French government and the Southern Region to support the development of advanced alumina products.

Gildas Fontaine (GF), Marketing, Business development and Communication Director, gave us some insights on the company's development and plans.



Fig. 1 Gildas Fontaine

rwf: *At the end of January 2022, it was announced that Alteo could take advantage of regional financial support and would be part of the France Relance plan. What were the key issues behind Alteo becoming part of these programmes?*

GF: We had already launched very ambitious plans for the transition of Alteo to a premium alumina supplier for advanced ceramics, refractories and also new applications. Our new owner family is thinking strategically in the long term. They have clear ambitious investment plans for upgrading our production site (environmental issues – water, energy; technical upgrades – quality enhancement, new product lines/ technologies and increased capacities). This

external support means that we can be even more dynamic timewise and develop faster, also in new applications for our products.

rwf: *In September 2021, you presented the range REal® at ICR® Aachen. What guided the development of this series?*

GF: Alteo's new range of aluminas, REal®, has been developed to offer manufacturers of refractory materials an improved customer experience. In more detail, this means simplify the choice of alumina for specific refractory products (for self-flow castable, for gunning, for precast flowability ...) and help our customers to find the right alumina combination for improvement of their products' performance levels thanks to Alteo's expertise and support. Another aim was to simplify management of refractory matrix preparation by implementing fewer but more precise alumina reference products.

Of course, an important key to success is a stable and high quality of alumina powders as well as tight specifications to guarantee the manufacturing of high-performance refractories. We understand customer needs but their know-how ensures the actual performance.

rwf: *Is it possible to give us some initial information on how the market has responded to REal®?*

GF: In general, Alteo teams have entered into many very detailed technical discussions on our new approach. Our clients see in it a big opportunity to either improve

their performance level and/or add value to their products.

With REal®, we deeply analysed several industrial refractory applications and we extracted their most important parameters of performance. Then, we have decided to align our product portfolio of calcined and reactive aluminas to the performance levels of the applications. In more detail, we have tried different alumina combination in specific refractory formulations. Thanks to these trials we highlighted three different alumina combinations that bring different level of performances in application. An "essential matrix" level (1st level of performances), which is an alumina combination that suits the requirement of the application. A "Superior matrix" level (2nd level of performances) that provides a higher quality in the application and "supreme matrix" (3rd level of performances) stands for outstanding performance in satisfying all criteria.

This approach helps to optimize both cost and material efficiency.

The backbone of our service is the application laboratory, which we installed back in 2012. Over the last decade, it has made a great contribution to setting up REal®. This team has continuously improved its expertise by working with customers and a network of institutes and universities on international level. In future, we also want to focus more in-depth on requirements, which are dependent on regional issues in our international markets.

rwf: Investments have been made in grinding capacities in France and Korea, resulting in Alteo tripling its grinding capacities since 2016. What are the main user segments?

GF: With additional grinding capacities in Korea by the end of 2021 and increased by 5 % in France by the end of the first quarter of 2022, we have been able to respond to the very dynamic market since beginning of 2021, resulting in strong demand for very fine alumina.

We have done this to strengthen the development of speciality aluminas and to support customers in refractory and technical ceramics applications, but also in very strong growth markets such as lithium-ion batteries and thermal management applications.

Korea and Taiwan are our industrial work bases for the region where we see a growth market for batteries, thermal management, semiconductors and electronics in general. These are business segments in which we grow quickly.

rwf: During the pandemic, raw material costs have risen and reliable delivery has become an issue. What is Alteo's response to this new situation?

GF: It is no secret that, like all our competitors, we have already had to inform our customers of price increases. Energy costs are steadily rising, and accordingly logistic costs, too. In fact, we can now only give prices for a period of three months, which is a new thing for us.

We have decided to leave the commodity business, which has lower margins and therefore not much headroom to compensate for dynamic price increases.

Of course, we have even higher energy costs for the production of very fine or low-soda products, but the high-performance components made have really added value, securing much better market prices and margins. The progress made in advanced quality control is an important element in achieving the target of premium products.

rwf: What are Alteo's plans for improving its sustainability (energy and material efficiency) within the framework of the decarbonisation of the industry and the circular economy?

GF: Of course, the huge investment programme mentioned earlier not only covers new processes and new technologies but also all aspects where we can contribute to energy saving, avoiding emissions and protecting the environment. We have redesigned the Alteo logo to visualise this approach.

rwf: Will you be launching other new products at ceramitec 2022?

GF: In Munich, we shall meet our customers both in refractories and advanced ceramics. For refractories, we are following up what we launched in autumn last year in Aachen. In advanced ceramics, we have lots of information on higher-value powders and new features. We look forward to discussing these with our established and potential new customers at Ceramitec.

rwf: Thank you for talking to us. KS

Publication Schedule 2022

Issue	Central Themes	Additional Circulation / Presence at Following Events	Editorial Deadline	Advertising Deadline	Publication Date
	NEWSLETTER HOT TOPICS 3	All Products / Categories			Sept. 22
5	TECNA Fair Issue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sanitaryware / Tiles / Raw Materials / Additives • Heavy Clay Ceramics / Technical Ceramics • Refractories 	TECNA, Rimini/IT; 27.-30.09.2022 ICR® International Colloquium on Refractories, Aachen/DE; 28.-29.09.2022 ASEAN Ceramics Thailand, Bangkok/TH; 30.11.-02.12.2022	18.07.22	17.08.22	15.09.22
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Powder Metallurgy • Technical Ceramics • Powders / Powder Injection Moulding • Hot Isostatic Pressing • Mould Engineering • Spark Plasma Sintering • Additive Manufacturing 	WORLD PM, Lyon/FR; 09.-13.10.2022 formnext, Frankfurt/DE; 15.-18.11.2022 PM-Symposium Hagen, Hagen/DE; 24.-25.11.2022	01.08.22	01.09.22	04.10.22
	NEWSLETTER HOT TOPICS 4	All Products / Categories			Nov. 22

Subject to change!