

Umicore Electroplating highlights latest innovation

Umicore Electroplating of Germany recently developed a new metal-plating solution for the jewellery industry. In an interview with JNA, Umicore Electroplating's Martin Stegmaier, head of the decorative applications department, and Joachim Grimm, sales manager for decorative applications, talked about the company's latest initiatives and business outlook in 2016 and 2017.

JNA: Could you tell us more about the new solution that you just developed?

Martin Stegmaier: RHODUNA 470 Black is the latest in a series of product innovations. Traditionally, black is a highly sought-after colour. Jewellery in black metal has become very attractive to consumers. The challenge, however, is how to produce deep black surfaces. Umicore Electroplating has changed the game. The L (lightness) value in the Lab colour space developed by the International Commission on Illumination or CIE is the decisive factor. The CIEL*a*b colour space stipulates that 0 refers to totally black and 100 means white. Until now, the benchmark was to produce dark grey surfaces with an L-value of 50. We are pleased to announce that Umicore Electroplating can produce L-values of below 40 if each step in the process is carried out accordingly.

JNA: Is there demand for this type of product? What is driving it?

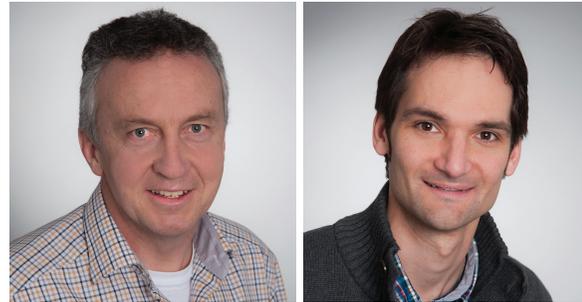
Joachim Grimm: We are no market researchers, but we believe that lifestyle and fashion changes regularly affect consumer preferences. We respond to these trends by providing a whole spectrum of colours for jewellery production and other lifestyle products. For instance, Umicore Electroplating offers all shades of gold as well as silver, platinum, rhodium and ruthenium electrolytes.

As an innovative company, we continuously enhance the quality of all our products.

JNA: In which kind of products is this new solution most applicable?



Ring plated with RHODUNA 470 Black



From left: Martin Stegmaier, department head for decorative applications at Umicore Electroplating; Joachim Grimm, sales manager for decorative applications at Umicore Electroplating

Stegmaier: RHODUNA 470 Black is suitable to all kinds of jewellery and other lifestyle products such as spectacle frames. In all these applications, the electrolyte can fully exploit its capabilities. Another advantage is that hard and abrasive resistant layers of up to 0.3 micrometre can be deposited. This translates to higher consumer satisfaction due to fewer scratches.

JNA: How is it different from existing solutions?

Grimm: We have been offering black ruthenium electrolytes for many years, and these products are enjoying solid market demand. These are especially suited to fashion accessories because the black electrolyte can be deposited directly on copper, nickel, bronze and brass. Users can omit pre-gold plating, which is requested mostly for RHODUNA 470 Black. This means our RUTHUNA electrolytes offer a cost-saving solution. With the launch of our new product, we now cover both electrolyte types – black rhodium and black ruthenium. We can meet a wider range of customer preference for decorative applications.

JNA: What advice can you give to users of this application?

Stegmaier: All users should take care of thorough pre- and post-treatment, and make sure that all necessary steps are carried out accordingly. Umicore Electroplating has a team of service engineers and laboratory experts who can guide our customers in the process. Members of my team, including myself, are often on-site at plating plants in Asia. We also provide training to our clients' staff. **JNA**