

ASBCI Review

The 2016 ASBCI AGM Meeting took place at the beautiful Barnsdale Lodge Hotel in the heart of Rutland Water, Leicestershire. The day was packed with speakers from a range of organisations giving advice and informing members of new products, guidelines and industry innovations, alongside the annual update of the Association's achievement.

Chairman's Annual Report



Alistair Knox welcomed over 65 members to the AGM, promising the usual mix of short formal presentations from committee chairmen reviewing the detailed operation of the past year, and then some more entertaining and informative invited speakers either side of lunch.

The ASBCI has had another successful year. Overall industry membership has increased, though some concerns remain about slower recruitment of student members. Events such as conferences and industry visits continue to provide excellent networking opportunities as well as contributing to the professional development of attendees. The finances of the Association are sound, with another small surplus for 2015 because of better than expected attendance at the March conference. We continue to look to develop the information available to members via publications and the web site, and seek to host events on topics of current interest. In this respect, the ASBCI is fortunate to have a great mix of enthusiastic and well-connected committee members who make things happen.

It is appropriate to also thank on behalf of the membership our head office staff, who do such a good job with limited resources. Our executive secretary Stephanie Ingham is gradually handing over tasks to Kirsty Holdsworth and Carrie Depledge, though I still think she is too young to retire!

Full details of the year's activities can be found in the Yearbook that has been distributed to all members. We look forward to the coming year with confidence that we can adapt to whatever our members are wanting the Association to provide in the areas of fashion technology & management.

REACH Regulations 2016

Tony Smith, the Consumer and Retail REACH Business Development Consultant for SGS UK, delivered information about the latest regulations affecting the industry.

Summary of REACH presentation AGM 2016:

Substances and mixtures

TS reminded attendees that the registration of substances with ECHA for substances manufactured in or imported into the EU in quantities 1 – 100T/yr must be completed by May 18. After this date substances in quantities >1T/yr must be registered before they are allowed to be placed on the market.

TS warned that the data needed for registration was time consuming to gather and potential registrants should not leave their applications until the last minute.



Articles

The number of Substances of Very High Concern (SVHC) on the ECHA candidate list now stood at 168 (Dec 15).

Reminders about the obligations required if SVHC`s were present in an article above 0.1% by weight were discussed before moving onto an explanation of changes in the definition of what an article was.

TS explained that a European Court of Justice ruling on 10th September 2015 redefined the definition of an article, this is summarised as;

Components are articles even if contained in complex products

Information on whether or not a product contains an SVHC above 0.1% is now not sufficient, the same criteria now applies to each individually manufactured component in that product. The presentation looked at several examples and discussed new approaches to the identification of SVHC`s in complex articles.

The audience were reminded that since this was not a new law but a clarification of an existing law the change was effective immediately. To assist in the new interpretation ECHA had announced they were producing a new guidance document urgently.

Restricted Substances

Updates on Annex XVII of the REACH regulation were given.

- PAH`s – amendment to restriction in force from Dec 15. This now applies to a much wider range of consumer products previously not affected.
- Lead – amendment to restriction published and enters into force in June 16. Much broader scope of products affected not just jewellery; essentially anything a child can foreseeably put in its mouth.
- Nickel – changes to the test method called up by the restriction removes the “no decision” category from the reporting.
- NPEO`s – new restriction published on Nonylphenol ethoxylates (usually found in surfactants) enters into force February 2021.

Innovation Awards



The Innovation Awards were presented to two individuals, who had worked on major projects supporting the industry. 2nd prize of £300 went to Zoe Robinson from The University of Huddersfield for producing a business plan for consumer data. 1st prize of £500 was given to Emma Dane, from the University of Manchester, who designed a mobile app for fashion house and retailer All Saints. Both were commended for their achievements.



ASBCI Member Presentations.

A number of speakers attended this year's AGM to entertain and inform ASBCI members on a range of subjects. First to the stage was Sarah Proud studying Fashion and Textile at Nottingham Trent University, who presented her findings from her dissertation which studied **Online Merchandising** and recommendations for UK lingerie retailers.



“There is huge opportunity to boost lingerie sales in the UK,” said Sarah. “We are a nation of online shoppers with 95% of us buying online, yet 3 out of 5 of us still prefer to go into a shop to get our underwear.”

The consumer fear of making a wrong purchase and product attractiveness formed the basis of the issues the industry is tackling.

Sarah embarked on desk based research, interviewed internet psychologists and investigated current lingerie e-tailers offerings (ASOS, Little Deer and Boux Avenue). She then took those findings and built and tested two dummy web-sites amongst consumer focus groups to create her conclusions.

Her results formed the basis of good guidance for the industry which saw recommendations for investment in model based photography, improved navigation tools, simplicity in design and colour and major improvements in the amount of product detail with links to sizing guides.

Uncovering the Secrets to Successful Online Lingerie Merchandising

Sarah Proud – Finalist of ASBCI Dissertation Award - sponsored by Marks and Spencer.

It's a fact. 95% of us shop online now and 3 out of 10 of us don't even visit shops to buy clothes anymore. We are buying with ease and confidence and, thanks to the clever tactics of the online merchandisers, online fashion shopping is a big success.

There is however one area in the fashion industry lagging. Lingerie. The retail sales are growing 5-10% each year but there is a high return rate and 3 out of 5 ladies simply prefer not to shop online because they are concerned their garments will not fit and they are not sufficiently enticed to purchase.

Sarah Proud, an ASBCI member and finalist of the 2015 ASBCI Dissertation Awards recently researched the buying habits of prospective lingerie purchasers. She investigated the industry, looked at where e-tailers may be going wrong and learnt how merchandisers could improve their techniques to increase sales.

Sarah commented "Online merchandising is all about delivering the right product at the right time in the right place. Lingerie e-tailers need to invest in their strategies and put the customer at the heart of their businesses to grow their buyers."

Sarah carried out desk and interview based research, interviewing Internet Psychologist Graham Jones amongst others. She looked at existing Lingerie e-tailers, Boux Avenue, ASOS and Little Deer to find out what the customer wanted and how they could adapt web-sites to create the perfect e-tail site and drive lingerie sales. Sarah took her learnings, created two dummy web-sites and presented them to focus groups for testing.

Perhaps not surprisingly, her findings and results were based upon creating good design, clear navigation and enticing products but of greater importance was product information to suppress a consumer's fear of making a wrong purchase. With these findings, Sarah was able to compile these 10 guidelines of actions retailers can take to improve their sales strategies.

Guidelines for Merchandising Lingerie

1. Understand the customer
2. Create detailed product information to help reduce returns
3. Produce easy to access sizing information through links on all pages
4. Show 12 products per page to stop losing the customer through scrolling
5. Use white space and minimise colouring within web-page design.
6. Create clear navigation paths to enhance the consumer journey – a small investment for all businesses
7. Get the attention and gain interest on the page to create a purchasing action – eg: offer banner
8. Invest in model images (not flat images) to eliminate fear of purchase
9. Where investment allows, produce three photo images per product to increase amount of information available
10. Use models of two different sizes to eliminate sizing fears

In summary, Sarah found that those companies that invested in multiple model images would be most likely to succeed in growing their lingerie business. Those that continue to merchandise using flat product imagery with uninviting hard to navigate sites will not uncover the sales opportunities open to all businesses – nor will they succeed in becoming a market leader in lingerie e-tailing.

Sarah concluded: "The boundaries to lingerie sales success are small but the market is wide open with much potential for all lingerie e-tailers to maximise their customer experience and sales through effective merchandising."

Safeguarding Consumers, Employees and Businesses

Next to the stage was Dr Tony Sagar, the Group Technical Director at Oeko-Tex®. The organisation is an international association of independent research and testing institutes focused on enhancing both product safety and sustainable production in the textile industry. Oeko-Tex® constantly seeks to work with the clothing manufacturers to enable the highest of standards and global consistence when it comes to sustainability, workplace safety and protection of the environment. The organisation supports new innovations and tests high quality textile products to meet the challenges faced by the industry such as pollution, use of toxic chemicals, diversity in regulation and the monitoring of safe workplace conditions.

The organisation explained how members could get more involved in the Sustainable Textile Production (STeP) programme and gain their certificate and accreditation, which would be valid for 3 years.

Those meeting STeP requirements would demonstrate environmental efficiency, commitment to environmental targets, responsible handling of waste, reduction of carbon footprint, safety of production plants, monitoring and management of chemicals and support the introduction of greener chemicals.

ASBCI members were encouraged to take part in the STeP certification scheme as it is simple and easy to do, supports company CSR objectives, ensures that company standards are of the highest level and ultimately demonstrates a commitment to raising employee safety and protection of the environment.

For more information on reaching Oeko-Tex® creditation, contact: Dr Tony Sagar info@shirleytech.co.uk.



The World and Quality of Alpacas

What came next was an illuminating insight into the world and work of Alpacas from Shaun Daniel, director of Alpaca Comfort - a business that produces high end Egyptian cotton duvets filled with Alpaca fleece.



Passionate about his job, Shaun described how he has a vision to change the quality of sleep and provide the highest of silver like fibres to discerning clients, with the help of his friends the Alpacas.

Operating out of a former salt mill in Huddersfield, Shaun has his own Alpaca farm and works with Alpaca farmers around the UK to bring him fleece, which is treated and turned into duvets and other high quality clothing products.

It's not an easy task. Compared to 1000 tons of sheep fleece turned around daily, alpacas are in short supply producing only 20-40 tons. Add to this the fact that those animals come in 23 different colours with no food chain to enable breeding growth, the business operation becomes very specialist.

According to Shaun it's the quality of the product that enables Alpaca fleece to stand out. 'It's a very fine fibre like cashmere and mohair, but it's a truly unique fleece because it comes from an animal that's designed to live in dry, high, often cold deserts. It's naturally evolved to deal with extreme temperatures so, as a duvet, creates a lovely, ambient product.'

To learn more about Shaun's journey, passion for alpacas and the products visit: www.alpaca-comfort.co.uk/pages/our-story

Skillset launch Apprenticeship Scheme

The final presentation from the day came from Jayne West from Creative Skillset – outlining a new apprentice academy being built to bring more talent to the fashion and textile sector.

In April 2017 businesses turning over more than £3 million will be subject to a half percent payroll levy, which will be used to bridge the skills gap and support our aging workforce. Creative Skillset will be working with government and our industry to use this levy to boost the skills across the creative industries and provide the help needed to grow UK design and trade businesses.

The task however will not be easy, as Jayne points out. "There may be 63,000 businesses registered across the fashion and textile sectors, though 98% of these employ less than 50 people and 80% less than 10 people. Retail roles are reducing and manufacturing is growing at only 5% per year."

Given the majority of the industry's businesses are tiny and the reputation for employment in the fashion and textiles industries is low, support through an academy is essential if the industry is to regenerate and grow. Creative skillset are currently working with universities to encourage students to take part and with businesses to design the courses. Jayne believes that the apprentice scheme will be a significant step forward for the fashion and textile industry.



"We need to get more students in by providing them with standardised focussed skills based programmes. With the apprentice academy, we will enable businesses to get the right talent with the right skills for both new and existing jobs."

Businesses wanting to get involved should contact Jayne: jaynew@creativeskillset.org