

TRENDS IN APPAREL + FOOTWEAR DESIGN AND INNOVATION • MAY/JUNE 2020 • A FORMULA4 MEDIA PUBLICATION

TEXTILE INSIGHT[®]

RESET



THE INDUSTRY EVALUATES WHAT'S NEXT

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United States. All other countries,
\$54.00 (U.S. Funds).**Formula4Media®**Footwear Insight
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Postmaster: Send address changes to Textile
Insight, P.O. Box 23-1318
Great Neck, NY 11023

textileinsight.com

When Endurance is a Mind Game

For those of us involved in the active/outdoor business, endurance is often portrayed in the physical sense — running a marathon, summiting one of the world's tallest peaks, biking solo across the country equipped with only a hydration pack and minimal gear. I don't do any of these things, nor do I ever want to, but over the past few months I have become increasingly intrigued by the idea of endurance. Specifically, endurance as a mind game not a training log.

A columnist I admire wrote, "endurance is patience." Earlier this week I listened to a podcast that featured a meditation guru who spoke of endurance as "welcoming uncertainty." A friend of mine, a lawyer and social butterfly to the max, emails me routinely about the endurance it takes to work from home. All of us experiencing this COVID-19 pandemic are finding new meaning in the word endurance, and the mental fortitude it takes to push through tough times.

Stories on the following pages bring this to light. Designers I spoke with about creativity in the time of isolation leaned into the concept of creating

from what was on hand. "We learn to adapt and use creativity to forward that," says Kim Brannock, who turned header card swatches as well as old camping gear into good-looking functional products.

The endurance of the textile community's work ethic also shines through in several articles featured in this edition of *Textile Insight*. Execs describe 18-hour days dealing with the chaos coronavirus has wrought on supply chains. To catch Mike Smith, CEO of HeiQ's U.S. subsidiary HeiQ ChemTex, for an interview on the company's new Viroblock textile treatment, we spoke at 7 am, and it's sure bet Mike

All of us experiencing this COVID-19 pandemic are finding new meaning in the word endurance, and the mental fortitude it takes to push through tough times.

had already been at his desk for hours.

In Debra Cobb's Made in America report, titled, "One Billion Gowns by August," Cobb quotes trend forecaster Li Edeldoort. "We have no choice but to join forces and stand together. New pacts need to be forged between fiber farmers, yarn makers, textile industries and fashion houses, between raw material producers, independent designers and their craftspeople. Whole chains need to be integrated, stimulated by federal funds, finding a shared interest and income from this rebirth in business. The economy of hope has the potential to transform society from within."

Here's to the endurance of hope as well. ●

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Industry's New Reality

The traditional tradeshow circuit, a dependable industry cycle of events scheduled years in advance, is getting a do-over. As spring gives way to summer the business conference format continues to evolve, leaving textile execs to wonder what's to come in the remainder of 2020. Yet there is one sure thing in this time of uncertainty: remote participation and the rise of digital tech will define the trade show experience going forward, even when doors swing open to face-to-face conferences.

"Virtual robustness is here to stay and will grow," commented Kristin Hostetter, a panelist on a recent webinar discussion about navigating virtual trade shows. "We will get back together, but let's not forget what we learned during this time."

Businesses are coming to the same conclusion that investment in technology and new types of interactive presentations happening now should be a launching pad going forward, not brushed aside as a one-off pandemic necessity. Digital has been dappled with for years as a trade show tool, however the upheaval wrought by the COVID-19 crisis has sped up innovation in how business communities connect.

Organizers make a good case for going virtual. Oft cited benefits include lower cost, greater convenience, sustainability achieved by removing travel and waste, and easy access to entry resulting in a more level trade show playing field.

"I'm a believer in the power of face-to-face in a physical environment, but I also recognize that trade shows had become less transactional and more about experience," commented webinar panelist Kenji Haroutunian, an outdoor industry veteran involved with the Big Gear Show launch, now planned for August 2021.

Small Shows Find New Formats

Munich's Performance Days, IFAI's Smart Fabric Summit and Kingpins Amsterdam trade events needed to get out of the gates quickly with digital upgrades in order to hold originally scheduled April 2020 events. All three serve a

particular sector of the textile industry — a factor that proved helpful in supplying targeted information online.

Renamed Kingpins24, the new online version of the denim fair, was especially successful in retaining the show's casual quirky business vibe. The livestreamed two-day program did a good job replicating a typical show atmosphere with an event schedule that blended trend talks, exhibitor videos and promos, panel discussion, music, and one-on-one conversations between show founder Andrew Olah and his friends.

Future Developments

The cancellation of Outdoor Retailer Summer Market 2020 left a void that newcomer Thin Air is eager to fill. Thin Air is generating buzz for its futuristic platform and forward-thinking outlook. Organizers have extended its original exclusive focus on brands and media and recently opened the show to retailer and buyer attendance resulting in an industry-wide affair.

"Thin Air is re-creating a trade show experience. It is more like a video game setting. Avatars that will be walking the halls and interacting with attendees. But there will be keynotes, private meetings and booths," explained Jenna Celmer, a communications specialist for digital, who is working on the launch of Thin Air.

Organizers are also encouraging a wider assortment of show goers, including bloggers, YouTubers, Instagrammers, podcasters, journalists and other content creators. The Thin Air show experience should be especially appealing to start-ups and young brands as well as an audience intrigued by how virtual tech can bring to the industry together.

Celmer was upfront about costs to exhibit. She stated, "\$1500 gets you a seat at the table with a standard booth; \$5000 is the fee for a premium upscale booth; and \$25,000 buys an entire hall." Event exhibitors get two avatars or a robo chat option.

As the industry explores this new virtual trade show landscape, whether that's with avatars or humans, or hybrid models built on a combination digital and in-person platform, companies will determine what is the best fit for their product lines and growth strategies, which is pretty much how it's always been. New, however, is the ability to attend a trade show from the comfort of one's home or office. ●



It's a new trade show landscape offered by Thin Air. Details available at www.thinairshow.com

Trade Show Calendar 2020

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| June 23-24 | Kingpins24, NY |
| June 24-26 | Thin Air |
| July 21-23..... | Texworld USA / Apparel Sourcing USA |
| October 28-29 | Performance Days, Munich |
| November 3-5 | IFAI Expo, Indianapolis |
| November 18-19 | Functional Fabric Fair, Portland, OR |

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IN THE MARKET | COMPANY NEWS

Suppliers Build Partnerships, Programs and Face Mask Production Lines

Hyosung Repurposes Production to Aid Global Mask Supply

“Hyosung has converted creora spandex yarn production to increase supply to the global mask market by 20 times,” said Mike Simko, Hyosung global marketing director - Textiles. “This production can make ear loops for several billion face masks per month, which will be a significant help to our customers’ production needs. We’ve been fortunate to keep our spandex production operating in all of our international plants to serve local and global communities.”

Spandex is primarily used for making the ear loops and head straps to make the mask fit



Polartec x Salewa Makes Fleece from Fleece

Polartec continues to innovate in the fleece category with a new wool version created in collaboration with mountain sports brand Salewa. Hidden within the construction of this new High Loft wool fleece, a synthetic core provides greater durability, shape retention and faster drying times. Salewa’s Ortles Polartec wool High Loft Hoody (available in men’s and women’s) performs throughout a wide range of temperatures and activity levels. The Hoody is lightweight and even more compressible than synthetic fleece; the garment can be stowed into its integrated compression pouch.

properly and comfortably on the face. While the majority of facemask production is in China, consumer apparel and accessory manufacturers around the world are now switching gears to make face masks to help with the PPE shortage. This surge in production has made facemask component supplies, such as ear loops, scarce. In addition to aiding supply of masks globally during the course of the COVID-19 crisis, Hyosung has donated over \$420,000 along with medical supplies to medical workers caring for COVID-19 patients in Daegu, hit hardest by the virus in Korea, and its adjacent North Gyeongsang Province. ●

TS Designs’ Community First Approach



Personal use masks made from TS Designs’ irregular t-shirts feature two layers of organic or conventional cotton, with an inner layer pocket for an additional filter.

TS Designs has been able to create mask-making jobs and retain employees by keeping things local. The North Carolina-based maker has long advocated a close-to-home supply chain and has stayed true to that mission when it comes to operating during the months of COVID-19. The firm continues to up its mask making production with an assortment of personal use masks and recently launched youth sized masks as well. For example, TS Designs banded together with Trotter’s Sewing in Asheboro, NC to create a regional supply chain to turn its irregular t-shirts into face masks for personal use. “Local is everything at TS Designs,” said founder Eric Henry. ●

Sorona Unveils Fabric Certification Program, Branded Fabric Collections

The DuPont Sorona brand team is launching a new brand architecture and hangtag program designed to bring simplicity of choice and fabric confidence to designers and apparel brands. New fabric collections offered by mills are tested and certified through the DuPont Sorona Fabric Common Thread Certification Program to assure the fabrics have the unique molecular footprint of partially plant-based Sorona polymer as well as meet key fabric performance attributes. As such, apparel brands and designers will be able

to request that mills provide their DuPont Sorona Fabric Common Thread Certificate to confirm the Sorona fabrics’ unique performance and touch.

“Fiber producers are able to create many unique constructions from Sorona polymer enabling a wide variety of textiles exhibiting diverse performance properties from wrinkle-resistant outerwear fabrics to lightweight breathable insulation products, permanent stretch and recovery, and newly launched Sorona faux fur,” explained DuPont Biomaterials global marketing director Renee Henze. “We are committed to ensuring that mills, designers and brands have clarity on our offering and that they can trust the source of the materials when they’re choosing fabrics using Sorona.”

New fabrics which are certified through the Common Thread Fabric Certification Program will provide the Sorona fabric performance characteristics including: Sorona Agile fabrics for long-lasting stretch; Sorona Revive fabrics for outstanding shape recovery; Sorona Profile fabrics for easy care; Sorona Luxe fabrics for all day softness; and Sorona Aura fabrics for lightweight breathable warmth. ●

Quality meets Craftsmanship in ISKO x DW Styles

In the latest collaboration between ISKO and Italian brand DW every element, from fabrics to stitching to accessories, is carefully envisioned and designed to create garments that stand out in the market and are safe for the planet. The result is the five pockets Milano model and the American pocket Enea pant.

Being the first mill globally to be awarded both Nordic Swan Ecolabel and EU Ecolabel, ISKO provided responsible solutions to better define DW’s vision. ISKO’s Responsible Innovation approach is based on creativity, competence and citizenship, to form a holistic strategy helping forge new sustainable standards for the entire industry. ISKO’s R-TWO program is made with certified reused cotton and certified recycled polyester to yield denim that is fully responsible. ●



IN THE MARKET | ECO-UPDATE

Innovations in Eco-Responsibility Strong for Seasons Ahead

Trend boards from Performance Days Forum illustrate directional fabrications.



Natural Function Features at Performance Days Munich

Performance Days Munich stuck to its planned script with a focus topic “Inspired by Nature” supported by expert talks, supplier news and the latest product developments to kick off the Spring ’22 season. Presentations throughout the two-day April fair were available by navigating the Performance Days website. With very little time to prepare a digital platform, organizers managed to capture the Munich show’s distinct textile-centric intention, with a line-up of informative webinars on functional fabrics and spot-on trend forecasting.

The main takeaway of the April 22-23rd fair was that sustainable fabrics, local production and gentle natural finishings are increasingly important for the season ahead. The show’s eco focus, from fibers to green

treatments, highlighted hemp and merino, man-made fibers based on plant sources, as well as natural additives with performance attributes. Attention was also paid to baby alpaca yarn that combines a luxe feel with climate-active properties, and functionality found from the sea, such as oyster shell particles provides odor-neutralizing properties.

Innovators receiving Performance Days special awards included BenQ Materials Corp. and Stotz. BenQ, from Taiwan, won the Performance Award for its 3-layer fabric “0D677” made of recycled polyester enhanced with its Xpore membrane, a textile free from the use of water or solvents, and with a water column of 18,000mm and a breathability of over at 10,000g/m²/24h.

Swiss company Stotz received the Eco Performance Award for its “Ventile

Eco 205,” a 32 percent hemp/68 percent cotton fabric that is windproof, breathable and water-repellent thanks to its PFC-free finish.

The Performance Forum identified a handful of emerging trends. Here’s a quick overview: “Regenerated fibers” and additives such as jade, fish scale, bamboo charcoal, aloe vera and argan oil look to be important in upcoming seasons. “Biodegradable” remains a buzzword throughout collections. New mid-layer fabrics raise the bar ecologically by creating warmth with in new ways using spacer, quilting and French terry constructions that don’t rely on micro-plastics. Stretch gets an update with new sustainable elastane products, and/or without use of spandex entirely. And the lifestyle category advances by benefit of a greater variety of fibers offered,

ranging from cotton, hemp, wool to Tencel, recycled synthetics, felted wools and wax finishes. The conclusion: Nature is anything but boring when it comes to the latest crop of functional fabrications.

Performance Forum jury member Ute Mauch, a sports-fashion designer, has curated a list of must-haves for summer 2022. Mauch’s top picks include: superlight recycled mono-component 3-layer nylon with bio-based castor oil membrane; double knit with wool on one side, cotton with Solucell Air technology on the other; UMORFIL yarn made from recycled fish scales; and yarn blends that feature hemp such as a 20 percent hemp/80 percent organic cotton fleece that is OCS and GOTS certified. More details available on the Performance Days digital fair website. ●

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One Billion Gowns by August



Face masks look to become a must-have accessory in 2020, and likely remain popular for years ahead. Shown here, an assortment of masks by BOCO Gear.

“Industry came together to try to figure out how to deal with the chaos. We were getting bombarded with calls from everyone from home sewers to local hospitals to doctor’s offices.”

Will Duncan, executive director, SEAMS.

The COVID-19 pandemic could well have been the demise of the U.S. textile and apparel industry. Instead, it has presented the industry with an opportunity to respond in a cooperative effort that may haringer the development of a robust vertical supply chain in the U.S. and Western Hemisphere.

Like most of us, textile and apparel makers watched in shock the week of March 16 as retailers shut down, orders were cancelled, supply chains collapsed, and factories closed following President Trump’s declaration of the COVID-19 emergency.

As the virus multiplied, so did demand for PPE (personal protective equipment) by hospitals, medical offices, nursing homes, first responders, military personnel and the general public. With the bulk of the world’s PPE being made in China, and hoarding of medical supplies taking place on a global scale, the Federal Government found itself unprepared to deal with the magnitude of the situation.

Both FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency) and the HHS (Department of Health and Human Services) issued urgent calls for masks, gowns, and other protective clothing.

Early in the crisis, a consortium of textile organizations, including SEAMS (the Association & Voice of the US Sewn Products Industry), SPESA (Sewn Products Equipment & Suppliers of the Americas), NCTO (National Council of Textile Organizations), IFAI (Industrial Fabrics Association International), INDA (Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry) and AAFA (American Apparel and Footwear Association), came together to “try to figure out how to deal with the chaos,” explained Will Duncan, executive director of SEAMS. “We were getting bombarded with calls from everyone from home sewers to local hospitals to doctor’s offices.”

Creating New Supply Chains

Working through the textile organizations, and with NCTO president and CEO Kim Glas serving as a conduit to the Federal

Government, a group of U.S. textile and apparel suppliers joined hands in an effort to meet the urgent need for PPE.

The group included apparel brands Hanesbrands and Fruit of the Loom, knitters Contempora Fabrics and Beverly Knits, cut-and-sew manufacturers LACorp and SanMar, yarn spinner Parkdale and Henderson Sewing Machine Company, along with others. Calling back recently furloughed employees, they converted their production capacity to make reusable, washable, 3-ply cotton masks for HHS, with an expectation to deliver some 320 million masks for use by the general public.

While Hanesbrands no longer has production in the U.S., the company retrofitted several of its own factories in El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and Honduras to produce the masks.

Different specs for each product, along with lack of a single government contact point, created confusion on a mass scale. “We had ten different tech packs for a face mask,” said SPESA president Michael McDonald.

The group collaborated with several

of the industry's technology suppliers to centralize patterns for PPE, which are now posted on the SEAMS website at www.seams.org.

Hanesbrands' senior manager for global innovation, Colin Holloway, explained the challenge of simplifying face mask construction to reduce steps, control costs, and speed up production—while creating the correct layering configuration and antimicrobial chemistry.

Shortages Continue

Scaling a formidable learning curve through collaboration and transparency, the group built a vertical supply chain, from yarn to sewn product, practically overnight, and the list of domestic textile and apparel makers pivoting their businesses to make PPE is growing by the day.

Despite these efforts, medical-grade PPE shortages in the US continue. Back in March, Health & Human Services (HHS) estimated that the U.S. would need 3.5 billion face masks for healthcare workers. In addition, the consortium was told that the fight against COVID-19 would require one billion gowns by August.

Eye-watering numbers of medical-grade PPE are required partly because many items cannot be cleaned and reused. Most surgical-quality masks and N95 respirators are made with a layer of electrostatically-charged non-woven fabric (spunbond or meltblown) which loses its charge (and the ability to attract the virus) when laundered.

In addition, disposable non-woven PPE products are generally less expensive than reusable alternatives.

Because PPE is not on the list of “essential products” covered by the Berry Amendment, masks and gowns have been systematically outsourced in search of price over the years.

According to Frank Henderson, president and CEO of equipment supplier Henderson Sewing Machine Co., “98 percent of the world's PPE is controlled by a Communist government (China). In November/December they bought up most of the non-woven production.”

“We first made these items in the USA, but the PPE gown was sent overseas with no standardization,” said Henderson. “The result was five different patterns. Our melt-blown and spunbond machines are sitting in mothballs. If we require PPE to be Berry-compliant, we will control our own destiny.”

As an equipment supplier, Henderson sees his role as “a conduit to disperse information” and helping to set up supply chains. As of mid-April, Henderson Sewing had placed some 27 automated systems in

14 states and Canada to make ultrasonically-bonded, non-woven masks.

Textile and Apparel Opportunities in the “New Normal”

Given that the “new normal” may be a year to 18 months away, what are the opportunities for the domestic textile and apparel industry once the curve is flattened and equipment stockpiles are replenished?

Thought leaders predict work-at-home wear, protective outerwear, and home textiles will be in-demand; while interest in office dressing, fast fashion, and athletic wear for the gym, team sports, and fan gear has faded.

The pedestrian mask may be a hot item for some time. Front-line and service workers, vulnerable populations, and those who use mass transit or travel long distance will need to protect themselves until there is an available vaccine.

Indeed, the new airline amenity kit may comprise a face mask, pair of gloves, and disinfecting wipes.

In Hanesbrands' Q1 2020 call to analysts, CEO Gerald Evans reported, “Based on the current interest from potential customers as well as the anticipated change in consumer behavior around the world, we believe our mask and protective garment business could be a sizable revenue opportunity with growth potential over the next several years.”

A Roadmap for the Future

The COVID-19 crisis will change the apparel industry in many ways—hopefully for the better.

“We hope it's a wake-up call for brands and retailers, to make them re-evaluate their supply chains and the ability to operate

closer to the marketplace, eliminate mark-downs, stockouts and inventory carrying costs, and generate higher profit,” said Duncan. “The sourcing model has been driven by cost, not profit.”

“Our industry needs a re-branding,” added McDonald. “We are excited to see more innovation and cooperation within the U.S. industry. But those doing government work need stability. The makers have only been converting what they have. They are not investing in new equipment or training if contracts are only good for three months. And getting sewers has always been a bottleneck.”

While organizations such as SEAMS, SPESA, and NCTO are making great strides in bringing the industry together, Henderson would like to see the formation of a single, field-to-finished product domestic data base, perhaps at the hands of the government.

“We may have 300,000 sewing operators in the U.S, but no one really knows,” he said. “The government has no idea.”

Published in design and architecture magazine Dezeen in conjunction with its recent Virtual Design Festival, trend forecaster Li Edelkoort's manifesto proposing a “World Hope Forum” offered a road map for the industry's future.

“We have no choice but to join forces and stand together. New pacts need to be forged between fiber farmers, yarn makers, textile industries and fashion houses, between raw material producers, independent designers and their craftspeople. Whole chains need to be integrated, stimulated by federal funds, finding a shared interest and income from this rebirth in business. The economy of hope has the potential to transform society from within.” ●

“Our industry needs a re-branding. We are excited to see more innovation and cooperation within the U.S. industry. But those doing government work need stability.”

Michael McDonald,
president of SPESA.



Source: Aol.co.uk

A surgical mask painted over Banksy graffiti in Bristol, UK.

The Performance Pivot

Both HeiQ's new Viroblock NJO3 textile technology and Nufabrx's textile drug delivery system, developed with assistance from the AAFOA, not only provide personal benefits relevant to today's Covid circumstances, but also prove directional as performance textiles look to continue to play a stronger role in creating a safer future for all.

Industry and consumers alike have responded to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic by shifting to a new normal that requires face masks and routine safety measures. This change, so fast paced and unexpected, has intensified thinking about the future of textiles engineered for protection and wellbeing.

The latest technologies exemplify this performance pivot. New developments are focused on re-defining the role of functional fibers and fabrics beyond enhanced comfort and fitness-related benefits to supplying critical amenities, whether that is fighting the COVID-19 virus or delivering medicine.

"We are at a tipping point now when we talk about functional fabrics," said Carlo Centonze, Group CEO, of the Swiss company HeiQ, which made news earlier this spring with the introduction of a new antiviral, antimicrobial textile technology.

Advanced Functional Fabrics of America (AAFOA) president, Alexander Stolyarov, believes fiber innovation is the next frontier. "We need to think of fibers as high-tech products and fabric as service providing

entities," said Stolyarov in his keynote during the Smart Fabrics Summit, held virtually last month.

Protection with Purpose

HeiQ's Viroblock NPJO3 antiviral and antimicrobial textile treatment has shown during face mask testing to be effective against human coronavirus. The treatment — a combination of vesicle and silver technologies designed to inhibit the growth and persistence of bacteria and viruses — reduces the infectiveness of the virus more than 99.99 percent. It is tested to last at least 30 washes.

"Our responsibility is to access this technology for the better for all as quick as we can and unite together to fight against this virus."

Carlo Centonze,
Group CEO, HeiQ

The treatment is accomplished through binding permanently two viral sulfur groups and using HeiQ's fatty vesicle technology (Liposomes) as a booster that helps swiftly deplete the virus membrane (pericapsis) of its protective cholesterol layer, thereby destroying the enveloped virus.

(In very simplified layman's terms, Viroblock's main components, silver and liposomes (fatty particles) work together to form a synergistic effect that de-activates the virus in a matter of minutes.)

HeiQ was fast to react to the pandemic. Team members stationed in China alerted Zurich execs early on about the severity of the virus. Management was able

to bring proof of concept, scale up and launch to Viroblock NPJO3 in just two months. (Developed previously, Viroblock had been "shelved," at that time when the marketplace was moving away from anti-bacterial to focus on odor control tech.)

Centonze explains, "We were able to accelerate to meet demand for large usage of masks with a very sustainable, effective and fast technology we had created years ago."

Masks featuring Viroblock became available in record time; by mid-May, 150 million masks featuring Viroblock NPJO3 were being shipped, according to Centonze.

"We condensed a six to nine months, or up to a year long process, into a matter of weeks," explained Mike Smith, CEO, HeiQ ChemTex, a U.S. subsidiary with



offices and manufacturing sites in Georgia and North Carolina. The two companies merged in 2016 to produce HeiQ's high demand textile chemicals domestically to serve local brands such as Hanes and Kayser-Roth.

"We are shipping now to places we've never shipped before by air and by sea back and forth creating huge challenges," said Smith. "Try to get 20-30 tons on an airplane to fly and you'll have issues. We face these problems when we develop a new product, but in this case, we didn't have time. Instead of making a gallon the first batch, we made five tons."

That first batch was in early April. Subsequent batches increased quantities. "We've gone beyond 1,000 tons delivered already," said Smith, when interviewed in mid-May.

The company has been utilizing its full capacity of 145 tons per day in its four manufacturing sites on three continents. (HeiQ has production facilities in in Switzerland and Australia, in addition to the two big plants in the U.S.)

Bringing Viroblock to market so quickly is a global endeavor with a supply chain that spans Europe, Asia and the U.S. Partners include CHT Group, Jintex Corporation, Wacker Chemie AG, Alchemie, FHNW School of Life Sciences (University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland), Piedmont Chemical Industries.

"Our responsibility is to access to this technology for the better for all as quick as we can and unite together to fight against this virus," said Centonze.

Clothing as Healthwear

"We believe there is this new shift in a generation of fabrics that not only tell something about yourself – calculating steps, calories, heart rate –but that will also solve health and wellness outcomes," stated Jordan Schindler, founder and CEO of the company NUFABRX, maker of yarns with built-in therapeutics.

Schindler explains, "Instead of using a cream or a patch for pain relief, why not just get dressed in the morning? Or, what if your father or grandfather has to take medication daily and all he had to do was put on his socks?" According to Schindler, these types of questions gave shape to the concept of healthwear as a new category of textiles for clothing that is the basis of Nufabrx innovation.

Eight years in development, jointly with the Department of Defense, scientists and the AAFOA, Nufabrx products deliver a controlled dose of medication (vitamins, supplements, pain relievers) via

clothing. Kentwool has partnered with the company to produce a wool sock with a 10 percent blend of Nufabrx pain relief yarn.

According to Schindler, the base yarn, a polyester or nylon, is plaited inside a garment, and strategically mapped to be most effective. For instance, placed at the ankle within a sock construction, or at the elbow of an arm sleeve.

This "drug delivery system" is engineered to control both the release rate and dosage. Nufabrx has recently rolled out a Walmart product that features the Capsaisin pain relief medicine.

The fabric feels "normal" said Schindler. "It is soft and comfortable and washable like any garment." The pain release medicine does not impact the aesthetic so there is no odor or stickiness that would be associated with a cream for example. Nufabrx is produced in the U.S. with a secured supply chain.

"What if you could take this huge health/wellness category and offer it as a benefit to the whole textile category," said Schindler. "That's what we strive to do. That's where we think the future is headed. Consumers demand more, why not high-performance health delivered directly through a garment." ●

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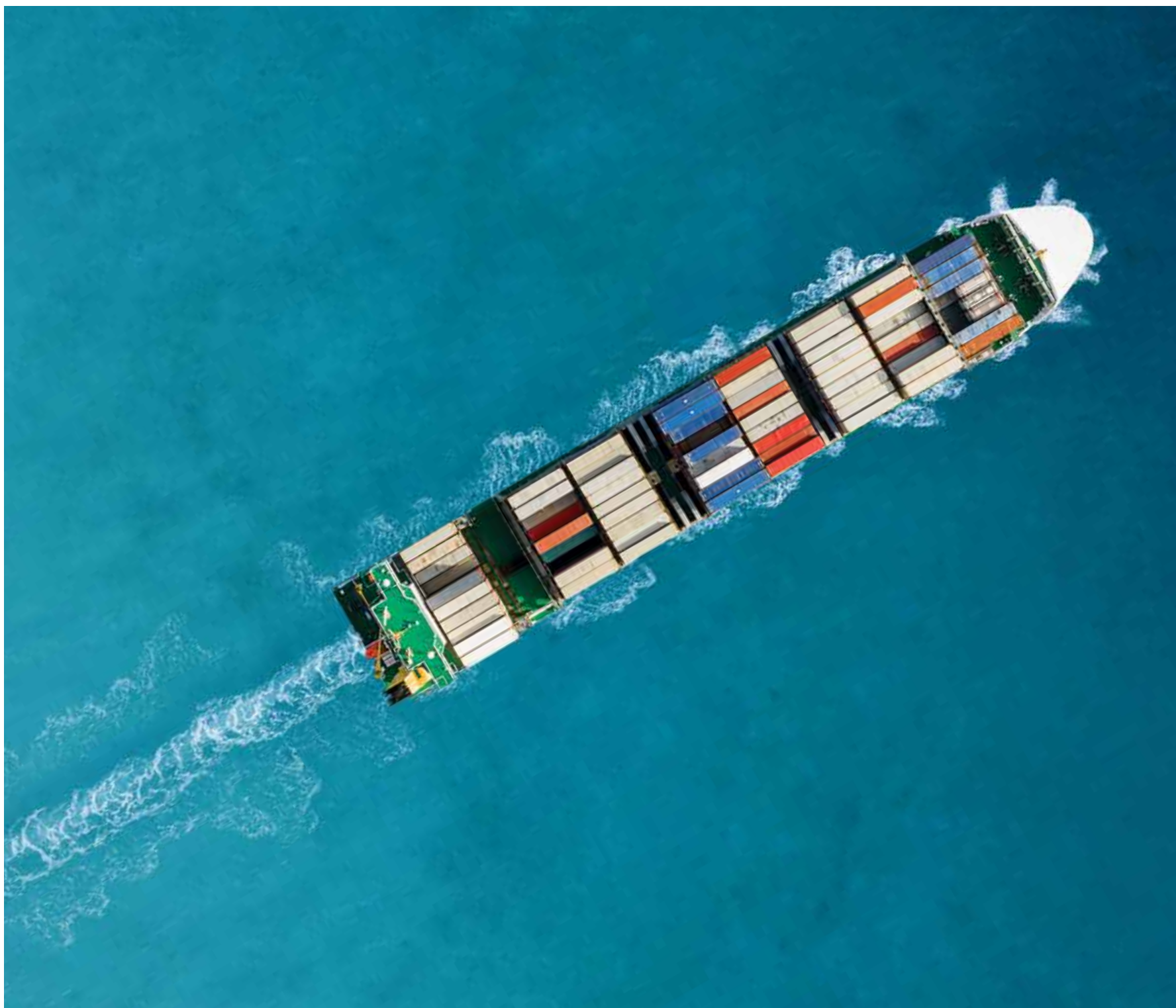
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SUPPLY CHAIN:

Textile Execs Weigh in on Post-Pandemic Opportunities

Many in the textile sphere liken the COVID-19 crisis to a wake up call. It's a time to re-think supply chains, analyze the ability to operate closer to the marketplace, and consider new sourcing models. Creating a culture of collaboration goes hand in hand with assessing supply chain structure. Already, by working together to produce needed PPE to flatten the coronavirus curve, new textile coalitions have formed, encouraging new relationships between companies once viewed as competitors. Here, top-level execs from leading textile suppliers offer thoughts on how to strengthen production capabilities, foster innovation, and ultimately "re-brand" domestic manufacturing as a better, more united industry.

Re-Balancing Act

"Our industry has been highly dependent on lower cost, Asian supply chains versus domestic production for a very long time. To ensure some level of domestic security of supply, it is beneficial to consider operating closer to home. This is the right time to consider a rebalanced sourcing model.

People are breaking out sewing machines and sewing PPE in the U.S., Puerto Rico and Central American, and along with this is an appetite to buy USA made. There is movement to lower that percentage of PPE coming from China from 95 percent to 75 percent with 25 percent made here. Will we see a similar shift in apparel manufacturing? Inexpensive jersey knits – probably not. High-value garments made here with expensive technical fabric used for true innovation from a design perspective — yes.

Bespoke manufacturing has remained in Europe and as such there exists a self-reliant supply chain. We'll see if more of a European model will transpire here in the States." *Greg Vas Nunes, CEO, Trinity Tech Group (TTG)*

Assessing Availability

"The resources are here and the supply chain

exists, they just don't exist at the capacity that we need. The crisis has caused many companies to take a look at what's available here in terms of manufacturing.

COVID-19 has placed a greater focus and emphasis on more localized supply chains that are closer to final markets, and this has increased the need for supply chain diversification more essential than ever. Although we are an international company, the heart and soul of Unifi is based in the U.S. We have transitioned to an asset-light global strategy, with vertical supply chains in the U.S. and Central America. This, in turn, creates greater supply chain flexibility for the company. Brands and retailers will likely move to transition some of their supply chains closer to final markets, but the overall need for some diversification is more essential than ever." *Jay Hertzog, SVP Global Sales & Marketing, Unifi*

Market-Centric Approach

"For many years now, PrimaLoft has been committed to an asset-light manufacturing model that allows us to be nimble when it comes to producing our products in close proximity to our partners' facilities. This cuts down on the time, cost and environmental impact of shipping goods, and allows us to adapt our manufacturing locations in

U.S. mills need to step up their communication skills and speed of development to bring textile production here and away from Asia."

response to market factors or crises like COVID-19. We've been able to keep capacity high, throughout these past few months, because of this model.

In the case of COVID-19's impact on the supply chain, bringing sourcing closer to the marketplace would not have helped. In

this case, supply chain restrictions moved from China to western countries. So, our supply chain in North America and Europe was impacted in a similar way, due to lockdowns. I believe market-centric sourcing plays an important role in the reduction of inventory and just-in-time inventory. Not so much related to COVID. Bringing sourcing closer to market will impact our ability to meet changing consumer preferences while keeping inventory and supply chain lean." *Mike Joyce, President & CEO, PrimaLoft*

Communication is Key

"Communication needs to improve if want to see production come back here. The problem is things move so slowly in this country. Whereas customer service and the system in place in Asia are so good that it makes it easier, and faster to produce. U.S. mills need to step up their communication skills and speed of development to bring textile production here and away from Asia." *Chris Parkes, president, Concept III*

"The introduction of more diversified IT technologies, such as virtual video conference, location tracking, AI identification, and other digital production management applications, is the key consideration for the construction of new supply chain resources." *George Yang, CEO, e.dye*

"This is a challenging time for our industry and it's how we deal with this as a collective global textiles community that will help define and set the foundation for the future. We have always believed that innovation becomes amplified by collaboration. A strong focus experimentation, agility and entrepreneurial thinking are core values of Invista and the Cordura brand and positions us for the new normal. We continue to work on developing our future-proof digital and transformative tools and customer connection points to navigate the journey ahead." *Cindy McNaull, Business Development Director, Invista, Cordura Brand*

Lowering the Competitive Fence

“Schoeller as a company has been much more focused on working toward a safer future lately versus worrying about what may have been competitive concerns in other times. We have been more proactive around sharing technical data and performance insight around select textiles. There have been very heartfelt conversations, knowing that this is

People are breaking out sewing machines and sewing PPE in the U.S., Puerto Rico and Central American, and along with this is an appetite to buy USA made.

all about what’s in the interest for future generations and keeping people safe. It’s been an interesting time to interact with more people who, from time to time, we’ve had competing business segments with, but now the focus is on coming up with better solutions overall.

From my experience, the whole competitive

fence has been lowered, and people are being much more open with their own situations, as well as working with customers who may have previously been outside their regular scope.”
Stephen Kerns, President, Schoeller Textil USA

Certification Matters

“Like COVID-19, sustainability is a huge challenge, which requires significant collaboration up, down, and across value chains. Today brands are collaborating to get their supply chains to certify common manufacturing facilities. New technologies are being developed which are available for open sourcing. In the pursuit of solving major industry challenges we are likely to see more collaboration taking place.”
Jean Hegedus, Sustainability Director, The Lycra Company

An Open Dialogue

“If there’s a silver lining with regard to COVID-19’s impact on the textile industry, it’s that it’s opened up communication among mills and suppliers, many of whom probably wouldn’t have looked at each other just a few months ago. It goes back to your supply chain ques-

tion—we all felt the disruptions to our supply chains and realized the only way to combat any further slowdowns or losses is to be completely forthright with one another.

For instance, most mill operators have proprietary fabrics we’ve innovated, and while we want to keep those close to the vest, we can be completely frank about greater concerns affecting our production practices, distribution channels, customer requirements, et cetera. Just opening simple dialogue about such matters leads to new product ideas, strengthened relationships, and better business practices for the future.”
Andy Dong, President, DryTex

“MMI has been actively involved in the legislative side with a lobbying group out of DC that we belong to – we would love to see legislation enacted for PPE like the Berry Amendment for military products. The tough hurdle is the price disparity. There is a very wide gap between pricing out of China and what US is able to offer. Many companies feel strongly about getting away from China, but when presented pricing, they tend to back pedal a bit.”
Amy Bircher, CEO, MMI Textiles ●

PLANET POSITIVE

These days, if you want to see sustainability in action, look out the window. Smog has lifted in Los Angeles to reveal a skyline view, in Venice dolphins are swimming in clean water canals, bald eagles soar over Denver, and in Toronto the family of fox that settled into a downtown neighborhood recently now have their own security detail to protect the fun-loving brood from human city-dwellers.

Along with free-range wildlife, consider that daily carbon emissions have plummeted since

COVID-19 shutdowns took effect. According to Nature Climate Change, daily carbon emissions are down 17 percent from January to early April. Pictures from NASA satellites in space illuminate the spectacular change in the atmosphere in just two months time.

It appears that while coronavirus has brought us to our knees, the natural world is flourishing.

The question for the textile community right now is, with PPE the industry’s focus as the battle with COVID-19 continues, will sustainability measures adopted by textile companies during past decade now take a

SUSTAINABILITY:

Textile Suppliers Reflect on Industry Eco Agendas in the Short & Long-term

back seat? Or, as the silver lining of the pandemic shines in the form of nature’s rebound, are eco-responsibility and best practices production more important than ever?

Here’s what textile suppliers have to say in response:

Mike Joyce, President & CEO, PrimaLoft

“As we re-enter our new normal, we have an opportunity to re-enter in a more responsible way. Virtual business may allow for less traffic and petroleum consumption, positively impacting CO2 levels. I am convinced that

We know our planet has an incredible ability to self-heal. It has been demonstrated over the last 12 weeks.

this will play a significant role in our business practices going forward. We know our planet has an incredible ability to self-heal. It has been demonstrated over the last 12 weeks. Our industry needs to focus on how to re-start while not reverting back to old practices. Let's try to keep our gains."

Chris Parkes, President, Concept III

"Since mid-March the environment has been given a break and the change in the environment has been remarkable. This will be a message for the outdoor industry to show that sustainability works and consumers will respond to that message because they want to work with brands that are doing things to keep the planet thriving. Now we need to focus on how we involve the industry culture around sustainability and move that forward."

Jean Hegedus, Sustainability Director, The Lycra Company

"In the short-term, I believe the initial focus for most companies will be stabilizing their businesses, sorting out inventory issues, and understanding what consumption will look like going forward. Recent consumer research seems to indicate a shift in the consumer's psyche toward more mindful shopping – looking for more durable clothing that will last – if that's the case, it will certainly encourage more sustainable practices.

So, while the immediate focus will be on stabilization, in the mid-to long-term, we believe the industry's efforts toward sustainability will only accelerate."

Stephen Kerns, President, Schoeller Textil USA

"In the early days of the outbreak, people were scrambling for ways to make more gowns and face masks in the short term, but now there is in general more consideration and care being taken around material sustainability – from face masks being washable without disintegrating to medical gowns with membranes to just



having the peace of mind of knowing that nothing you're putting on is bad for you or others.

"We haven't heard from our customers that they're not going to continue with sustainability efforts. Their processes are in place and running well. Customers are being more diligent and pragmatic about from whom and what they are buying these days."

Jay Hertzig, SVP Global Sales/Marketing, Unifi

"Sustainability is here to stay. We've spoken with our brand partners about their plans when retail returns to normal, and all continue to be committed to their sustainability initiatives and goals. Several of our customers are utilizing REPREEVE recycled polyester in their production of masks, gowns and other critical PPE products. There is still a strong commitment to sustainability, and we believe it will be even stronger post- COVID-19 as the world focuses our health as a society, as people, and the overall health of the planet."

Bob Buck and Tom Band, Chemours

"Chemours has recognized the need to embrace more sustainable products and processes since its inception as a company in 2015 and reinforced this view with the creation of its 2030 Corporate Responsibility Commitment goals. This situation has highlighted sustainability even more as businesses 'restart.'"

David Karstad, VP Marketing, Polartec

"With climate change and other issues that effect our environment and health going forward, sustainability will be one of the pillars by which we innovate around these challenges. That's not going to change. What might change is the desire to put energy and resources into making the next innovation sooner rather than later based on how we view materials needed to survive as humans. For example how we think about how much petrochemicals we need and how we think about what we have in our closet." ●



Poppy Gall Instagram: COVID-related sewing creations and her own Popia Design knitwear collection.

Kim Brannock Instagram: Craftsman apron made from repurposed camping gear and hammock fabric.

WEARING WHAT MATTERS

Creativity in the time of isolation has designers turning to what they have on hand. “We learn to adapt and use creativity to forward that,” says Kim Brannock, who turned header card swatches as well as old camping gear into good-looking functional products during shelter-in-place COVID restrictions.

Brannock, founder of SY Designs in Bend, OR, is not alone in prioritizing the value of re-purposing in today’s world. Indeed, across the board, designers are increasingly leaning into the concept of “make from what we have” to re-service for future use, as qualities of simplicity and self-sufficiency heighten as people endure weeks of pandemic realities.

Investment in durability and quality are other factors designers look to favor when coronavirus lockdowns lift. “I’ve always been in that category of people who appreciated clothing far more than others. I felt like I was standing on a soapbox explaining the value of textiles and what we wear,” says Kristen LittleJohn, gloves product developer at The North Face. “I now feel even stronger that if we need a new pair of jeans that we buy a brand that does better for the world. We have all been suckered into wanting to get a good deal.”

Adrienne Moser also recognizes a shift in values that has occurred in the past two months. “Cheap is not valuable,” states Moser, VP product for SAXX, who sees consumers’ buying habits swinging away from disposable fashion and to better made goods. Moser recalls a visit to Japan where home space is limited and closets are small. “Constraints dictate that wardrobes be condensed, so instead of buying 10 shirts, consumers shop for one perfect shirt,” says Moser, who believes COVID-19 circumstances will influence similar selective purchasing to transpire in the States.

Quarantine on Consumption

These are not new trends; sustainability, including a “renew & reuse” mantra, has been a key driver of innovation within the active/outdoor industry for years. However, the current crisis has been like a trend pressure-cooker, accelerating change and now bringing these trends to fruition.

Discussions with designers reveal a stronger commitment to level up conscious-consumption. They believe the time is right for a re-set in terms of industry expectations surrounding a “new-for-newness” sake approach that has become a drumbeat in outdoor product development in recent years.

“We need to take a really long hard look at what matters,” says Brannock, who works together with leading brands in outdoor, fish, hunt and workwear. “We can’t just keep doing

“We have to ask ourselves, how much stuff do we really need.”
Poppy Gall

“I want to consume as little as possible, try to achieve zero plastic and give few of my dollars to multi-millionaires and billionaires.”
Kristen LittleJohn

“Instead of buying 10 shirts, consumers shop for one perfect shirt.”
Adrienne Moser

“We need to use our creative energy toward making things that are purposeful for our future.”
Kim Brannock

more, more, more. There is already so much textile waste. The path we’re on is clothing becoming frivolous. I don’t want to make another version of what’s already available.”

Designer Poppy Gall agrees that a re-evaluation of what we buy is called for, as well as a need on the part of brands, and the industry overall, to reduce redundancy. “We have to ask ourselves, how much stuff do we really need,” says Gall, owner of Poppy Gall Designs based in Vermont. Gall is hopeful that when post-pandemic shopping resumes the consumer is going to be willing to pay \$100 for a pair of top-quality work gloves made by a local vendor that will last a good long time, instead of spending \$10 for a cheap pair at a big box store.

LittleJohn shares Gall’s point of view. She states, “Today’s circumstances fuels my desire to buy from small local makers and support small shops.” It also encourages her to strive for her bigger goals. “I want to consume as little as possible, try to achieve zero plastic and give few of my dollars to multi-millionaires and billionaires,” LittleJohn explains.

Moser, who has worked at Columbia Sportswear and Patagonia, says, “People want to simplify their lives. Give them enough but not an over abundance that will be discarded.”

The Bigger Picture

Gall makes a connection between designers’ creativity focused on re-purposing goods and how the supply chain has swerved to making PPE. “We see woodworkers using their CNC cutters to make plastic face shields and others re-tooling facilities to produce masks. Maybe new niches will emerge for outdoor to produce domestically,” says Gall, who specializes in knitwear product design and development.

Certainly the pandemic has illuminated the vulnerability of a supply chain reliant on China. A New Zealand farmer recently confided in Brannock that he feels rejuvenated by his efforts to create verticality on his sheep farm. He said “to go full circle on his own soil” has been amazing, according to Brannock.

Perhaps the COVID-19 experience will embolden made in America production, too, Gall shares.

All designers contacted view this period as a turning point. For Moser, she expects a rebirth of camping, hiking and paddle. “There is a big need to be outside,” says Moser. “It should be a phenomenal year for camping; It’s a low budget, healthy outside activity.”

While Brannock and the others can’t say exactly what will happen when business returns, there is a consensus that the industry is at a tipping point when it comes to a design ethos. Says Brannock, “We need to use our creative energy toward making things that are purposeful for our future.” ●

By Emily Walzer

The Future of Gathering

As the “old” days of shuttling to presentations and large trade shows in early 2020 seem like just a blur, industry executives are currently doubling down on how the business of marketing and selling textiles will change. Webinars and Zoom calls have filled in a lot of in-person gaps, but can they sustain? We’ve asked executives in our business to share methods of communicating effectively.

Hyosung global marketing director for textiles, Mike Simko, sees “gathering as important to our industry for building relationships and trust.” While emails, phone calls and video conferences are important for commerce, “face-to-face meetings are unique in the multi-dimensional way you can interact with the client... read their body language, show samples and share a beer.” Trade shows are an efficient way to schedule meetings with many relevant people in a short period of time, plus “have all of our product and technical experts there in one place for better collaboration.”

Post-pandemic, Simko predicts that, “smaller, more targeted trade shows will become more important.” As a supplier, Hyosung can “be more specific in launching product innovations,” he said. For example, the brand introduced performance fibers Mipan Aqua-nylon and Askin polyester beyond cooling yarns in 100 percent reclaimed waste versions at the digital edition of Performance Days in April. At the April online edition of Kingpins Amsterdam (Kingpins24), Hyosung launched its new creora 3D Max spandex, as well as its creora regen and creora bio-based sustainable spandex via a recorded interview. “The interview was fun and informative, and we were able to address questions from the denim community in real time,” Simko said.

Specializing in niche textile shows, The Fabric Shows’ producer Susan Power is on board with the rise of the smaller show. Power operates The

Fabric Shows – DG Expo in six cities. Fortunately, the show is already in a format that can accommodate social distancing. “We spread the racks out for a browsing type atmosphere and have tables to work through the fabrics and take notes,” she said. If companies are not comfortable sending staff, there is a resource center they can contribute to, where Power’s staff can facilitate orders. “If this enables companies to be more comfortable, I’m all for it,” she said.

While Power is tentatively slated to host late summer shows this year in Atlanta and Chicago, it’s New York City that gives her pause. Beyond spatial challenges for exhibiting, there are also cost considerations. “I anticipate a problem with lots of shows trying to find space,” she commented. With that in mind, Power is exploring Philadelphia as a possible replacement for her NYC show, at least for this year. “I’m still exploring it,” she said.

Business as Usual — NOT

With summer still a big question mark for lots of shows, fall is fast and furious becoming “the show season” for industry. “I have some international travel in September that I will need to reschedule due to the fact that so many of our clients (such as Outerbike, SBT GRVL and Life Time dirt events) are moved to fall. My schedule has really changed,” Kristin Carpenter, founder of Verde Brand Communications, commented. While she hopes and anticipates that these events happen, she has also been “already pivoting quickly” to hosting successful immersion events when an in-person event (such as a camp for an event) has been cancelled.

One of the coolest things that Carpenter has seen as of late is “virtual” Spring Classic European road bike races. Several pros are participating via virtual training platform Zwift, where the watcher can “ride along with them, see their houses and their kids high-fiving them when they win... it truly makes relating with athletes you admire different, like we’re all in this together.”

With meetings, events and trade

shows, we have an opportunity to modernize through this crisis, Carpenter explained, “and commit to not keeping sacred cows alive for the sake of keeping something familiar – instead we need to take risks together and create the vehicle that will support where our industry community must go today.”

During Kingpins24, three panel experts participated in a talk called “The Future of Seminars.” Moderator Kerry Bannigan (founder of the Conscious Fashion Campaign, which works with the United Nations to advance sustainable development goals) asked poignant questions pertaining to “business as usual.” Due to cancellations of events and shows, Alex Paredes explained how his budget at Jeanologia suddenly opened up, creating a positive for the future. In normal times, without so many in-person commitments, perhaps instead “we could put that money into research and development or into sustainability,” he commented.

When asked about the viability of in-person events in the future, panelist Simply Suzette founder and sustainable denim curator Ani Wells asked, “why do we really need to fly our whole team out to a sustainability conference to hear someone speak?”

The consensus is that denim executives travel far and often, perhaps unnecessarily. “In denim, we are in a unique position,” explained Adam Taubenfligel, creative director for Triarchy denim. “If I could look at fabrics once a year, that would be enough. Denim doesn’t change that much.” Taubenfligel explored the idea of meeting in person, albeit less frequently. “I can’t do my job if I can’t touch the fabric. I’ve tried it, it’s awful,” he joked.

“The apparel industry is really about touch and feel, which is difficult virtually,” added Kirsten Harris, VP of North America marketing for Nilit. “The workforce has gotten used to the comfort of working remotely,” noted Harris. When we do travel, it will be to segmented shows that are productive, while a “few larger, international shows will bring the global community together to share ideas and innovations,” she said. ●



“We have an opportunity to modernize through this crisis and commit to not keeping sacred cows alive for the sake of keeping something familiar – instead we need to take risks together and create the vehicle that will support where our industry community must go today.”

Kristin Carpenter, founder, Verde Brand Communications

Schools Step Up

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed an acute shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) within the U.S. stockpiles. Universities have made significant contributions using their additive manufacturing capabilities, machine tool laboratories, knitting labs, and testing facilities as resources.

Louisiana State University

LSU ramped up production of PPE as part of a statewide response to support medical professionals on the front lines of COVID-19. The focus was on gowns and face shields.

Working with Biomedical Engineering senior Meagan Moore, LSU Medical Physics Program Director Wayne Newhauser began developing gown prototypes. Meagan and her mother, Kathryn Moore, also modified a mask pattern they found online, using two layers of tightly woven cotton fabric with elastic bands that go over the ears.

In the midst of her mask making, Meagan received a call from Newhauser, asking if she could help him create a 3D printed part for a COVID-19 ventilator. Moore said, “yes” without hesitation.

“In the war on COVID-19, LSU has found our own modern-day equivalent to Rosie-the-Riveter, ‘Meagan the Maker,’” Newhauser said.

Drexel University

In Pennsylvania, Genevieve Dion, Drexel University design professor & director



Photo: Charles Fox

Drexel Center for Functional Fabrics' Genevieve Dion in front of a Comez warp knitting machine.

of Drexel's Center for Functional Fabrics (CFF), sprang into action. She saw this as an opportunity to show what advanced manufacturing and rapid prototyping can do. Much of Drexel's textile creativity is done at the CFF, which also incorporates the Pennsylvania Fabric Discovery Center. Dion shifted 3D knitting machines from a Department of Defense project to rapidly begin developing PPE masks and respirators.

While the immediate goal was to develop surgical masks that could be washed, sized, or made of anti-bacterial/anti-viral material, the long-term goal is to develop a washable and reusable respirator mask with an air filter that provides much more protection.

Tennessee Tech University

In response to a call from Tennessee state officials and Governor Bill Lee, eight higher education schools and universities were contacted to fight COVID-19 with 3D printing.

Tennessee Tech University is one school that is making hundreds of face shield headbands for medical workers. The purpose of the face shields is to allow healthcare workers to extend the use of face masks when dealing with COVID patients. Within a few hours, production of the headbands had begun, under the leadership of Michael Aikens, director of the Tennessee Center for Rural Innovations. TTU student, Hunter Hinshaw, operates six machines, and each 3D printer makes four headbands at a time.

Colorado State University

As COVID-19 pandemic patients began to fill Colorado area hospitals, several apparel manufacturers began to shift their production to making PPE medical gowns. For guidance, they turned to the high-tech textile laboratory at CSU for its expertise in testing materials that could be used for the gown production.

CSU's Smart Textiles and Nanotechnology Research group was contacted. Led by Associate Professor Vivian Li, the CSU Lab is the only lab in Colorado that can do the type of testing required for this project.

According to Li, the objective was twofold: to help companies choose the right type of material to manufacture the gowns, and then to test the completed gowns to ensure they meet the PPE standards set by the FDA, ASTM International, and the AATCC. ●

Kathlyn Swantko, president of the FabricLink Network, created www.TheTechnicalCenter.com for industry networking and marketing of specialty textiles, and www.fabriclink.com for consumer education involving everything fabric. Contact: kgswantko@fabriclink.com

▼
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We surveyed 420 consumers. Here is what they told us.

The Survey: Purchasing Priorities for Post-Pandemic Shopping



Consumers are saying “yes” to tech, are keen on natural, eco-friendly fibers and are likely to seek Made-in-USA apparel. These are among the purchasing priorities that may shape consumers’ buying habits going forward as COVID-19 restrictions lift and individuals resume shopping routines.

Staying connected with family and colleagues during isolation is translating to increased consumer awareness around smart textiles that feature conductive yarns developed to sync with iPhone apps. When asked about incorporating smart textiles into their everyday wardrobe, 87 percent of our survey respondents answered positively.

Natural fibers also look to get a boost, as the majority of respondents — 55 percent — believe that cotton, wool and hemp are “cleaner” and “safer” fabric choices. Along this same line of thinking, respondents report that purchasing sustainable or “eco-friendly” apparel and footwear has become more important. This shift in outlook reflects a greater appreciation of nature and environmental protection by everyone, not just survey takers, as a result of the pandemic experience.

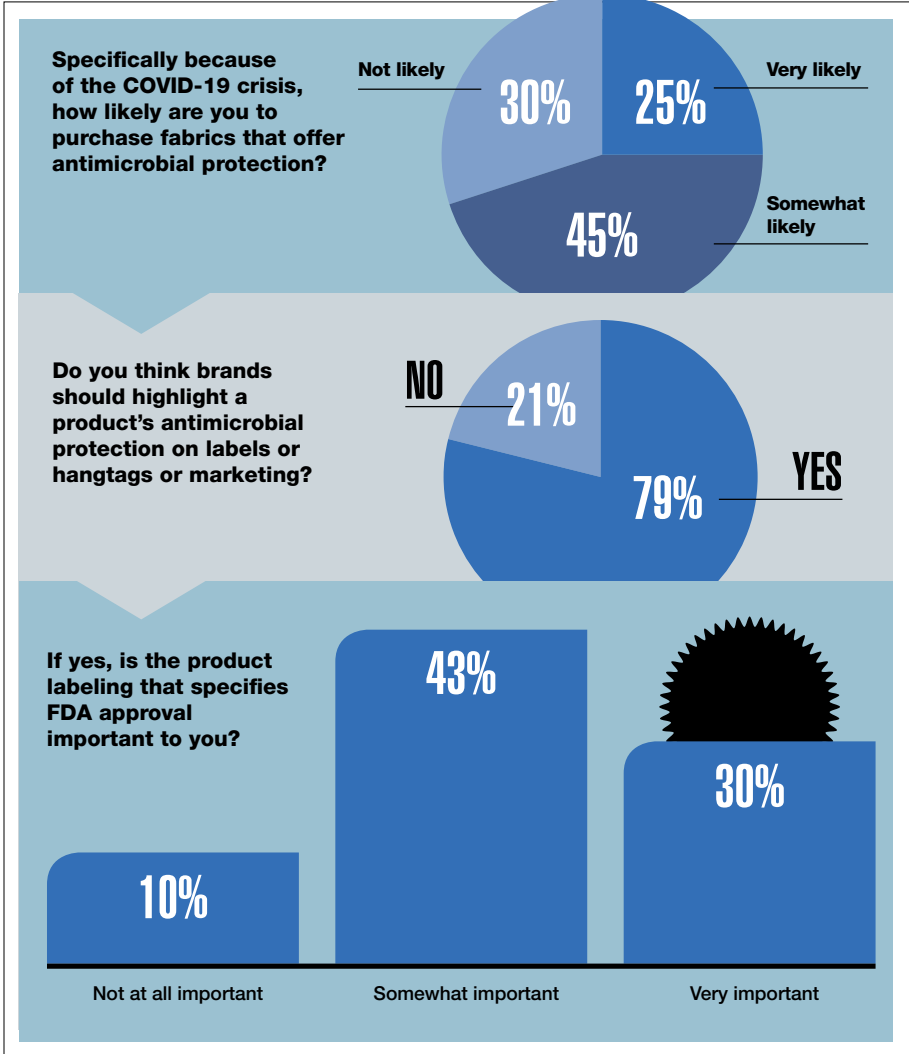
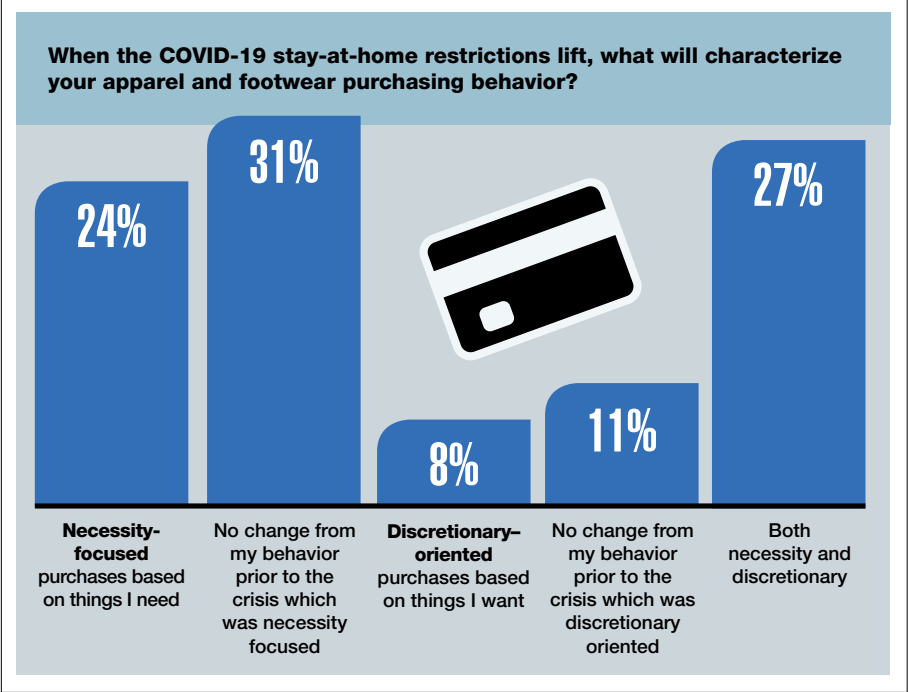
Buying products made closer to home is another broad takeaway from COVID-19’s impact. This is clear from respondents’ significant show of support for American made products — tallied at 89 percent — influenced by the role domestic manufacturers played in providing needed PPE products in recent months, compared to 33 percent of respondents not swayed by that action. ■

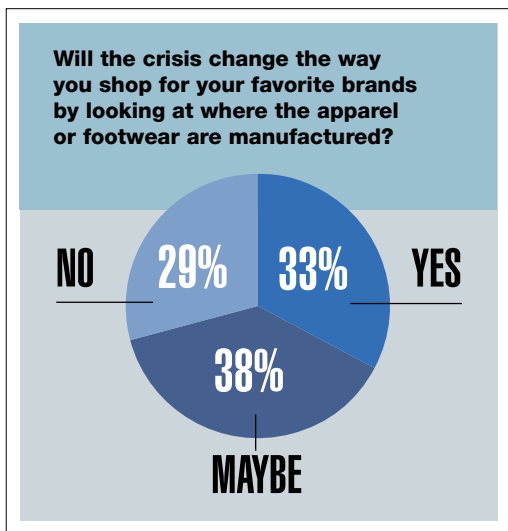
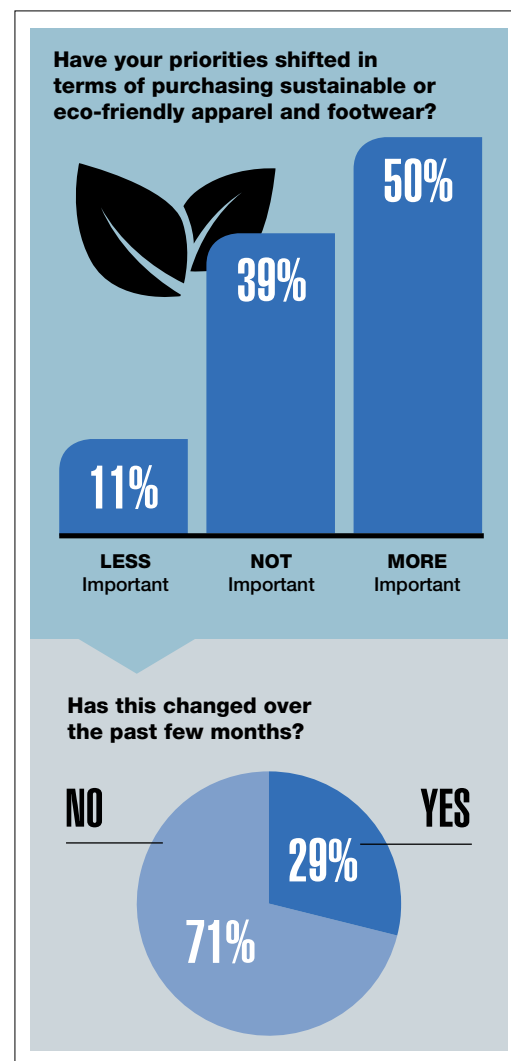
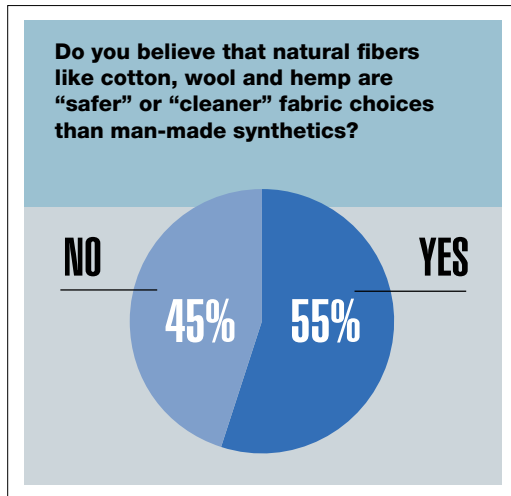
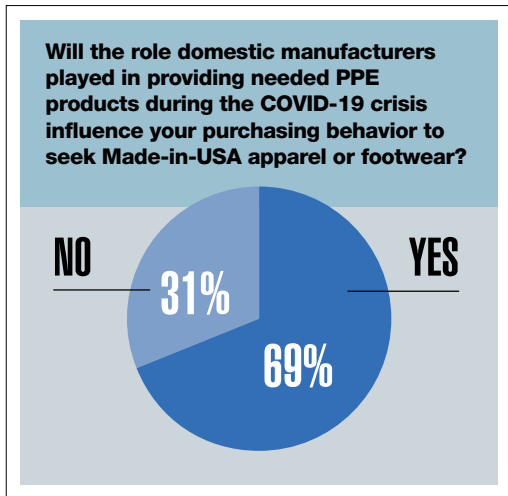
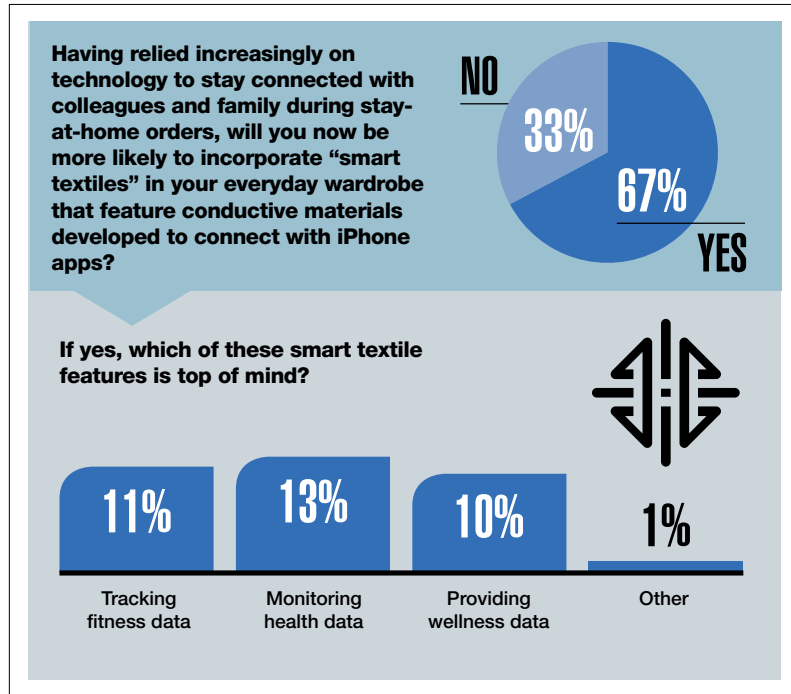
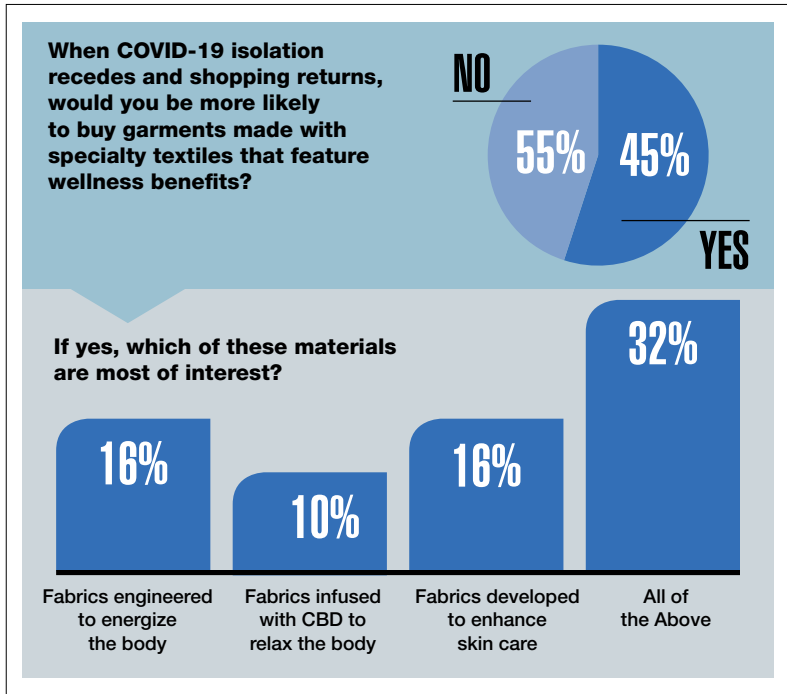
The survey, conducted by MESH01, included 420 respondents, men and women, with an average age of 35 years old.



SEIZE THE TREND!

Trend Insight Consumer is a feature within Textile Insight that delivers research conducted on the MESH01 Platform. MESH01 collects data from a select panel of sports enthusiasts. For information on the Mesh1 Platform, contact Brian Bednarek at 603-766-0957 or brian.bednarek@mesh01.com. For more information on Trend Insight Consumer and how your company can participate, contact Jeff Nott at 516-305-4711 or jnott@formula4media.com.





- Please rank from 1-7 the importance of these textile performance features in your short-term purchasing decision-making.**
- #1 Durability
 - #2 Weatherproof/Breathable
 - #3 Stretch
 - #4 Wicking
 - #5 Eco-Friendly
 - #6 Antimicrobial
 - #7 Reflective
- 1 being the most important

OUT OF CONTEXT

Textiles on the Trail



By Kurt Gray

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR TRAILHEAD parking lots look like, but here in Colorado ours are packed full, like Fourth of July full, every day of the week. In this state if you're not at work or drinking expensive craft beer, you go outside. The pandemic favored the latter and combined with excellent late spring weather, the locals set out to hit our trails, roads, and rivers. I drove ten thousand miles back and forth across Colorado during the last couple of months and witnessed overflowing trailhead parking lots from Golden to Grand Junction. Safer inside just didn't make sense to Coloradans; we knew we'd be better off outside.

A great many of those outdoor recreationalists are what we in the trade used to call "gummies." They are relatively inexperienced yet enthusiastic beginners, who can usually be identified by their inappropriate footwear and dazed but happy attitude. Spending longer amounts of time outdoors and going farther afield leads them to turn to better performing gear to support their new love of roaming and wandering. The specialty trade looks to nurture these newbies into enthusiasts who will spend a large portion of their earnings

on a passion-slash-hobby. Specialty retail offers personal advice and a curated product choice flavored by local experience. Enthusiasts trust specialists.

Then along comes a contagion. And you know the rest.

So where does the active consumer seeking to upgrade their gear go? Can specialty product be sold without specialists?

Textiles are sold based on color and touch, function and fit. Technical fabrics add story and some sort of promise regarding performance and comfort.

The opportunity for the textile industry now comes in the story telling. With traditional retail on its heels, and the price value relationship for consumers changing, now is a good time for the textile industry to reach out and create customers.

In the past textiles have been pushed to the market almost exclusively by brands. In that widespread equation, fabric is subjugated to the brand's image and

the meaningful differences in textiles are lost in the fine print. Now, without those brands to carry the marketing load, textiles have to tell their own stories directly to the market wherever they can find it or create it. Textiles might end up with their own Amazon stores.

Those new outdoor participants will shop where they have to, although less frequently than before. They will trust specialty retailers if they can find them, and most importantly, their values will continue to change with an emphasis on more durable, more versatile and higher quality product.

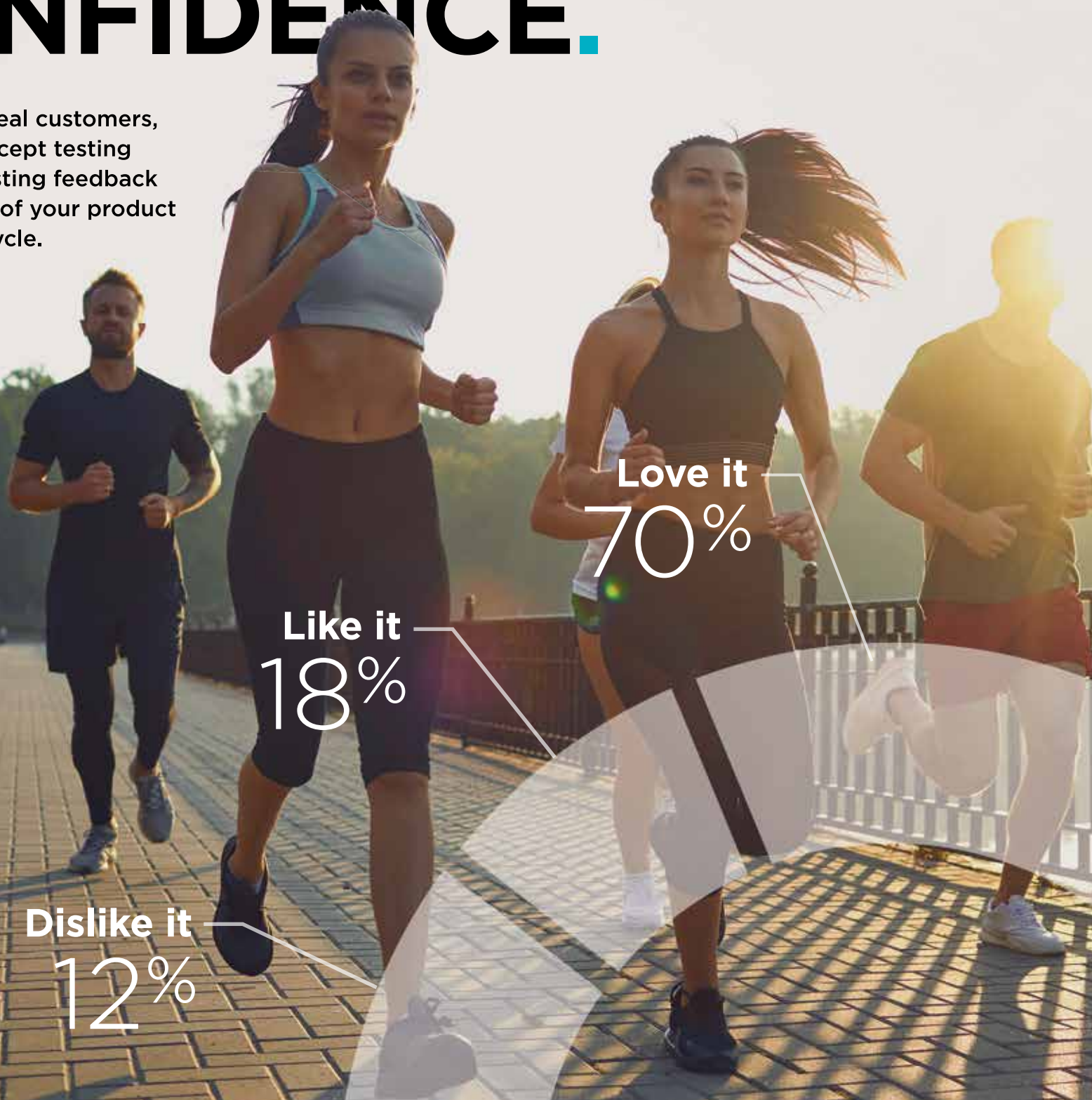
The newbies will become enthusiasts with a little direction and help from the textile industry. It is the rare opportunity to change the dynamic and create new customers. They will learn what we already know; good fabric makes a big difference. ●

Connecting
to New
Customers

Disclaimer: Mr. Gray is unclear in the difference between roaming and wandering, however he feels he probably does both at the same time. Textile Insight's Publisher may not share in his opinions or *laissez faire*.

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