

MERCHANDISE'S SUSTAINABILITY ISSUE



Learning to reuse, recycle, reduce **p16**



INDUSTRY RESEARCH

DID MERCHANDISE SURVIVE
THE PANDEMIC? **p14 >**



WHAT NEXT FOR YOUR
BUSINESS? PLANNING
FOR BETTER TIMES **p22**

BPMA MEMBER BENEFITS
FIND OUT ABOUT THE
NEW PACKAGE **p34**

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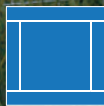
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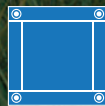
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Contents

JULY/AUGUST 2021

4 News

Need to know information for the industry

11 Ask Clive

What can jute do for you?

13 A question of trust

Peter Hill on choosing the right advisor

14 Merchandise research

The market during the pandemic

16 Sustainability report

How the industry is stepping up to consumer and client demands

22 Business planning

After a year holding on, it's time to get strategic

24 Back to work

What you need to know as staff return

26 Events

Latest guidance on what you can do with merchandise

27 Briman Voice

Challenges ahead but opportunity too

28 Technology

Get switched on to green tech

29 Marketing

How COVID has changed the playbook

30 Finance

Tread carefully as business rebuilds

33 BPMA lobbying

The industry body has the ear of Government

34 Member benefits

New package revealed

36 BPMA news

The BPMA golf day is back, plus dates for the diary

WELCOME



Welcome to the latest edition of *Product Media* magazine. We are poised on the edge of reopening UK and world business and boy, do we have a demand for merchandise!

Merchandise has been missed and the upbeat enquiry levels coming into the industry show the anticipated strong return is just around the corner. At *Product Media*, we're not going to pretend this is all over and life has got back to normal. However, with the UK market predicted to regenerate stronger than any other world economy, and the country opening up, we look forward to reporting in

the coming months the renewed successes across the industry. There are of course some obstacles ahead and none more challenging than the rise in commodity prices and freight charges; look out for the article in this issue discussing the industry view. We are also looking at a range of topics and of course looking forward to *Merchandise World* in September 2021. Reporting back on our interactions with Government, the BPMA provides an industry view on the end of Transition, six months on. The opportunities and challenges we still face plus key updates on how the promotional merchandise industry is performing. Look out for our special feature on sustainability, innovation and technology in this issue. Moved firmly

from a 'nice to have' to a 'must have', the pandemic has accelerated the awareness, drive and demand for sustainable goods. We examine the market, demands and desires from end users through to the innovation driven by a proactive industry. In this digital issue, we will be exploring your industry news, updates, regular features and covering critical topics alongside dates to look forward to. In our next *Product Media*, we return to print for *Merchandise World* in September – a bumper edition not to be missed! Share your news, views and more with us at editor@productmediamagazine.co.uk.

Carey Trevill
BPMA CEO

Product Media Magazine is available to the whole promotional merchandise industry. It is the official magazine of the British Promotional Merchandise Association (BPMA).



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Direct Textiles and Bags grows the team

Direct Textiles and Bags (DTB) has announced the appointment of Benjamin Hillary to the newly appointed role of digital marketing executive.

Responsible for the content across all digital platforms as well as the marketing of Direct Textiles and Bags, Hillary's extensive artwork, computer and marketing experience will be valuable going forward.

Clive Allcott, commercial director at Direct Textiles and Bags said: "It's exciting times here at DTB as we continue to reinforce our position as the leading bag and garment supplier in the UK. Benjamin's appointment will allow us to link with our distributors' marketing teams as we build our trading partnerships."

Hillary is joined by Melanie Tomlin in the role of purchasing manager. Tomlin brings extensive purchasing skills along with industry knowledge to the role.

Working closely with DTB supply



partners she will continue to build supply chain partnerships focusing on sustainable, ethical and recyclable products.

Beirne volunteers to administer COVID-19 vaccine

Geiger operations director, John Beirne has stepped up to help save lives as part of his ongoing volunteer work for St John's Ambulance.

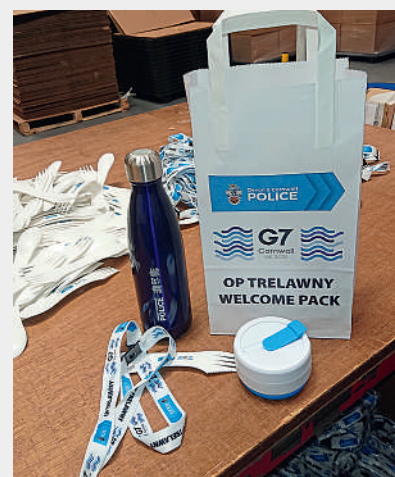
As a volunteer for the first aid charity he has been trained and actively involved in vaccinating people against COVID-19 and to date he has given more than 100 hours of his time towards vaccinating more than 100 people in several vaccination centres across London.

Beirne is training on drawing up the vaccine to get even more people into vaccination centres because only qualified healthcare professionals are able to do it.

In the past, he has provided training to the Geiger team on how to provide first-aid help in emergency situations.

Vicky Kinasz, managing director said the team was proud of his efforts. "John is truly leading our team in our commitment to going the extra mile," she said. "He is determined to make the world around him a safer place and we are honoured to be able to support him in this endeavour."

Geiger was recently named as one of the Greatest Companies to Work For by the magazine of US trade association, the Promotional Products Association International (PPAI).



Global G7 job for Boosters keeps it local

Redruth-based Boosters landed an order to supply police and support teams working at the recent G7 Conference in the county.

The event was attended by leaders of seven of the world's most important economies, and was hosted by the UK at the Carbis Bay hotel in St Ives, Cornwall.

Boosters was commissioned by Devon & Cornwall Constabulary to supply welcome packs for the 7,000 plus police and support teams who arrived in the county to manage the event. The order amounted to 25 pallets of merchandise.

Boosters' managing director, Blair Carroll said: "This has been a demanding but interesting job for us and it has been all hands on deck to complete the 7,700 packs which has involved all the products, metal water bottles, collapsible cups, lanyards and sporks collated in paper bags and boxed for distribution. In addition, we supplied head torches in bulk."

In keeping with one of the event's priorities to protect the future of the planet by moving to net zero, all products were environmentally friendly, with no single use plastic. All packaging was removed and recycled, and even the pallets were made from recycled plastic waste.



BalloonGrip posts multi-million first year sales

B-Loony's BalloonGrip balloon holder has sold more than 30 million units in its first year.

The product was launched to provide a more sustainable option ahead of the EU ban on single use plastics, which is due to come into effect in July.

It has since won multiple awards including 'Promotional Gift Award 2019', EMCA's 'Save the Planet Award 2019', SME Business Awards MK & Bucks 'Gold Winner', and 'Finalist' in SME National Business Awards for 'The Green Award'.

The balloon industry has long relied on traditional plastic balloon sticks to display and distribute printed promotional balloons to children. Under the EU's Single Use Plastics Directive, plastic balloon sticks, and those made from bio-based or bio-mass plastic with PLA additives will be banned in the EU next month, along with plastic straws, plastic cotton buds, and single-use plastic cutlery and plates. The UK is likely to bring in similar legislation post Brexit, claims



B-Loony.

The company recognised that the loss of this accessory would have a significant impact on the promotional market and the ability for end users to hand out promotional balloons, even though the balloons themselves are biodegradable.

Its R&D team developed the BalloonGrip, a recyclable and sustainable alternative, made entirely from PEFC certified cardboard, sourced from sustainably managed forests.

As well as replacing a plastic product with a sustainable alternative, the company also created an additional branding opportunity, since the balloon holder provides enough real-estate to be printed independently to the balloon.

Brands are increasingly adopting the balloon holders as the default accessory for natural rubber balloons, and including creative ideas, such as printing QR codes to direct users to their websites and programming apps to recognise the products in augmented reality.

Family Business finals for The Pen Warehouse

The Pen Warehouse has made it to the finals of the Family Business of the Year Awards 2021.

Founded by managing director, Neil Cleere, more than 25 years ago, the Aldershot business is now in its second generation.

Awards are up for grabs by sector and region, as well as national titles for entrepreneurship, innovation, small family business, and the spirit of family members.

The awards are run by Family Business United, a voice for the global family business community and a source of insight. It celebrates the contribution family firms make through the provision of employment, creation of income, as well as supporting local communities and charities.



PromoAlliance members commit to business after COVID

Three promotional merchandise service providers Sourcing City, PSI, and ASI (Advertising Specialty Institute) have renewed their international PromoAlliance.

Under the new agreement the three members will coordinate their activities on behalf of the larger international community.

The alliance, which launched in 2012, is being reimagined and reenergised for the increasing importance of global trade and cross-border transactions in the post-COVID world.

PromoAlliance said it would continue to introduce best practices, promote referrals, develop emerging market concepts, and foster education and trade shows. Members are committed to the efficient and effective

distribution model of suppliers providing products and services to distributors, and distributors serving as the sales channel to buyers of promotional products.

A key benefit of PromoAlliance is that any member of the three regional players will be recognised as a qualified promotional products professional and able to seamlessly participate in any activities hosted by all three organisations.

David Long, CEO of Sourcing City, said: "With three major players joining forces, all of our customers benefit from continued opportunities, including help finding new suppliers and distributors in the US, Europe and other parts of the world."

PSI's outgoing director Michael Freter, said:



"This trans-Atlantic partnership offers major benefits to PSI members within our business network, including new market perspectives and sources of information, ideas and inspiration."

Timothy M. Andrews, president and chief executive officer of ASI, added: "Viewing supply markets, sourcing from a worldwide perspective and working together is critical to the success of everyone in our industry, now more than ever."



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PSI Digital paves the way for year round networking

PSI Digital, the first virtual event from Europe's largest promotional products trade show drew 3,500 attendees in May with 20,000 search queries through the PSI Product Finder.

Approximately 120 companies from Germany, Austria, Portugal, Poland, Spain, Italy, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the UK were present. Company profiles were clicked on more than 10,000 times and video content was viewed live and on-demand more than 6,600 times.

The digital show replaced a planned physical event in May due to the pandemic. PSI Digital kicked-off a series of monthly online events that will lead into the next in-person trade show, which is planned to return to Düsseldorf, Germany, on January 11-13, 2022.

From June, every second Friday of the month will be a Digital Friday with a different focus, including design and product safety, Christmas, sustainability, Gusto & Gastro, outdoor, the global industry, and textiles.

Petra Lassahn, director of PSI, said: "For all of us, it was a new experience to digitally represent the products and industry topics of the promotional products industry. Even though no digital event can replace the trade show on site,



we have managed to offer the industry an event with added value. I am very proud of that."

Barbara Leithner, COO of PSI organiser Reed Exhibitions Austria & Germany, said the hybrid model for event was the future, and would help customers to do more business all year round.

PSI Virtual drew industry professionals from all over the world, with 46% of participants consuming 20 hours of live programming, distributed over 41 sessions. Keynotes, lectures, panel discussions and workshops covered the latest in digitalisation, law, marketing and social selling.

Jake sets sights on super obstacles to raise awareness of mental health

Jake Scott-Paul of Ely-based branding company Soopa Doopa is to undertake the Spartans Super obstacle race in July this year, to raise awareness and funds for mental health charity Mind.

The race boasts 25 gruelling obstacles over 10k and is a test of both physical and mental strength - a perfect challenge for raising money for what is such an important charity, now more than ever.

Scott-Paul, who will be racing with friend George Marsden said he wanted to support Mind as it was likely to see a surge in demand for its services due to the damage done to people's mental wellbeing over the prolonged lockdown.

"Having suffered with various mental health issues over the years, I know just how damaging recent events and social isolation will have been, to those with pre-existing conditions and those who have never experienced issues before," he said. "During this last lockdown, it was exercise



that kept me going. While we are doing this for a bit of fun, we felt it was a great opportunity to raise awareness around mental health, an area that affects so many people. The more we can get people talking about what's going on inside, the better everyone will be."

The pair have almost raised their £2,500



target and would like to thank all their donors, including shirt sponsors, Brewers Paints, The Cambridge Joiner, Soopa Doopa, Burnt Orange Creative, Business Growth Coaches Network and Squeeze Football.

To make a donation or keep up to date on their progress, visit [justgiving.com/fundraising/jspgfm](https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/jspgfm)

Impamark gets nifty with its fifty for Farleigh Hospice

Impamark is helping two charities while doing its bit to tackle climate change with a creative approach to the Farleigh Hospice £50 challenge.

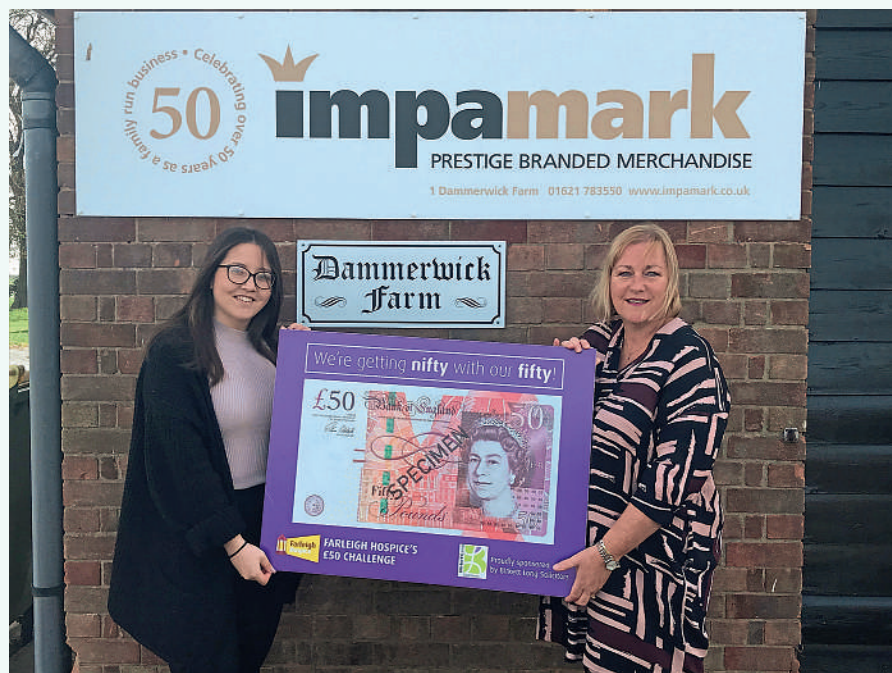
The promotional merchandise supplier is participating in this year's £50 challenge for the first time and will be helping Farleigh Hospice, the National Trust and the planet with its novel fundraising idea.

The Burnham-on-Crouch business is using the £50 start-up capital, provided by sponsor Birkett Long, to buy ten trees from the National Trust and will be raffling them off to raise money in aid of Farleigh Hospice. The trees will be planted by the Trust as part of its pledge to plant 20 million trees by 2030.

Winners will be able to dedicate their tree in memory of a loved one. The purchase of these trees supports the trust with its pledge to tackle climate change through the planting of new woodlands.

Impamark owner and managing director, Nicky Crisp said: "We're delighted to be involved in the £50 Challenge for Farleigh Hospice. My father was supported by Farleigh, so this is a very personal opportunity to help raise funds for them. The coronavirus pandemic has been the most challenging period for charities and we are excited to participate and make a difference."

Michelle Martin, corporate fundraiser at Farleigh Hospice said: "This year's



challenge is celebrating the amazing work of the Farleigh Hospice nurses who have been working on the frontline of the pandemic, supporting the NHS and delivering hospice care within people's homes and out in the community. All the money raised from the raffle will go towards supporting our nurses, helping them continue to care for people with a

life-limiting illness across mid-Essex and offering vital support to patients and their families free of charge."

Tickets are on sale until 30 June and the raffle will be drawn by an online generator on the 9 July at 12pm.

To make a donation and purchase raffle tickets, visit justgiving.com/fundraising/impamark-farleigh.

The Pen Warehouse and Snap Products raise awareness of mental health

The Pen Warehouse and Snap Products teamed up to raise awareness for the 21st Mental Health Awareness Week.

Resources were shared with their employees, including ways to get involved and look after mental wellbeing.

This year's theme was 'Nature'. Across the country, people celebrated the mental health benefits of being around nature in their local community in a range of digital and creative ways.

Marketing programme manager, Monica Malfa, said: "Mental health is very important to us and this year's theme is so fitting. Nature is a powerful and free resource, and the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted just how important nature is to mental wellbeing."

Mark Rowland chief executive of the Mental Health Foundation said: "Since the beginning of the pandemic, millions of us turned to nature to help us get through lockdowns and our research shows that good mental health depends on us being able to connect with nature in some way and its power in both prevention of and recovery from poor mental health."

During the week, people were encouraged to connect with nature in simple ways, such as listening to birdsong, tending plants, or noticing trees, flowers or animals, and share them on social media.



Sustainability IS THE PRIMARY DRIVER FOR BUSINESS

BPMA CEO Carey Trevill has been working with the BPMA board and members over the last few months to establish how to take the standards expected from our industry from discussion to implementable reality across business in our sector.

With 18 months that have changed the world, trading and heightened attitudes to many critical factors influencing buyer behaviour, the long term is now fundamental to many immediate and future transactions.

Studies over the last five years have demonstrated a steady increase in demand. As far back as 2015 a Guardian study showed 70% of consumers would be positively influenced by sustainable packaging, product and recyclable materials. A recent US and UK GWI survey showed 60% would pay more for 'eco-friendly' and while price is a barrier, where possible, these consumers would opt for eco where they could.

"Translate this consumer behaviour to your core buyer's view on how they need to buy for their event, brand and service. The age of your buyer could also indicate that you should be on top of expectations for sustainable and environmentally friendly goods," said Trevill. "They want to see a transparent, traceable supply chain and you can substantiate any claims you make. But most of all, where it is relevant, present the solutions where your product makes a difference to your client's environmental goals. Understanding this better will result in competitive advantage and put promotional merchandise into a progressive place."

The BPMA is now creating a system to help identify the baseline markers for sustainable products to aid selection. Working on recognised information, the BPMA aims to establish a code for products to select based on a myriad of needs so they can be aligned with end user requests,

aiding distributors to select best fit products to answer a brief or respond to a specific client ask.


"This is not about products being 'good' or 'bad' – this is about buyer choice and expanding the excellent information already provided by suppliers. Together with the recommendation that HS/Commodity Codes are supplied to support customs declarations we also need to provide more information. We know distributors are being asked for increasingly complex information to support a sustainably aware purchase, so this is a logical step. The challenge for the industry is the most effective and efficient way to provide the information. We are testing at the moment," Trevill concludes.

Together with a drive to 'Reuse Reduce

and Recycle' as a demonstrable traceable action, the BPMA has provided consumer research to members in the last six months to reinforce why a move to harmonise industry is necessary, answering the calls from the wider industry to work towards net zero goals and 'green' product.

While the pandemic has both accelerated the conversation and slowed progress due to the stop start nature of the economy in recent months, the industry is clear this is a primary driver for business in 2021 and 2022.

"Don't underestimate buyer expectation you have this covered," says Trevill.

For more information on how merchandise companies are responding to demands for sustainability, turn to p16. 

First Biomaster antimicrobial cotton bag

Jutebag has a cotton tote that adds built in lasting antimicrobial product protection to a reusable bag.

Developed in conjunction with partner Addmaster, the 5oz cotton bag has features the Biomaster additive in the fabric. Biomaster provides antimicrobial protection, and in independent ISO 20743:2013 tests is proven to inhibit the growth of microbes including harmful food-borne strains of bacteria by more than 99%.

This protection lasts for the useful lifetime of the item – and for added reassurance, the bag can be washed up to 50 times without affecting the efficacy of the Biomaster additive.

Jutebag's Parit Shah said: "The popularity of reusable bags has soared in recent years, especially since the

introduction of the plastic bag tax. Now we have a product which is not only good for the planet, but is also more hygienic to use."

He added: "There is less chance of cross-contamination from harmful bacteria each time our antimicrobial cotton bag is used."





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MATERIAL WORLD

Knowing your materials is the first step to creating textile products that deliver. **Clive Allcott** explains some basics



Jute

'The Golden Fibre' as it's referred to, is a silky type of fibre with a golden sheen.

With the move away from the plastic bagging, Jute has established itself as the go to for the bag for life in many leading supermarket and high street stores. There are many reasons for this but the most important is that jute is fully sustainable. It is estimated that there is enough jute to provide everybody in the world with two bags per year without exhausting supply.

It is also one of the most affordable natural fibres that can be spun into coarse, strong threads. And it is 100% biodegradable.

As well as being a strong, affordable natural fibre which has a low carbon and water footprint it is also a very versatile material. The whole plant can be used with the fibres used in fabrics and twine along with the outer and leaves being utilised as firewood and food.

The Jute plant takes approximately four to six months to grow before being harvested. It is said that there is no genetic



modification, no fertilisers and its water footprint is low as it is rain fed rather than irrigated. India and Bangladesh are the main growing countries with the majority of products coming from these areas.

Jute/Juco mix (Juco)

With the success of woven jute for bags there became branding demands for a smoother surface for decoration and personalisation. By mixing cotton and

jute together Juco was created – it is a 75% jute and 25% cotton blend.

Juco offers all the natural benefits and qualities of jute however the addition of cotton into the weave has allowed products to be decorated in finer detail and is now a viable option in the marketplace.

Ask your local bag supplier what options are available either bespoke or off the shelf.

Happy selling,
Clive (The Bag and Clothing Guru). PM



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A QUESTION OF TRUST

The relationship you have with your professional advisors can be one of the closest in your business life, says **Peter Hill**

One of the best parts of my role as a partner in an accounting practice is that I get to work with a wide range of businesses.

I have perhaps half a dozen conversations with clients each day. Their businesses are different, their ambitions and objectives very personal, and the financial circumstances unique.

What I find fascinating is that the issues I discuss are so often very similar.

That makes some sense as the fundamentals of running a good business are just that... fundamental.

For example...

- Looking after your customers well will drive sales.
- Managing your people effectively will increase productivity.
- Controlling your finances properly will help avoid crisis.
- Having the right business structures will protect the value you build.

Technical issues like the tax rules, insolvency law, companies act requirements and so on, are also the same for everyone.

But many business owners often feel they are the only ones dealing with these issues, or that their situation is somehow unique.

As an accountant with almost 40 years' experience, I have encountered most issues hundreds of times, where my clients may encounter them only once or twice.

Age, experience and education have allowed me to improve my ability to advise in these key areas. I studied hard and sat many exams, I learnt from colleagues smarter than me, and I worked with hundreds of clients, to apply the same advice in personalised and tailored ways.

By contrast, many business owners seem to feel that they should become experts by osmosis, absorbing the knowledge and skills needed. They are often reluctant to ask for help for fear of embarrassment or of asking a 'stupid question'. A situation often referred to these days as 'imposter syndrome'.

So, it is really important for any business owner to know a few key points:

- You know more than you think you do.
- You are the expert in your business.
- It is never a stupid question if you don't know the answer.
- Your advisors want to help, and will have seen the situation many times.

The key for all of this, is to build a relationship with your professional advisors where you are happy to ask any questions and be confident in the advice they give you. In our firm, the objective is to become the prime 'trusted advisor', and we are often the first call on any issue of concern, even when we cannot provide specific guidance (such as divorce for example) because they trust us to provide sound common sense advice and signpost them to the right lawyer.

Building a rapport isn't always possible for a variety of reasons, and I have on occasion suggested that a good client seek out another advisor as I didn't believe the client wasn't getting the best from us. No blame or recriminations, just the realism that people don't always gel.

So, what does this mean for you? Consider a few questions that might crop up from time to time, and on which you might want some advice. That could be:

- Tackling a performance issue with a very senior employee.
- A personal crisis like a marriage breakdown.
- A question on tax saving that you know might cross the line.


Would you have the trust and confidence to approach your accountant or other advisor with these issues? If not, then perhaps you need to find another advisor.

Once you do have an advisor you trust, then make sure you have regular conversations about key issues for you. We would normally meet at least quarterly and usually deliberately without an agenda. We just talk about their concerns, their ambitions, current challenges, the ideas we are using with other clients, and of course the numbers (business performance, personal wealth etc).

The BPMA virtual seminar (see p22) explored exactly this last point. The problem with a passive accountant who waits to be asked for advice, is that the client has to know the right



questions to ask. So, I will just talk through the current hot topics in case these hit a sore spot with you, so you can seek out advice on what you may want to do about it.

Peter Hill is director at business consultants Mark Holt and the author of Pricing for Profit 



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LOOKING TO BUILD BACK

Sourcing City's latest review of the year in promotional merchandise made for sobering reading, but there are glimmers of hope for the future

For any promotional merchandise business that has felt that the past year has been uniquely tough, David Long has a message. "You are not alone."

The Sourcing City boss was presenting the latest figures from his annual review of merchandise businesses to BPMA members during a webinar. In recent years it has been a story of almost continual growth for the sector, but data and analysis of product enquiries from January 2020 to April 2021 paint a very different picture.

Sourcing City analysed the trends in promotional merchandise enquiries since the pandemic hit the UK.

Going back to January 2020, the year promised much with 102% of the level of enquiries generated in Sourcing City compared to the previous year. However, nervousness around the emerging coronavirus threat entered the market in February, and enquiries

"dropped off a cliff" as soon as the national lockdown kicked in on 16 March, with a significant decline in industry enquiries for the remainder of March 2020.

In April things got worse with enquiries dropping to less than a quarter (22.6%) of the equivalent month in 2019.

May saw enquiries remain low as companies regathered themselves and some businesses turned to selling PPE items to mitigate losses. However, relatively few made up losses this way, said Long, as it's not core business for merchandise companies.

With sales declining, cost-cutting was required. Government grants, business loans, and the furlough scheme helped companies retain their teams and in June things improved slightly, with enquiries up to 46% of last year.

July and August were steady at about 40%, before September's increase to 50% seemed to herald a recovery.

However, this hope proved short lived as COVID cases spiked and business levels dropped again in December 2020, to be followed by another lockdown in the new year.

With events still cancelled, including the start of the year Merchandise World, enquiries were poor at the beginning of 2021.

In comparison, March 2021 seemed more positive as enquiries reached similar levels to September 2020; however, the number of enquiries was still more than 50,000 down on March 2019.

The worst month for enquiries last year was April in 2020, so seeing a growth of 183% in April 2021 may have looked encouraging but it was still only 59% of April 2019.

Meanwhile, distributors report conversion rates have worsened due to customers making slow decisions, or no decisions at all.

Back to face to face at Merchandise World

The UK's premier promotional merchandise show, Merchandise World is back after an absence of 18 months. It returns to a familiar venue, the Marshall Arena, Milton Keynes on Wednesday 8 September 2021.

The Government has changed its roadmap so that England should be out of lockdown by 19 July. Scotland has also pushed back its easing of Covid-19 restrictions to the same date to give the chance for more people to be vaccinated as cases of the Delta variant have increased.

Merchandise World stand sales for both this coming September and the January 2022 show at the Ricoh Arena are described as buoyant and more than 120 suppliers have already booked stands to exhibit at the events, with more expected to commit soon.

Sourcing City founder, David Long said he was excited for the show to be coming back in September. The show will be COVID secure, with Merchandise World taking advantage of the knowledge Marshall Arena will have gained from events it runs before September.

With 68 stands already booked and 117 prospects in discussion, Long predicted around 118 stands for the show, which would be just short of the 126 that came to Milton Keynes in 2019 for the inaugural event there.

Distributors are indicating that they are keen to visit, however current uncertainty in the market makes it too early to forecast visitor numbers, and the industry is currently smaller than previously, he said.

"However, there is a clear desire to all meet again, and there is confidence that distributors will visit in good numbers as they all want to see their suppliers again," he said. "I expect the market to be buoyant in September and people will want to come."

Merchandise World will provide a great opportunity for exhibitors to have quality conversations with restructured distributors who are ready to take on the expected upturn in the market.

Angela Wagstaff, chair of BPMA said: "There is no better way of doing business and building relationships than face to face, and the appetite for Merchandise World once again is clear. With the extra measures planned to keep us all safe and well, September is the perfect time for us all to come together to plan for the future."



"Our sector is totally dependent on confidence and if customers are not confident, they don't spend money," said Long.

However, the sector remains positive and resilient. "The big surprise is that there haven't been as many casualties as expected, which shows the quality of the business people out there," he said.

He predicts a big bounce back for the sector, although it will have to wait a little longer. "Unfortunately, our industry is the first to be hit and one of the last to recover, and a lot of the business is not recoverable – all those events that didn't happen are not spend delayed, but spend lost."

Between February 2020 and April 2021 Sourcing City enquiries fell by 49%, which represents 628,000 lost enquiries for Sourcing City companies whose turnover levels are half those of pre-COVID times.

There are crumbs of comfort though, he said. From July, when the latest end of lockdown restrictions comes around, there will be a massive opportunity as companies start to spend again.

Carey Trevill, CEO of the BPMA pointed out that end users are looking to spend again, with marketing predictions indicating that the UK will have a stronger recovery than other comparable economies.

"It may be 2022 before we are back, but we will get there," she said.

As it looks to build back better, merchandise faces other challenges. Tactile products are a problem at the minute when handing out samples may not be appropriate. As highlighted in this issue, the environmental challenges facing plastics and waste are here to stay.

Long said he expects entrepreneurial merchandise companies to come up with the products that brands want to show their environmental credentials.

Trevill said: "It's a baseline ask particularly as buyers get younger and younger – it's fundamental to them. The last year has accelerated that conversation around how things are produced. Some people may think possible price issues will override it and that it's a fad, but it really isn't."

Long looked to positives from the past year and said it had given companies a chance to reassess their businesses and restructure, which left them in a position to restart with confidence as business



picks up. "People have reviewed their costs and where they add value. Many companies have probably returned to profit on a month to month basis, albeit at lower turnover. That's good news."

A problem coming down the line will be finding quality staff as growth returns, he predicts.

Be that as it may, Sourcing City's reports notes an air of confidence starting to develop because of the UK's successful vaccination campaign and the fact that the end to lockdown is in sight, despite the recent postponement of 'Freedom Day' to increase vaccination levels.

Recovery is built on confidence, and that has taken a big hit in the past 18 months. However, when it does eventually return, the Sourcing City report is optimistic for the outcome.

It predicts: "We fully expect enquiries and sales to increase quickly if the end of lockdown is successful. The spending will happen when confidence returns and events and promotions restart, and we might just see that happen in the next few months – and we will all be grateful for that!"

One worry, pointed out by economist Roger Martin-Fagg in the report is that productive capacity has not been maintained in merchandise businesses.

As demand starts to rebound, businesses should expect to sell 13 months of output in 12 months, so the next year will be busy. An upside is that the Government's 130% capital investment allowance is an incentive to expand productivity.

After a year and half like no other, being busy could be a nice problem to have for many companies.

Upcoming Merchandise World events

Wednesday 8th September 2021 at Marshall Arena, Milton Keynes

Wednesday 26th & Thursday 27th January

2022 at Ricoh Arena, Coventry

CHX Products' new range is made from a biodegradable polymer

STEPPING UP *sustainability*

How is the promotional merchandise sector responding to the demands for greener products, processes and performance. *Product Media* found out

As time goes by it is becoming abundantly clear that moves to improve sustainability are moving from the margins to the mainstream.

In April, the government announced it would put the world's most ambitious climate change target into law, to reduce emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels. The overall aim is to reach net zero by 2050.

Car companies are increasingly looking to an electric future. Jaguar plans to sell only electric cars from 2025, Volvo from 2030, and Ford says all vehicles sold in Europe will be electric by 2030.

Let's not forget the humble plastic bag tax, which went up to 10p in May and was extended so that all retailers must charge for single use bags. Since its introduction in 2015, the number of bags used has declined by 95% and £180m has been raised for charity.

Recent research by the BPMA underlined that consumers increasingly look for products that don't cost the earth.

It is important that promotional items are useful to consumers – otherwise they can be seen as wasteful in terms of both space and landfill contribution. Consumers are less interested in something being free than its impact on the planet it seems. The top three important qualities when receiving merchandise are that it is useful, relevant, and reusable.

The report is backed by a Deloitte study into the sustainable consumer from March which looked at how attitudes had been affected during the pandemic. Though slightly down on last year, ethical and sustainability issues remain a key driver for almost a third of consumers, who claim to have stopped purchasing certain brands due to related concerns. As with previous research, around one in five has opted for low carbon transport or switched to renewable energy.

So, what is the merchandise sector doing to make its voice heard? The good news is that the message has been heard loud and clear by many companies in the sector. *Product Media* has rounded up a few of

them for our report into sustainability, but it is by no means comprehensive.

Plenty of other companies are doing their bit and adapting their products, processes and approaches. This is just the start.

PLASTIC BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT

Plastic has become public enemy number one in the eyes of some. However, science has provided more sustainable alternatives that can fulfil the flexibility of plastic with less of an environmental headache.

CHX Products has launched a new biodegradable polymer; rHIPS.b, which is made from 100% waste and recycled products.

rHIPS.b naturally biodegrades in compost, landfill and water by being broken down by over 600 naturally occurring microbes. The biodegradation process is 200 times faster than standard plastic and is the first of its kind on the market.

CHX Products has designed and created a range of 12 promotional merchandise products in the five muted colour ways –



Sky, Sand, Tor, Seaweed and Buoy – that are all suitable for white ink printing.

Products include badges, card holders, sporks, and coasters, and will appeal to an eco-conscious consumer and offer brands an affordable, eco alternative to other materials on the market.

The range is designed and manufactured in the UK, and distributed from Cornwall, meaning no air miles.

TRACK AND TRACE

Another company that has looked to help its clients to better understand the impact of our choices on the planet, is Mantisworld.

Last year, the textiles company launched its Impact Calculator, a handy tool that shares the impact and story of every garment it makes. QR codes printed on the care labels mean customers are now able to see for themselves the true environmental impact of picking organic over conventional cotton – from the water saved to the land farmed without pesticides – simply by scanning with their smartphone.

This technology also allows wearers to see the full supply chain, starting from the raw material, so there's no doubt about the true origins of their garment.



Pinksheep finds its own path



Surrey-based distributor Pinksheep is on a mission to help its clients become more sustainable.

Not only has the company made changes at a business level with initiatives such as switching to green energy and transitioning to electric company cars, it has created a programme to make it easier for its clients to buy more sustainably.

Now, it is trying to encourage more suppliers to come on board and provide the information it needs to convince customers that they are actually buying sustainable goods. It also wants suppliers to offer better deals to customers to counter the accusation that buying sustainably needs to cost more.

Sales director, Phil Law says the scheme, called Ora, will appeal to customers who want to genuinely make a difference, and not to those who simply want to jump on an eco-bandwagon.

"As a small business we can have a far reaching impact through our client base by encouraging them to change their buying behaviour away from products that end up as landfill," he says.

Law admits that it can be confusing knowing what various schemes and badges mean, which is why Pinksheep launched its own. "There is no real guidance in the industry. We could have waited for it but decided to pioneer our own standards."

He says he is not a fan of badges of

accreditation, which can just be money making exercises. A company or product may not carry a certain accreditation because they don't want to pay to be part of a scheme, even if they have a sustainable story to tell.

With Ora, he says that Pinksheep have delivered something unique in the promotional industry.

"We do this better than anyone and we go much deeper. As a programme it is constantly evolving – it's not an off the shelf system. It is proving to be a real differentiator between us and the competition."

Ora is exclusive to Pinksheep clients and works across three main areas. The company vision is to sustainably source at least 50% of merchandise by 2025. "And we promise to members that we won't participate in greenwashing," says Law.

It provides sustainable buying choices; contributes to a carbon offsetting programme, and provides reporting data on how much of a company's merchandise spend is sustainable.

Staff are trained to proactively suggest more sustainable changes to their clients.

Buying sustainably is not always easy admits Law. Many products that make sustainability claims don't live up to them he says. Pinksheep has its own assessment method of all products based on nine criteria which the company keeps secret.

The sustainability, or otherwise, of a product is indicated with a traffic light system – green for good, red for bad, and amber where the result is mixed.

"For some products there isn't really a sustainable option – like power banks," he says.

Clients are rewarded for making sustainable buying decisions, and less so for less sustainable ones. Rewards go towards a tree planting scheme.

It's important that suppliers get involved, he says. "We need the evidence to show that products are sustainable and we want the supply chain to be a benefit to members."

Law wants Ora members to feel a sense of common purpose – a bit like a social club, he says.





October includes clothing, caps, folders and bags. For every purchase, 2% of the price is donated to water.org, which provides safe drinking water and sanitation around the world.

HOLISTIC APPROACH

When it comes to a sustainable story, there are many aspects that a business can emphasise, such as how green its products are, its trade practices, and the sustainability of its business processes.

Pen manufacturer Senator operates its print, assembly, injection moulding, mug finishing and administration from 20,000 m² plant in Germany. The entire electrical energy for the company has been obtained ecologically from renewable raw materials for years – the only company in the industry to do so.

Senator focuses on sustainability when developing its products. Its plastic pens are fitted with refills that are designed to give a smooth writing experience lasting up to 16 times longer than other pens. This means the pen and the brand associated with it are with the end user far longer before disposal.

Most promotional items are perceived as 'single use' items, so Senator intends to redesign all of its products so that the refill can be replaced.

ENDING GREENWASHING

As Mantisworld indicates, sustainability starts with transparency and knowing that you can trust claims made about a company and its products.

Xindao has recently launched its Impact Collection, which it says will end this 'greenwashing' and tell a true story about sustainability.

The Impact Collection of products is a range that aims to make an impact on the use of water.

Water is a global issue from the melting Arctic to dried out areas. By 2025, it is estimated that 50% of the world's population will experience so called 'water stress', which is having to deal with a lack of sufficient and ready to use water. Water is a very tangible subject.

By using recycled polyesters and cotton, the Impact Collection saves thousands of litres of water used in the lifecycle of virgin yarns. Impact products are produced using yarn derived from shredded water bottles or post-industrial cotton.

However, as detailed in last issue of *Product Media*, it can be hard to be certain of the provenance of some materials. 'Organic' cotton for example, may be mixed with non-organic and passed off.

Impact uses a system called Aware, a tracer that is added to recycled fibre and has its own unique fingerprint. Yarns can therefore be scanned and identified with the

identity stored securely on the blockchain.

Aware verifies sustainable content in a final product and guarantees the genuine used recycled fabric materials and the water impact reduction claim. Buyers can therefore be provided with evidence that the product they are buying has water saving credentials.

The range, which was launched last



Growing popularity

It's not easy being green, but manufacturer Sow Easy has 25 years' experience of sustainable products so can offer some tips

What questions should buyers be asking when they are looking for sustainable products?

To find truly sustainable products buyers need to look for ones that not only sustain the planet but go one step further by actually nurturing it in a tangible way – not just in clever marketing words!

Products that are helping the environment are those that can 'show you', not just tell you how they benefit the planet and society. For example, using waste products (like the coir pellets in our grow kits), using plant-based materials, and making tangible donations in time and money to causes. Buyers need to expect total transparency when it comes to sustainability claims.

How do you avoid greenwashing?

As customers prove they are willing to pay more for products that are sustainable many companies are trying to make what they do sound better than it is. Always look for companies and products who are acting sustainably, and not just telling you they are. The other sign that a company is serious about sustainability is the length of time it has been investing in being sustainable. Here at Sow Easy we have been on a mission to reduce waste from the promotional industry for over 25 years, long before it was sexy.

What messages are companies looking to communicate with sustainable products?

Brands want to ensure that their workforce and customers know that they take their corporate social responsibility seriously. Over half (59%) of the UK workforce believe the companies they work for should do more in the way of CSR activity (Qualtrics study). In general, promotional items are one of the quickest ways to show a brand cares; using zero waste products, like Seedsticks, is a great start.

We have seen a big trend in companies investing in staff wellness and mental health recently. Some of the big brand names have been sending desktop gardens to their employees to brighten their desks while they work from home. Clients like the idea that, as they promote growth, the message is backed-up by real plants

What is popular at the moment?

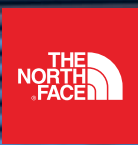
Our Seedsticks shapes are always popular as they can be fully customised and even bespoke shaped. We've

also seen a growth in demand for seeds that attract wildlife, aiding biodiversity.

The Desktop Eco Cubes are also big sellers in 2021, which seems to be because of a rise in gardening interest and house plants. As we have all been spending more time at home, we've been amazed at how many of our products have featured on social media feeds with recipients being proud to show off what they have grown, thanking the brands that gave them the seeds.



tear it > plant it > watch it grow



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Senator's popular 'Bio' range includes three pens made using the biobased polymer PLA (poly lactic acid) from sustainable sugar cane. PLA is one of the most efficient biopolymers: yielding 1kg of polymer for 1.6kg of sugar cane, compared to other biopolymers which can require three times more feedstock to produce the same amount of plastic.

Biobased plastics offer an alternative to products made from fossil fuels, with sustainability benefits like a reduced CO2 footprint, and additional end-of life options.

COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Distributor Geiger has joined the United Nations Global Compact and has been awarded a gold medal from EcoVadis during a recent sustainability assessment, that placed it in the top 5% of all companies assessed.

The UN Global Compact aims to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and protect the planet. Participating organisations commit to doing business responsibly and to discovering opportunities to innovate and solve societal and global challenges. More than 10,000 companies have joined since it launched in 2000.

EcoVadis independently assesses businesses on the quality of their sustainability practices, rating environmental, social and ethical performance. As of 2020, it has assessed the performance and practices of more than 75,000 companies.

Geiger joined the EcoVadis programme in 2019 and was awarded a silver medal. March 2021's assessment upgraded it to the prestigious gold medal – the result of several months of targeted work by the Geiger team looking at improving working practices across key areas including

environment, labour and human rights, ethics, and sustainable procurement.

Vicky Kinasz, managing director of Geiger UK, said: "The EcoVadis process has been very good at highlighting improvement areas to focus on and helping to put in place real, tangible actions that make a difference."

STORMING AHEAD

As a brand that focuses on the great outdoors, performance clothing brand Stormtech has a weather eye on sustainability with continually evolving practices. It looks to minimise its environmental impact and enhance sustainable practices through responsible design, sourcing, and daily business operations.

This includes such roadmarkers as building products that last to extend usage and minimise environmental impact. A commitment to quality workmanship is backed by a five-year warranty with a sustainable product care programme to extend product life and performance.

Sustainable sourcing means the supply chain is built on strong, transparent, and trusted business partnerships, focused on transparency, traceability and zero waste at all stages. Stormtech works with compliance-certified mills, factories and supply partners, ensuring the sustainability of both social and environmental practices.

Recycled content is sought and used in business operations and new product developments. Exclusive material technologies and recycled polyester will feature prominently in future seasons. Starting later this year, all products will begin the transition to biodegradable polybag packaging.

To become Forest Derived Materials (FDM) policy compliant, the business is committed to sustainable sourcing of

The sustainable consumer

Key findings from Deloitte's sustainable consumer study:

- Sustainability remains a key consideration for consumers in 2021 with 32% of consumers highly engaged with adopting a more sustainable lifestyle
- 28% of consumers have stopped buying certain products due to ethical or environmental concerns
- Gen Z are adopting more sustainable behaviours than any other groups: 50% reduced how much they buy and 45% stopped purchasing certain brands because of ethical or sustainability concerns
- Overall, lack of interest remains the main barrier to adopting a sustainable lifestyle, followed by the perceived expense and issues around accessing relevant information
- Consumers want to do more but many want brands to take the lead with 64% of consumers wanting brands to reduce packaging, 50% want information on how to recycle and 46% need clarity on sourcing of products
- It is in frequent, essential purchases like groceries, household items, personal care and clothing that consumers say they most often consider sustainability
- The five sustainable brand practices that consumers value most include: waste reduction, reducing carbon footprint, providing sustainable packaging, committing to ethical work practices, and respecting human rights
- There is a 50/50 split between those willing to pay more or not for environmental and ethical brands.

wood-based fibres, cellulosic fabrics, and paper products to address deforestation and forest degradation. It has reduced printed marketing materials by over 80% in the past year.

Products are feather- and fur-free, and an animal derived materials policy outlines the restrictions on use of materials sourced from endangered animal habitats.

WHAT NEXT FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

Companies have done what they needed to do to hold it together for the last year. Now they can start to look ahead and plan, says **Peter Hill**

Business advisor and BPMA columnist Peter Hill recently took part in a BPMA webinar alongside BPMA CEO Carey Trevill.

The session looked at what issues businesses will have to address as we seem to be emerging from the uncertainty of the past year. Businesses have been "in distress mode for a while" said Trevill, and they have coped well to an extent, but were now feeling quite exposed as they sought to rebuild.

What advice do they need as they ease out of lockdown and into recovery mode, she asked Hill?

CT: There have already been some business failures, particularly in retail and leisure. I know many BPMA members are feeling a little financially exposed right now. What are you advising other clients to do to minimise the risks as they move forward?

PH: Many business run a single entity that does everything. Employs people, buys stock, makes things, chases debts, borrows money, owns assets etc. If a catastrophe strikes and all your financial eggs are in one basket, you could lose decades of hard work. Covid is an extreme example, but I have seen many businesses go bust over a single large bad debt, a legal dispute, or an employee tribunal that doesn't go their way.

All businesses should consider a two company structure as a minimum. A holding company to sit on top and own assets, brands, intellectual property, cash or anything else of value, and a trading business underneath to run the day to day activities. A catastrophe here could at least see the value in the holding company protected from creditors of the trading business.

Complex rules apply so take advice!

If you agree two companies is sensible, then consider whether multiple businesses may be worthwhile to split different activities such as online vs offline sales, or core trade vs niche premium services.

CT: The pandemic has seen many business owners consider the merits of just cashing in their chips. What sort of options for exit are your clients thinking about, and what are you promoting or warning them about?

PH: We have had more conversations with clients about exit options in the last year than the previous five.

There are many and varied exit options and all come with very different pros, cons and costs. What is interesting now is that there is plenty of money in the system. Investors and venture capitalists are desperate to find good businesses to buy or invest in, and money is cheap to borrow for management teams or other buyers.

Most clients I speak with see the options as 'sell the lot and retire', or 'keep going until they keel over'. There are many options for phased exits with levels of decreasing involvement. It isn't an all or nothing choice

The key point is to explore all your options and develop a plan now, even if you think an exit is years away. If your accountant isn't up to this task, talk to us. We can work just on this issue and leave the routine work with your existing accountant if you want.

One final word of warning. If you are thinking "I'll just do another few years to build the value a bit bigger" you may find any increase wiped out by a much more aggressive tax regime. Capital gains tax (CGT) rates on business sales are usually 10% or 20% and this will only get worse as the government seeks to pay the COVID bill.

There is an option that is tax free but with strings. Ask us, but at any rate, think and plan for your exit now.

CT: I know the pandemic has focussed BPMA members' attention on the fact that they have no real personal financial plan. All their focus has been on growing their business. Is this common?

PH: I would say that over 90% of our clients have over 90% of their wealth tied up in the business, and see over 90% of their income coming from it.

That is high risk.

We try to rebalance their wealth. That may mean money into pensions, moving property out of the business, or paying down personal mortgages faster than business debts.

It all starts with a simple wealth plan. What money do you have and where is it? In most cases clients who guessed at this net wealth figure would be out by a long way. Sometimes the real wealth is double their guess, and sometimes half.

Only when you know where you are can you have any chance of a plan to improve it.

There are always tax impacts of moving money around, but sometimes these are positive, such as pensions, but other options may mean deciding on a tax cost now to achieve an important outcome for your future.

Far too many business owners I meet simply have no grip on where their income goes. They don't really know how much they spend and they certainly don't know what on. A fresh pair of eyes will add insight and ideas that you may not know, and may add some discipline to your wealth building plans.

CT: There were some big changes in the Chancellor's last budget. What should business owners be doing to adapt and does this say anything about likely future changes?

PH: The biggest change was the planned increase in corporation tax rates to 25% for businesses making more than £250k of taxable profits from April 2023. While not a particularly high rate by historical standards or against other countries, it is a big jump up from 19% especially as the plan was for it to reduce to 17%.

This was partially offset by the 130% super deduction for spending on certain qualifying assets. Perhaps a signal of 'Hoard profits and pay more tax' vs 'Invest in your business and pay less tax'.

None of us has a crystal ball, but if I were a betting man, I would put money on most tax rates increasing, and some like CGT by a hefty jump.

So, tax planning is going to become more important in the future. In that context there are two important points.

If HMRC disagrees with your tax planning actions, the most likely outcome is to simply pay the tax you would have by not taking those actions. Penalties and criminal sanctions are usually reserved for extreme or persistent abusers of the tax rules.

Even if you follow the letter of the tax laws, if the prime purpose of any transaction is to avoid tax, HMRC can tax you anyway. Always have good commercial arguments such as risk protection, finance raising, employee engagement, and so on, and make sure they are documented.

CT: The government has thrown a lot of money at businesses to help keep them going. As well as future tax rises, are there any other issues businesses should be concerned about?

PH: Let's just get right to the point here. If you claimed furlough payments but asked people to still work, or massaged the numbers so it was based on a higher than accurate income level, that may well be fraud. If you borrowed a bounce back loan (BBL) or a CBILS loan, but were a bit 'creative' with the information or have used the money to buy a flash car, clear personal debts or a deposit on a buy to let property, then that may also be fraud.

If you did your best with rapidly changing rules in a really challenging business environment, but have made a few mistakes, then that is understandable.

If you are in the first categories, then rest assured HMRC will come looking at some point. They are already looking at more than 27,000 dubious furlough claims and had over 8,000 tip offs of employers breaking the rules.

One business we know claimed a BBL via the online portal for a dormant company, which is against

the rules. The bank uncovered this and froze all his bank accounts for up to 10 weeks while it investigated.

If you pushed the boundaries a bit, take a good look and decide whether to sort it now, or keep your fingers crossed. The best case is a demand for immediate repayment of any money that you shouldn't have had. The worst case may be much more serious as HMRC may well make examples of some to flush out others.

CT: So, based on your overall experience from previous recessions and recovery, and your conversations with other businesses, where should any business and BPMA members in particular, be focussing their attention?


PH: I am going to keep this answer simple, so that there really is a clear focus. There are two areas most of my clients will need to do something about.

Firstly, sales. Even before the pandemic my experience was that sales functions lacked discipline and control and relied upon the 'personality' of order takers (they don't really sell at all). They have not adapted to the new world of virtual selling and office or home-based client

management. They are waiting for the return to motorway miles, door knocking and expense accounts, that I am not sure will return at all or certainly soon.

Businesses need to fundamentally change the way they communicate with and serve customers and that includes the whole sales process.

Secondly, people. Many clients have seen the pandemic highlight issues they sort of knew were there but had no enthusiasm to address, such as overpaid and underperforming employees. It is hard to manage negative people that influence others. If this sounds familiar, have a clear out. Be tough. Most clients I talk to did more with less people in the last year, and that is because some of them are holding you back rather than pushing you forward.

Decide on the people you need now or will in the future, and go hunting immediately. There will be a war for talent in the next few years, and those slow to the party will lose out. Be bold and be decisive. A great team will do more to improve your chances of success than most other things you can do. 

You can watch Peter Hill's conversation with the BPMA on its member channel where you can find many other webinars providing business advice. If you're a BPMA member, contact enquiries@bpma.co.uk for access.



OPENING BACK UP: GETTING IT RIGHT

There is a lot to consider when you return to the office, as many may soon be doing. Here are some of the areas to look at

Getting back in the office for us all feels like it's way overdue but with much to consider for employee safety and reassurance, what kind of measures will our insurers expect us to follow?

Towergate, advisers for BPMA members, have covered off some key measures every employer should consider. With the push for vaccination now including adults over 18, we're entering a new era of what to expect when coming back to work.

HEALTH & SAFETY IS STILL HERE

Health and safety legislation hasn't been suspended in any way and in fact has been expanded particularly with the requirement to report instances of COVID-19. The starting point for your business is to develop and document a COVID-19 Health & Safety Policy which sets out how you are going to prevent and control the transmission of COVID-19.

The policy recommended is based on the principles of 'Plan, Do, Check, Act' and begins with a statement of intent ('Policy Statement') in which businesses set out their commitment to managing the risks from COVID-19. This statement should be signed by the most senior person in the organisation to demonstrate the commitment is led from the top.

MAKE IT CLEAR

While the overall responsibility for health and safety, and management of COVID-19 rests at the highest level, every employee has a role to play in helping to provide and maintain a safe place of work. Your policy should therefore set out those responsibilities and provide a clear understanding of what is expected.

Once you have returned to your normal work environment and it is business as usual, you will need to introduce new arrangements to manage the risks from

COVID-19. The starting point is to undertake a COVID-19 Risk Assessment, which will help you to decide what action to take. Health and safety legislation requires that your COVID-19 Risk Assessment is 'suitable and sufficient' and that a written record is made of all significant findings.

RE-OCCUPATION CHECK

For every business reopening their offices and premises, it's important to carry out a full check on everything from electricals to business continuity to arrangements for contractors and freelancers. Your COVID policy should be available for every member of staff to see.

GET AN ACTION PLAN

When considering your COVID-19 control measures, businesses should seek to apply measures according to the 'Hierarchy of Controls', with the most effective controls



(those at the top) considered first.

Health and safety law does not demand absolute safety when considering what safety controls are required but measures taken should go as far as is 'reasonably practicable'. This requires a balance between risk and costs; the greater the risk, the greater the need to commit resources in terms of time and money to remove or control it.

An action plan will need to be developed from the organisation's COVID-19 Risk Assessment and the issues within it will need to be implemented as soon as possible. Finally, those carrying out the risk assessment must be competent – in other words, they must have the necessary skills and knowledge gained through experience and training and may have qualifications that enable them to make sound judgements.

WHAT ABOUT VACCINATIONS?

There seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel in this COVID-19 pandemic, with the approval of several vaccines that have good efficacy rates against most of the variants that are cropping up, particularly the new Delta variant. The question that is coming up more often now, though, is whether employers can require employees to get vaccinated when they are able to.

As you can probably imagine, the answer is not straightforward.

All employers are under a duty to protect the health and safety of employees and provide safe systems of work under health and safety legislation. An employer will be expected to have undertaken a risk assessment to identify what steps need to be taken to meet that obligation. It is likely that appropriate control measures will include employees being vaccinated given that this is one of the clearest ways of protecting the individual from serious illness, as well as testing, if available. Employers should be strongly encouraging employees to be vaccinated where they can.

DOES EVERYONE HAVE TO BE VACCINATED TO BE ABLE TO RETURN TO WORK?

You could not physically force an employee to be vaccinated against their will, since this would amount to assault. But could you require them to do so if, for example, the risks within the workplace were such that this was the surest way to protect staff and also service users if relevant?

Maybe. This is obviously an untested area and there are various views on this. On 8 February 2021, a report in *The Telegraph* stated that Ministers believed employers could require employees to be vaccinated to comply with health and safety obligations – this was contradicted later that day by a Health Minister.

WHERE DO WE STAND ON EMPLOYEE RIGHTS?

In legal terms, Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights protects the right to private and family life. The right for an individual to choose whether to be vaccinated is likely to fall within this right. It is possible to interfere with this right "in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic wellbeing of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others".

Therefore, if there is real need to protect health or economic wellbeing, that may be capable of overriding the Article 8 right to private life. It requires a careful balance between the rights of the individual and employer (which could also include the service users of the employer).

Product Media expects more examples such as care providers requiring vaccinations to work in care homes to arise but as the employer's main aim here is to achieve a safe workplace, it is their responsibility to protect the workforce. Employers could

only require employees to be vaccinated where it is identified within a risk assessment as a necessary requirement. The potential reasons for this being a requirement will include those highlighted above. If it is identified as a requirement, then it may be that an instruction to staff of this will amount to a reasonable management instruction.

There are likely to be circumstances where an employer sets the requirement for a vaccination but the employee refuses; in which case several factors need to be considered such as why they are refusing and if there are other options available such as continued working from home or taking a different role.

With much still changing, we expect to report on this topic for many months to come and encourage readers to check the latest employer advice and importantly any measures your insurance company expects you to take for safe return and onward working.

If you'd like to find out more about creating an action plan and the right checklist for the current rules in place, BPMA members can access helpful documents via their member benefits.

Is hybrid the answer?

The UK has experienced an unprecedented situation where millions of people have been working from home during the pandemic. Nearly half of those in employment (46.6%) were doing at least some of their work from home in April 2020.

For some businesses and employees, there may be no going back to the old way of working.

Almost all 50 of the UK's biggest employers questioned by the BBC have said they do not plan to bring staff back to the office full-time.

HSBC will reduce its space by 40% globally, while advertising group WPP said it would need 20% less space in future.

Nat West has said that just 13% of its 59,300 staff would be in the office full time. A third will continue to work remotely, with 55% adopting a hybrid model of working between the office and home.

Businesses in the UK expect their office space to reduce by 18% on average by 2023 compared to 2019.

Many employees may want to permanently adopt some degree of flexible or hybrid working when workplaces reopen, according to research for the CBI.

- 76% of businesses say that they expect flexible working to become more common within their organisation.
- 47% expect most of their workforce to adopt hybrid working beyond 2021

Hybrid working could be a best of both worlds but businesses need to

plan for it, including their approach to health and wellbeing, managing, training, engaging, and leading their teams.

Although some people have found working remotely isolating, 58% of staff said it had made them more productive, with less commuting, fewer disruptions and flexibility to arrange work. This can lead to greater commitment to the company and higher job satisfaction compared to non-flexible colleagues.

However, there is a risk that some employees feel isolated, less effective, and less engaged. As well as ensuring they have the right technology and equipment for employees to work effectively, businesses need to look at how leaders communicate and how managers change the way they engage and develop their teams to foster a shared purpose and team-culture.

One possible danger is that companies may find themselves with a two-tier workforce, with staff who are mainly in the office and those working flexibly treated differently. Businesses have to develop systems in areas such as performance assessment to recognise the output of staff and not simply reward presenteeism.

A CBI report *Adapting to Hybrid Working* encourages firms to focus on four main areas as they transition to hybrid working:

- Health and wellbeing
- Recruitment and development
- Leadership, management and engagement
- Operations and practical support

ALL SECURE AT EVENTS

Merchandise makes events, but new guidelines are needed to keep everyone safe

Late last year, the All Secure Standard was created by event trade bodies collaborating to produce comprehensive guidelines around the safe operation of events and exhibitions.

With further lockdowns and infections, the guidance has been shaped to form the backbone of test events.

The BPMA has spotted some missing elements in the guidance and has been collaborating with ESSA to provide safe merchandising guidance.

What is the All Secure Standard?

Created by the Association of Event Organisers (AEO), Association of Event Venues (AEV) and Events Supplier and Services Association

(ESSA), the guidance provides a framework of support and assessments to ensure a safe return to live events. All work is approved by the DCMS.

This best practice document is continually reviewed.

With merchandise forming a big part of this visitor experience, the BPMA has been keen to input into guidance. As part of promoting safe use of merchandise within the All Secure framework, the BPMA is also advising show organisers such as B2B in November.

Helping control transmission

The road ahead appears to be focused on how to live with COVID-19. Mindful of the three ways transmission can take place, the BPMA's simple guidance is based on how airborne, surface



and hand to hand contact is controlled and considered. Strict risk assessments for every event and exhibition should examine contact points.

Guidance applies a dose of common sense to face to face events and with successful test events, every sensible step is a step closer to the type of interaction we are all craving. Yet to be finally approved, *Product Media* has a summary of the key points.

are encouraged to create displays to admire from a distance.

Product attributes might be conveyed via a QR code for more information, images or video. Samples have always been a challenge particularly for higher value items – offer a sample service, collecting legitimate interest data from customers that can be qualified and turned into future sales.

Collect safely

Goodie bags are still a treat for event goers and an expectation. With the traditional handouts essentially removed, a different approach is required. Avoiding hand to hand contact, provide samples or gifts in an area where they can be collected without the risk of multiple touch points. Get creative with displays and use materials which support a safety message.

No double dipping

Will we ever see the classic 'dip and grab' bowls again? Applying common sense, places where unsanitised hands were plunging in to grab the latest product were never the most hygienic solution so don't expect to see them any time soon.

Discussions on event standards are still being assessed alongside the success of 'free movement' events. The continued test and learn of these events will mean 'back to normal' gets ever closer.

For further guidance, visit www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/the-visitor-economy, last updated on 22nd June 2021.

Going interactive

Consider how physical touch can be reduced, such as e-tickets and QR codes to download information. While it may feel anti-merchandise, the approach the BPMA is encouraging supports the view of safety first and creative approach second. Overall, think about how you can convey product attributes through different mediums, switching on the senses and engaging on effective levels.

BPMA CEO Carey Trevill, said: "We're in the business of creating positive, long lasting memory through impact. Right now, we must place safety at the forefront of event and exhibition thinking so let's get creative, find new ways to complement and celebrate the amazing products we produce."

Look but don't touch

Merchandise is tactile and reaching out to a wonderful new product is natural. For the type of merchandise which is likely to be picked up and handled in 'normal' times but can't be cleaned easily between interactions, exhibitors



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CHALLENGES AHEAD BUT HOPE TOO

Recent surveys on the state of British manufacturing paint a mixed picture but companies must embrace change, says **Mark Alderson**

British manufacturing is currently looking at a future which is highly unpredictable. In the aftermath of Brexit and with the repercussions of the pandemic, our businesses find themselves facing a considerable number of tough decisions. There is, nevertheless, reason for optimism in that evidence indicates that the manufacturing sector is well prepared to negotiate the troubled waters ahead.

Mixed picture

The current forecast for UK manufacturing looks decidedly mixed. On one hand, data from CIPS UK Manufacturing Purchasing Index for March and April is encouraging. Two consecutive months of strong growth in output, order books and employment would seem encouraging for the sector.

On the other hand, profitability has dropped to its lowest level for a decade, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Its data shows that the net rate of return for UK companies, calculated as the profit on capital used in production, fell sharply for a second consecutive year in 2020, to 8.8% - the lowest since 2010.


Both studies observe that the sector faces significant obstacles as it confronts an ever more challenging business environment. In particular, supply chain disruption continues to buffet the industry, with many companies complaining of higher prices for components and raw materials.

Digital transformation

However, following the enormous effects of COVID-19 many UK manufacturing companies are better prepared than ever

before to steer a steady course through the turbulent times ahead. Having accelerated their digital transformation journeys as a matter of expediency in early 2020, there is now a considerable appetite to continue down that path in 2021, in search of reduced costs, increased profitability and greater resilience and agility.

Over the past year to eighteen months or so, UK manufacturers have amply demonstrated that the industry has the capacity and willingness to make fundamental changes, on short timelines and with limited budgets. We must continue to do so.

Mark Alderson is the chairman of the Briman Group 



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SWITCHED ON TO SUSTAINABILITY

Producers of technology are raising their game to show that gadgets have a part to play in sustaining our world, says **Matt Pluckrose**



Technology products and eco credentials can often be in conflict with each other. Most gadgets and tech are powered by Lithium batteries and contain a whole host of wires, chips, PCBs and many other parts which are hard to recycle and dispose of in an environmentally friendly manner.

However, these very same products are among the most popular in our industry as they are often regarded as a necessity in our digital world.

The challenge for our industry is not how to change gadgets to make them 100% sustainable, as this is not currently possible. It's more how to make them more friendly to the planet.

There are a few angles to this some regulatory and some voluntary.

Disposal tax

Regulatory actions include registering for government schemes like WEEE which means importers pay taxes to help the government dispose of gadgets at the end of their life. These can be specifics like taxes on batteries and packaging, or more general like the WEEE scheme which is based on a tax payable on the total volume of electronics imported into the UK or EU.

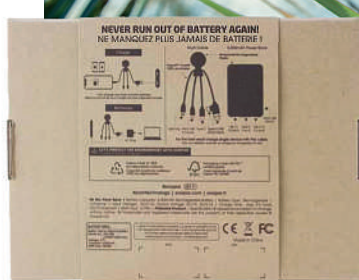
The past 18 months have seen many changes to demand for eco tech. This has led suppliers to change their product strategy often and move away from 'pointless' low cost giveaways and focus on more sustainable ranges.

This in itself is a big move forward for our industry as products have a much longer life cycle and deliver more brand messages over their lifetime, reducing the number of promotional products which go directly to landfill after a single use. This is a part of the swing towards more eco-friendly promotional products which will change our industry over the coming years and has been accelerated in the last 12 months.

Suppliers are taking on the challenge of more eco features in various ways and one main focus has been packaging reform.

Many suppliers have looked hard at this in recent years and are changing the design and make up of their packaging on an ongoing basis.

This includes banning 'single use' plastic, stopping the use of non-eco-friendly, non-recyclable foam, switching to bio degradable and compostable infill in cartons,



re-designing outsized large gift boxes which serve no purpose, and switching all packaging to be made from FSC (from sustainable forests) card and paper.

Good suppliers have also been re-designing and changing the parts of the products which can be changed to be more sustainable. For tech, this would include changing from PVC to RPET where possible, using recycled materials and changing the outer case of the product where possible to more natural materials such as wheat, wood, bamboo, cork and even concrete.

Recycled materials

Also, now starting to become popular is using recycled raw materials such as RPET (plastic bottles), aluminium, recycled plastics, tyres and even old computer cables to ensure products for promotional use do their part.

Suppliers are also working with factories to explore how a more sustainable manufacturing plant can help the environment. Plans to introduce alternative energy sources are under way in many progressive factories, getting energy from sources such as biomass or solar, reducing pollution, reduction in water consumption during production, recycling machine waste, and looking for ways to make manufacturing better for the planet. These are the partners to work with for the future of

our industry and its image in the eyes of large end users.

Another way that suppliers are looking to reduce the impact of gadgets on the environment is by carbon offsetting.

This balances the resources needed to produce products with balance from planting trees, donating to sustainable charities and making a calculation to offset resources used.

Definitely the hottest trend our industry has experienced in recent years, sustainability in all we offer is key to competitive advantage right now.

Whether its product purpose, use, design, manufacturing process or packaging, we all have to do our part and make sure we look after this precious planet while delivering marketing and promotional excellence for our customers.

Matt Pluckrose is managing director of Desktop Ideas



WHERE CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY MEET

The past year has fast forwarded how brands use technology to engage with audiences, says **Melissa Chevin**



The COVID pandemic has profoundly changed not only the way society interacts, but also the way in which it does business – and these changes represent opportunity and challenge in about equal measure.

Never before has the online world been so key to almost everything we do, and in particular the spaces created by social media.

One undisputable phenomena of the pandemic has been the rise in real-time online engagement. Not so long ago, video calls were a niche tool embraced by a select few. Now, the technology has gone mainstream.

Live streaming

The crisis has also seen a dramatic rise in the amount of live streaming activity. During 2020, there was a 50% rise in the amount of live streaming on Facebook, and a whopping increase of 70% over on Instagram.

As life inches back to 'normality', the convenience and economies surrounding this technology almost guarantee it will

continue to play a significant role in both our business and social interactions, perhaps in a more hybrid format with some participants physically in the 'host space' and others joining via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and other platforms.

One significant factor in this transition has been the rise of the online influencers, who were in many cases more able to connect with their audiences during the pandemic than the celebrities previously in the vanguard of this area of marketing. However, there is an argument that the lines between 'celebrity' and 'influencer' are becoming increasingly blurred – a prominent YouTuber recently co-hosted the Eurovision Song Contest.

The new shopping

Significantly for our sector, live streams are 'shoppable' – viewers can make purchases while they are watching. In a way, this is nothing new – you could argue that it's TV shopping reimagined – but the indisputable popularity and evolution of these channels means we'll probably see companies continue to redirect large chunks of

their marketing budgets into online.

A phenomenon which has grown alongside over the past year has been brands investing more in their social engagement credentials. The new generation of millennial customers places increasing value on a deeper connection with brands and looks to them to speak out on issues such as diversity, equality and sustainability.

While such topics offer many new opportunities to connect with audiences, it's important to be aware of the potential pitfalls, too. Some targets could soon reach saturation point with this type of marketing as it is becoming so common. If care is not taken, you could leave yourself open to accusations of virtue-signalling. In short, any message you are sending in this space must be backed up by action and fact.

I'll continue to examine how the pandemic has transformed the role of marketing in my next column – see you then!

Melissa Chevin is BPMA board director and marketing consultant with GF Consulting – mchevin@gf-consult.co.uk

NOT BUSINESS AS USUAL

Buyers may face rising prices as merchandise demand returns

As coronavirus curbs are loosened and businesses get back up and running, demand for many products has started to soar.

Pent up demand from consumers and businesses saw the UK's IHS Markit/CIPS Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), hit 61.7 for June. Any figure above 50 indicates economic expansion.

Although this sounds like great news for businesses that have been idling for the past year, it does come with some warnings, not least in the form of rising inflation, which hit a two-year high of 2.1% in May.

The CBI's quarterly survey of manufacturing warned that factories would be raising their prices at the fastest rate in 40 years due to shortages of materials.

Post pandemic problems

The problem can be traced to pandemic disruption. With lockdowns around

the world in place, many companies simply stopped buying products and raw materials as demand fell. Stock levels were not kept up so when markets reopened there was a rush from retailers and businesses to restock.

At a time when supply lines were being overcome by the demand for PPE companies bringing containers from the Far East have found costs had gone up six-fold.

With many merchandise items coming from Chinese producers, this sector is particularly exposed and face passing on increased costs to customers. Matters have been compounded by the increasing costs of raw materials.

Price hikes

DS Smith, the UK's largest manufacturer of cardboard, expects to pass on price rises of 5-10% this year after it saw the price of recycled cardboard for its boxes

go from €20 a tonne to €200.

Plastic is still abundant in merchandise and packaging, and here too costs are shooting up. The trade association of European plastics converters, EuPC, said a raw material shortage and an increase in price is "seriously impacting" the production of plastic products in the EU.

It seems unlikely that these costs will not need to be passed on to end users by merchandise distributors and suppliers.

However, recent BPMA research (see p33) found that more than 40% of suppliers and distributors faced reluctance from their clients when they tried to pass on costs.

That reluctance may be tested soon as buyers face a perfect storm of returning demand, rising materials prices, and longer deadlines due to a lack of staff following furlough. Something will have to give.

PLAN FOR THE BOUNCE BACK

As businesses rebuild their fundamentals will be different from pre-pandemic times, says **Mike Collins**



They've gone bust! No way, our notes show that they're more than creditworthy."

Hopefully, this is not a phrase that you'll have to say in the coming months. Being mindful, diligent and taking action now is a good way to avoid the pain of experiencing bad debt.

Companies are starting to open up again and the economy is coming out of hibernation. These new opportunities are great for us all, but they come

with a huge caveat.

It's an obvious thing to say but the situation now, compared with pre-lockdown is very different. The financial position of many companies, both inside and outside of the promotional goods industry, is distinctly worse. It will take some businesses a long time to get back to healthy trading positions.

Last issue, we highlighted the impending perfect storm of multiple upcoming liability challenges, such as Bounce

Back and CBIL loans, deferred tax obligations and the furlough scheme coming to an end.

Mind the risk

Some businesses will be faced with the necessity to find more monies than before and some may be forced to make up for lost ground. Some may take larger risks with bigger projects, stretching them both financially and commercially.

Recently we spoke with a new customer who was using a credit insurance company to set credit limits. While good in principle (you're paying attention to the constant flux of credit limits), bear in mind that insurance companies will want to limit their own exposure to your bad debts and so will approve only smaller limits restricting your dealings generally.

Credit checks are a great start to managing exposure.

However, credit checks could be based on outdated accounts filed before the pandemic.

Director guarantees

Another tip to limit bad debt exposure could include adding director's personal guarantees to your existing customer relationship.

You can perhaps list the possibility of the personal guarantees on account opening forms or include them in terms and conditions. The mere mention of a personal guarantee might be enough to put off the real chancers and charlatans that you are ultimately seeking to avoid.

Other tips include:

- Propose pro-forma agreements for new customers that have no

credit history with you. The best way to limit bad debt exposure is to have no exposure at all. Asking a new customer to pay up front is the best way to ensure cash-flow into a business.

- Start suggesting upfront payments to your established companies with new orders that exceed previous credit limits.
- Or, when considering profit margins why not request say 50% with order? By securing an up-front payment and reducing the credit on offer, you manage your exposure and risk to a level that was deemed acceptable previously through your credit scoring processes.
- For larger on-going orders, propose interim payment plans. By securing stage payments at agreed times you limit your exposure over the contract and occasionally can allow for the project to be halted for non-payment immediately. We appreciate that this is not always possible in the promotional goods industry.

Obviously not all of these recommendations can or should be applicable at any one time, but we would encourage you to consider utilising some of them to assist in managing your exposure and risk.

As always, feel free to contact us at any time to discuss either this article, or indeed any other credit challenge. We're always happy to provide free advice and guidance to BPMA members.

Simply email at mail@directroute.co.uk, or contact us on (01274) 223 190 for support.

Mike Collins is managing director of AccountAssyst

Local Support Contact Details

Please contact a member of our local support team for advice on any matter related to debt and credit management.

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VOICING INDUSTRY CONCERNS

The BPMA has undertaken research among merchandise companies to identify their pressing issues and feed them through to the Government

Throughout the pandemic, the BPMA has engaged regularly with Government, which is keen to know what support businesses need and how they are faring.

After a successful meeting with the Minister for Exports, Graham Stuart MP and Andrew Lewer MP, the BPMA has secured a further discussion relating to the export burdens placed on SMEs.

The meeting in April was secured after Andrew Lewer MP presented a question in the Commons on behalf of the BPMA, detailing the challenges faced by BPMA members and many other SMEs in exporting to the EU, instigated by BPMA board director and Juniper founder Andrew Langley.

BPMA chair Angela Wagstaff of Allwag Promotions, and Andrew Langley presented the case for distributors and suppliers during the meeting.

COLLABORATION WITH GOVERNMENT

The meeting and subject of support for SMEs linked to VAT burdens was well received. As a result, the BPMA has secured dedicated time with the Department of International Trade to work collaboratively with the BPMA and other Government departments to address the challenges faced by the merchandise industry.

Recognition of the financial burden faced by businesses has been central to the BPMA's

position to Government. Solutions to provide funding, simplify processes, and further resources are under discussion.

BPMA chair Angela Wagstaff said: "The case the BPMA has presented to the Minister gives the promotional merchandise industry a voice."

The BPMA impressed on the Minister the integral role promotional merchandise plays to many adjacent industries, the need for agility, competitive pricing and retaining business with British companies.

Experiencing the toughest trading climate in living memory, the BPMA is working hard to provide advice, guidance, and training to support every member.

News in April that advertising and marketing spend is set to grow during the remainder of 2021 by 15.2% indicates a UK spend recovery stronger than any other global economy. This signals incoming demand to the promotional merchandise sector as other services such as events are reintroduced. With order levels set to grow, favourable trading conditions and meeting end-user expectations will be more important than ever.

PRESENTING THE CASE FOR PROMOTIONAL MERCHANDISE

The BPMA conducted an industry wide survey to collate the picture of gains, losses and challenges experienced because of the Brexit transition period ending to help examine how the specific needs for the

industry can be addressed.

The survey found that both distributors and suppliers were under pressure from clients. Particular issues included half of clients (51.2%) expecting distributors to continue contracted terms (this was 47% for suppliers). Among distributors, 41.5% said clients won't accept extra costs and they had lost work (41% for suppliers). More than 40% of both distributor and supplier clients had turned to European competitors.

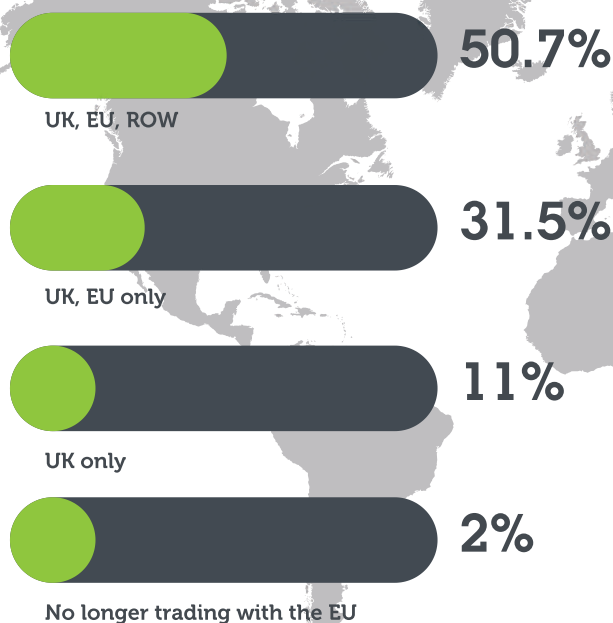
Spend was reported down by 76.5% of suppliers and 61% of distributors, although it is unclear how much of this is due to Brexit and how much to COVID. Carey Trevill, BPMA CEO told members during a webinar.

However, when asked about challenges, respondents named EU VAT (67%), delivery charges (54%), customs paperwork (62%), and rules of origin (39%) as top concerns – all issues that have become more pronounced since Brexit.

Two-thirds (65%) said they were adapting to cope with new rules, with 54% dedicating resources to customs paperwork, and 41% saying they were choosing suppliers and partners based on their adaptability.

When it came to trading with the EU, 19% of companies said that they were trading successfully, but 14% said they no longer traded with the EU due to increased costs of doing business. A further 13% said they had set up an EU business in 2021, with 17% having an office or premises in the EU. 

Where we trade



PROVIDING THE TOOLS FOR THE JOB

The BPMA has revamped its member benefits package in line with the changing needs of businesses

This summer, the BPMA has announced some changes to the benefit line up bringing upgrades for the most used services. After a significant review of essential member needs in 2020, new providers have been put in place to support critical business activities.

Business advice

Valued at more than £3,000 a year, members can gain access to a range of helplines and online resources through their membership with the BPMA. New HR, tax, legal, health & safety provider Quest gives members unlimited calls and their personal log in to the online resource library, boasting 800 documents across all its areas of expertise.

Selected after a competitive pitch process, the BPMA is keen to provide a 'no strings' service for members with no hard sell, just genuinely good advice. With the inclusion of VAT within the Quest helpline plus support on import and export VAT queries, this range of services sounds like a must have for any business in the industry.

Financial checks

Retaining Account Assyst and Direct Route services, the BPMA has been at pains to remind members of the credits with Account Assyst this year; not least the credit checks available to enable every new client to come with its own financial health check. With valuable services like free debt recovery every member should find out what they can utilise today and not miss out.

Insurance service

In addition to the core services, new insurance broker Towergate Insurance has been introduced to members and comes with a dedicated member enquiry service, discounts on insurance and advice on claims.

Citing the importance of advice, Tom Robey at the BPMA said: "We wanted this year to provide go to services for members where they can get help fast – not a sales pitch. We know time is limited and the pressure is on to secure business, so our benefits must be relevant and current. So many members are accessing their

benefits for the first time this year, and we want to encourage more members to take advantage of new services plus access those they have always had but never used."

Export help

Working with The Institute of Export & International Trade, the BPMA has also arranged a discount for all BPMA members for its trade surgeries, heavily discounted training and access to the trade helpline. Bringing on board recognised names such as Whistl to help members with larger consignments and campaigns, the BPMA looked to add value where it could to aid smooth trade. Whistl, with its Northern Ireland hub and ability to support mass mail and parcel campaigns was yet another tick in the box of asks from members.

Timely information

Together with a range of webinars tackling everything from furlough to the changed customs landscape to new incoming legislation, the BPMA has strived to bring the right information to members in ways everyone can access and apply to their business immediately.

Robey said: "This year has given us a chance to sharpen up and deliver for our members – and importantly supply our



member businesses the tools to thrive and survive in the most challenging of times."

Rounding off the list of must use companies the BPMA is affiliated to, members have been reminded about offers for Merchandise World and PSI, plus a range of vetted providers with core services such as artwork and design.

If you are a BPMA member and want to find out what is in store for 2021-22, contact Tom Robey via membership@bpma.co.uk. If you'd like to find out more about BPMA membership, contact the BPMA using enquiries@bpma.co.uk.



“

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One of the UK's largest suppliers of headwear, Product Zone is making a welcome return to the BPMA

What made you join the BPMA?

We were members in the past and we felt we should re-join the body that represents us all in promotional merchandise.

What is business like at the moment?

We were very fortunate to continue to work every day throughout the pandemic, however over the last few weeks things do seem to be picking up very well. We are getting more and more enquiries from both our bespoke Far East headwear and our UK stock.

What trends are you seeing at the moment?

Basically, promotions are getting going again and we look forward to festivals



and conferences starting up once again.

What's your favourite promotional product?

As we specialise in headwear, I have to say caps, beanies and bobble hats.

Give us a prediction for the year ahead?

So long as we stay clear of any lockdowns, we are very confident of a great second half of the year, although it will take a lot to make up for the last devastating 12 months.



The BPMA golf day is back

Following a postponement in 2020, the BPMA golf day is back on the schedule for 2021.

The date for the BPMA golf day will be, Wednesday 13 October 2021 and it will again be held at the historic Burnham Beeches Golf Club, near Slough.

Entries are being sought for teams of four, or individuals who will be teamed up for a fun day of golf, complete with food, refreshments and lots of prizes.

Costs are £130+VAT per person or £500+VAT for a team of four. Non-members are £155+VAT per person, and a team of four £550+VAT

To register email events@bpma.co.uk or contact Tom Robey at tom@bpma.co.uk



BPMA CALENDAR

2021

9 July – PSI Digital Friday

22 July – BPMA: Industry Updates Webinar Series Marketing Your Business – 12:30-13:30

13 August – PSI Digital Friday

8 September – Merchandise World: Peak Season Event. Marshall Arena, Milton Keynes

10 September – PSI Digital Friday

8 October – PSI Digital Friday

13 October – BPMA Golf Day Burnham Beeches golf course

12 November – PSI Digital Friday

10 December – PSI Digital Friday

2022

11-13 January – PSI 2022. Exhibition Centre Düsseldorf, Germany

26-27 January – Merchandise World. Ricoh Arena, Coventry