



Ilkka Penttila is The Key Account Manager for Holmen, M-real, Myllykoski and UPM. Based in Helsinki, Finland, Ilkka has worked for Imerys Paper and Packaging for 19 years.

**Q: What does the role of Key Account Manager involve?**

I don't think there is a generic model for the role of 'Key Account Manager'. If I had to define the role in one sentence, I would say it was "to plan and manage the complete relationship between Imerys and its most important customers".

The role, day to day, is extensive and covers many business areas, including project management, co-ordination, relationship management, price negotiation, team leadership and the management of a wide variety of development projects. This diversity of tasks makes the job very interesting and each day presents a different challenge.

A large part of my role is the co-ordination of Imerys' activities with its customers. I am the intermediary between the customer and Imerys, looking after the interests of both parties, to ensure a successful collaboration. Each customer's mill has a nominated Technical Sales Manager (TSM) responsible for our activities and developments at the mill. Together with

the TSM, the Key Account Manager forms the core team that seeks future business opportunities and plans how to meet our customer's expectations. Depending on the project, the team can typically involve experts from other Imerys departments such as technical support or logistics.

All activities are initiated by our customer's corporate office, the mill or by Imerys itself. The Key Account Manager's role is to co-ordinate these actions, to ensure that the projects are in line with both companies strategies and are supported by the management of both companies.

**Q: The Paper industry has gone through some challenging times in the last few years. How has this effected your role as Key Account Manager?**

There are a couple of noticeable changes. Previously, most development projects were initiated and managed at mill level, whereas now our customers manage these projects more centrally. Key projects are selected and resources allocated to specific areas. As a result, there are now less development people based at the mills than in the past. On a positive note, as a result of this the

projects are now normally faster and more successful, as resources are allocated to the projects with the highest priority.

For Key Account Managers these changes have increased the importance of communication. There can never be too much communication, especially today, when we have several people involved at different locations and levels. It is a crucial part of my job to ensure that everybody is kept in the loop and updated on the actions and progress of the projects involved.

The other main effect is the change in the focus of development targets. The paper industry is still facing challenging times. Prices are unsatisfactory and paper production is making a loss, although operating rates are still typically high. During the past few years there has been a gradual switch from technical excellence to cost effectiveness. This change of focus has increased in the last couple of years, resulting in almost all development projects with customers being about the improvement of cost and TCO. We are no longer asked how to squeeze a bit more opacity or brightness into a sheet to gain technical advantage. Instead, we are asked to focus on how to maintain the current paper quality at a lower cost.



# View from the Face

**Q: What's the biggest challenge/opportunity that you see for Imerys looking ahead?**

I think our market is continually changing. The challenge for all pigment or any other suppliers is to be able to respond and adjust their own activities to meet these new targets. Imerys is one of the few players who still have strong customer service and product development functions. We are known for innovative people and we also have good raw material and production assets. This change represents an opportunity for Imerys. If we know how to utilise our unique customer knowledge and our experienced and competent people, we should be able to respond to these challenges well. But there is a lot of work to do.

**Q: How do you work with customers and others at Imerys to solve problems and reach new levels of performance?**

The same applies to both problem solving and new innovation projects. Whether it is a customer or Imerys project, there is no difference. This is team work. Together with the customer we pull the relevant competent people together, set targets, make a clear action plan and have regular follow-up meetings to monitor progress. For testing and development we use the customer's or Imerys' laboratory, commercial pilot plants and sometimes we also use external expertise, if needed.

**Q: Can you tell us about the importance of having local production/presence in the region?**

By having people 'on the ground' in the region, we know for certain that we can respond quickly to any projects or queries from our customers. This is not so critical when everything goes smoothly, but when there is a problem we must be able to get to the customer, warehouse or our production site quickly. Local people have the best understanding of local issues. Knowledge of the local language becomes more important the closer one gets to the paper machine. To me it is important that the customer's production superintendent and operators at the coating kitchen know the Imerys representative personally and feel comfortable to contact him/her at any time.

