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United Kingdom : Speakers at 'Sizing up the global market' - Sizing no linear matter!

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"Outstanding...excellent...invaluable" were some of the superlatives used by delegates to describe the advice and information they received at the ASBCI sizing and fit seminar, 'Sizing up the global market.' Nearly 160 delegates from across the fashion and corporate clothing sectors, attended the seminar at the Barceló Hotel in Daventry, organised by the ASBCI in partnership with Company Clothing magazine and the world's largest sizing technology specialist Alvanon.

Sizing and fit guru, Ed Gribbin, president of Alvainsight, a division of Alvanon, headed an expert panel of speakers from Incorporatewear, Lectra, Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), Royal Bank of Scotland & NatWest and Select Research. Together they advised delegates on how to optimise customer

satisfaction and brand loyalty while reducing returns and inventory by identifying "consumer commonalities", creating "flexible styles" in the 'right fabrics' and implementing targeted and consistent sizing strategies. Furthermore delegates were shown the crucial role played by robust and process driven communication strategies within the supply-chain that includes the customer.

Keynote speaker for the day was Ed Gribbin, president of Alvainsight, a division of Alvanon, who flew from America especially to speak at the seminar. Drawing on his illustrious sizing and fit career within both the fashion and corporate wear sectors he explained the complex "emotional consumer connection" with sizing saying: "20 per cent of fit is technical and the rest is how you communicate it" – within the supply-chain and to the consumer.

He went on to say that most garment suppliers have a global consumer profile where "diversity is the reality" and there is no such thing as a "pan-european or even Asian fit." Sizing he explained is not a simple linear issue. "You cannot sell a UK petite range into China – it won't work." Rather he urged delegates to use global and local sizing survey and research data when constructing their sizing strategies within which they could identify and target crucial "consumer commonalities". He concluded, within the fashion sector: "It is far better to be consistently wrong than be inconsistently right."

Richard Barnes, managing director of Select Research, who is currently undertaking the first ever national survey of children using 3D scans, ShapeGB, agrees: "Sizing is about shape, contour and curves, not linear averages." His use of advanced scanning technologies and methodologies allows him to capture an individual's Body Volume Index, BVI. Unlike the Body Mass Index, BMI, that only takes into account height and weight, BVI analyses weight distribution in relation to age, gender and ethnicity, giving a far more accurate analysis of body shape and health.

As part of ShapeGB Select Research is currently working with several universities including, Aston, Loughborough and MMU to scan thousands of children across the UK and generate BVI profiles for each.



The results are being shared with sponsors including the NHS, which is using it as an indicator of children's health/obesity, and to participating retailers, including George, M&S, Monsoon and Next, who are using the data to re-evaluate their sizing strategies.

Dr Steve Hayes, principal lecturer and Clare Culliney, programme leader for the clothing design and technology course at MMU, Hollings, followed with an overview of the sizing and fit technologies currently available to students and industry within its fashion faculty. These include a TC2 NX-16 body scanner for body measurement and the BodPod scanner that records body volume density/fat distribution.

It also offers the Optitex 3D system that produces static or animated virtual models upon which digital patterns can be fitted, flattened, altered and worn to show fabric performance and tension hotspots. MMU also has the Fastfit 360.com

on-line e-sampling system that reduces product development time by 30 per cent and 'fit model' time by 50 per cent. Gerber Accumark, V-Stitcher and CNC Cutting systems are also available at MMU.

Continuing with the technology theme, Christopher Schyma, strategic account manager, Lectra recognized the unique and complex product development lifecycle within the clothing sector and showed how 2D and 3D technology has evolved to support the global supply-chain in its quest for faster fashion with better quality and 'fit'. From 2D digital patterns Lectra CAD systems create a virtual environment to generate any number of samples before a commitment is made to make a physical sample. Pattern adjustments will automatically update up to 33 measurements on Lectra's on-screen "fit parametric mannequin, which can be fed directly from body scan information." Consequently a visual representation of a style's 'fit' can be generated, checked and validated in just two hours.

Crucially he concluded: "Teams across the supply-chain can collaborate across the globe – the technology in itself creates an efficient communication environment."

In opening the afternoon session Ed Gribbin explained how the corporate clothing sector was not about selling uniforms but about promoting a: "100 per cent professional, presentable, corporate image regardless of age, size, stature, ethnicity or body shape. Every size has to fit so we need an awful lot of sizes...There is no target demographic, it's everyone." Indeed garment inventory is a major challenge for corporate wear suppliers and buyers.

For those with large corporate purses the answer is often to "throw money at it." However, for smaller budgets he advised delegates to get their shape and grading right as it would reduce inventory: "Research target end-user populations as there will be differences and commonalities with specific fit characteristics. Develop an optimum range of sizes needed with grade intervals that minimize size SKUs. Once you have your size range, slap down in the middle should be your core size." He concluded: "Then put robust tools, such as a block programme, and processes in place to make consistent execution and communication inevitable."

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