

PressRelease 2026-06-23

ZELLCHEMING-Expo 2026: Inspiring Innovations and Strong Signals for the Future of the Industry

Rödermark, June 23, 2026 – ZELLCHEMING-Expo 2026 once again reaffirmed its position as the central meeting place for the European paper and fiber industry. From June 16 to 18, approximately **2,500 trade visitors** and more than **130 exhibitors and partner organizations** gathered at the RheinMain CongressCenter (RMCC) in Wiesbaden to discuss current challenges, present innovations, and develop new perspectives for the industry.

With high booth occupancy, strong international participation, and new sources of inspiration, the event signaled stability and sustainability.

At ZELLCHEMING-Expo 2026, there was a clear shift toward higher-quality, more in-depth professional exchanges. Although visitor numbers declined, the quality of the audience increased noticeably. Trade visitors impressed with their high level of decision-making authority, concrete project interest, and in-depth knowledge. This was reflected in a significantly higher level of interaction, whether in practical workshops, in-depth best-practice presentations, or diverse networking formats.

"Overall, participants perceived the expanded supporting program as higher quality and more goal oriented. This enabled the ZELLCHEMING-Expo to strengthen its role as a central platform for intensive expert exchanges within the industry," said ZELLCHEMING Chairman Dr.-Ing. Frank P. Meltzer.

"Given the challenging conditions that continue to persist, we are very satisfied with how Expo 2026 went," summarized Petra Hanke, managing director of ZELLCHEMING Service GmbH.

Day 1: Rethinking the Future – Business Models in Transition

The event began with the keynote address, "Winds of Change 2030," delivered by futurist Lars Thomsen.

Then, leading industry representatives discussed the future of the paper industry and the necessary transformation of business models. **Dr.-Ing. Frank P. Meltzer** and **Dr.-Ing. Tiemo Arndt** (ZELLCHEMING Vice Chair) moderated the discussion.

Participants in the panel discussion included:

- **Eva Kriegbaum**, General Manager Germany Paper Mills, UPM
- **Lars Mallasch**, Group Technical and Sustainability Director, Mondi
- **Jakob Kühnen**, Founder and Managing Director, Bottelsa
- **Alexander von Reibnitz**, CEO, Die Papierindustrie (DPI)

ZELLCHEMING Service GmbH organizes trade fairs, congresses, online events, web seminars in the field of pulp and paper production and the associated circular bioeconomy. In addition, the GmbH provides consulting and other services for associations (particularly the association ZELLCHEMING) and foundations such as administration, member care, member communication and member recruitment. Furthermore, the object of the company is the promotion of scientific projects in cooperation with colleges and universities.

The discussion centered on critical issues related to competitiveness, innovation, and the industry's strategic development. While the paper industry has a strong foundation in the circular economy, it faces the challenge of advancing new technologies, business models, and ways of thinking.

"We can transform your industry into one of the future, but the future won't happen with Excel!" said Lars Thomsen. He emphasized that the industry has strong structural advantages. **"You're two steps ahead of many other industries. The circular economy and sustainability are deeply embedded in your DNA,"** Thomsen continued.

The discussion revealed that, in addition to technological innovations, a shift in organizational thinking is paramount. Eva Kriegbaum emphasized: **"When everyone has the same background, they ask the same questions."** Her conclusion: **"We need more courage to approach things differently and consciously incorporate new perspectives."** Alexander von Reibnitz also pointed out the opportunities presented by regulation: **"If anyone can implement the circular economy, it's us!"**

The first day of the trade show ended with various networking opportunities and well-attended exhibitor parties.

Day 2: Diversity, Networking, and New Perspectives

A particular highlight once again was the Women4Paper event. With more than 100 participants, it sent a strong message about networking, visibility, and equal opportunity.

The following speakers participated in the panel discussion, "Empowerment Through Connection: Women, Networks, the Future":

- Iris Bienert, Managing Director of Education at Bundesverband DIE PAPIERINDUSTRIE e.V.
- Elke Renz, Head of Human Resources and Legal Affairs at Koehler Holding SE & Co. KG;
- Victoria Scherzinger, Product Development and Application Manager of the Refined Fiber Business and B2B at WEPA Hygieneprodukte GmbH; and
- Florian Schneemann, WEPA Hygieneprodukte GmbH's Head of Talent Attractiveness & Acquisition.

Moderated by ZELLCHEMING Managing Director Petra Hanke, the discussion highlighted that diversity is a key success factor for innovation and securing skilled workers. At the same time, it became clear that, despite positive developments, there is still a need for action, particularly regarding visibility, structural conditions, and the targeted promotion of talent.

Topics such as modern work models, corporate culture, promoting young talent, and transparent compensation systems were discussed. There was a consensus that networks like Women4Paper are crucial in providing impetus and driving sustainable change.

The second day of the trade show highlighted the successful integration of the association's work with the expo. First, Dr. Martin Zahel, Chair of the Executive Committee, presented the work, topics, and structure of the technical committees. Four of the 14 ZELLCHEMING technical committees then enriched the forum with their "ZELLCHEMING Insights." The technical presentations offered practical insights into important industry topics, ranging from the optimization of chemical processes to sustainable solutions for water and resource use.

In the evening, the ZELLCHEMING social event, themed "Connect, Swing & Celebrate," offered a lively platform for networking and exchange.

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Day 3: Focus on Young Talent

The ZELLCHEMING Career Day received special attention and attracted around 100 young professionals. The goal is to attract and retain young talent in the industry long term.

For instance, Dr. Max Winkler, this year's ZELLCHEMING Young Talent Award winner, delivered a keynote address that provided inspiration for a potential career path. During the "Science Flash" session, young scientists presented their research on topics such as data-driven optimization models and sustainable materials. Additionally, Petra Hanke presented data on the labor needs of ZELLCHEMING member companies, and Iris Bienert discussed the federal association's planned activities.

Thus, the Career Day underscored the importance of targeted support, personal interaction, and practical knowledge for securing the industry's future.

Conclusion: A Platform for Exchange and Innovation

"The ZELLCHEMING-Expo 2026 once again demonstrated the importance of in-person interaction for the advancement of the paper and fiber industry. It brings together industry leaders, researchers, and the next generation of professionals, fostering innovation, collaboration, and new ideas," said association chairman Frank Meltzer. "Especially in times of profound change, the Expo offers guidance and strengthens our shared vision for the future."

As Lars Thomsen put it: "**The crucial opportunities arise when we begin to ask the right questions.**"

Save the date

The next ZELLCHEMING-Expo is scheduled for **June 22–24, 2027**, at the RheinMain CongressCenter in Wiesbaden.

Frequent newsletter

A monthly newsletter is sent out on current topics concerning the ZELLCHEMING-Expo:
<https://www.zellcheming.de/en/events/newsletter>

The press release includes several event photos with captions. The following photo credits should be noted: ZELLCHEMING.

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Images and captions



Dr.-Ing. Frank P. Meltzer (3rd from left) and Tiemo Arndt (1st from right) moderated a panel discussion with Lars Mallasch (1st from left), Group Technical and Sustainability Director at Mondi; Alexander von Reibnitz, CEO (2nd from left), Die Papierindustrie (DPI), futurist Lars Thomsen (third from left), Eva Kriegbaum (third from right), General Manager Germany Paper Mills at UPM, and Jakob Kühnen, founder and managing director of Bottelsa
(Source: ZELLCHEMING)



Futurist Lars Thomsen opened the ZELLCHEMING-Expo 2026 with his keynote address on the topic: "Winds of Change 2030"
(Source: ZELLCHEMING)

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As part of Expo 2026, the ZELLCHEMING Association honored the following individuals (from left to right): Emanuel Wenger received the Ring of Honor for the History of Paper. Dipl.-Ing. (FH) Xaver Weig received the Eugen Lendholt Medal, and Prof. Dr. Samuel Schabel received the Hans Clemm Medal. (Source: ZELLCHEMING)



"Empowerment Through Connection: Women, Networks, and the Future" features (from left to right): Iris Bienert, Managing Director of Education at Bundesverband DIE PAPIERINDUSTRIE e.V.; Florian Schneemann, Head of Talent Attractiveness and Acquisition at WEPA Hygieneprodukte GmbH; Victoria Scherzinger, Product Development and Application Manager at WEPA Hygieneprodukte GmbH Refined Fiber Business and B2B; and Elke Renz, Head of Human Resources and Legal Affairs at Koehler Holding SE & Co. KG, and Petra Hanke, initiator of Women4Paper and managing director of ZELLCHEMING Service GmbH. (Source: ZELLCHEMING)

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