

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

The lockdown has allowed firms to think, streamline and reengineer – **P24**



TOGETHER AGAIN

BPMA VIRTUAL
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THE INDUSTRY **P15 >**



**USEFUL, RELEVANT,
REUSABLE** WHAT
CONSUMERS WANT FROM
MERCHANDISE **P18**

JOB SUPPORT DETAILS ON THE
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THE BPMA NETWORKING HUB

Recovery, Regeneration & Resilience | Open until 31st December 2020

'It's helped us keep up to date with Supplier news with instant access to information.'

- A BPMA Distributor

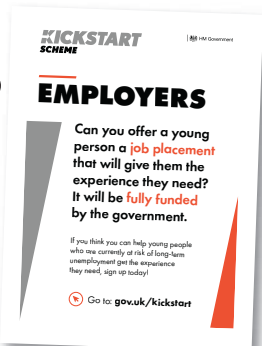
'What a great way for Distributors and Suppliers to communicate and engage virtually.'

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WELCOME



The tenacity of our industry never ceases to amaze. The enduring traits that founded the cornerstone of every business; entrepreneurial spirit, vision, and creativity, are laying

the foundations for a different future. Whilst uncertainty shaped the early part of the year and continues to change our market beyond recognition, the pandemic has taken its toll on the whole of the UK economy. The result is affecting our days, our lives and our businesses into something altered.

The regenerative process we are going through now will require a new approach from all sides of the industry. In this issue, we explore the ways suppliers

and distributors are delivering in a fiercely competitive environment, using an array of tools to speed up enquiries and quoting. Across the industry fast adoption of new behaviours means a changed approach throughout the supply chain to the end user. With pressure being applied since the start of lockdown to improve the attitude towards payment terms, the BPMA has been campaigning with other areas of creative industries to implement conditions that foster UK business.

Understanding the need to continue connecting and engaging, the BPMA has also opened its Networking Hub for every member. As many businesses are honing their virtual sales techniques, the platform presents a perfect opportunity to bring together members for discussion and growth.

During this year, the BPMA has been reshaping the output of the Association, creating a central membership platform and education ready for 2021 to support members. Together with monthly forums for members, webinars and research, the BPMA seeks to support every member along the journey to the new future we find ourselves in. Whilst the next few months may bring more surprises of the type we'd rather not experience, the collaboration and cooperation across the industry will ensure we will see many more years of innovative entrepreneurs not just surviving, but thriving.

Read on for more inspiring articles and content plus news and views from our regular columnists.

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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Rebrand for distributor Geiger

Distributor GeigerBTC is now known as Geiger following a rebrand in October.

The business was formed following the merger of UK company BTC and its US counterpart Geiger in 2018. The UK arm went on an acquisition spree, buying a range of merchandise businesses including EMC Advertising, Response Marketing, and Shout Promotional Merchandise.

Managing director, Vicky Kinasz

(pictured) said the change was an opportunity to evolve the brand and to realign its value proposition. "Being now known as Geiger will further strengthen our position as a global industry leader with worldwide reach, supported by market-leading standards of service and compliance."



Jo-an Lantz, president and CEO, said: "Our UK team has done a wonderful job of realigning their messaging and updating their visual appearance. It was a big decision, but we truly feel it was the right one. We're just continuing to be better and stronger together."

PF Concept claims sustainable branding first

PF Concept is now able to offer certified branding on all GOTS and GRS certified garments in its Elevate NXT range.

GOTS is the global standard for organic textiles, and GRS certification sets standards for recycled content. This means the garments are certified through the whole production process from raw materials to final decoration.

Launched in January 2020 as certified sustainable apparel, PF Concept has now added a GOTS certified Calla face mask and a GRS certified snood. In January 2021, at least five additional styles and a collection of GRS certified bags will be introduced. The focus is on supply chain transparency, strictly controlled materials, and BSCI audited factories.

The next step was to offer certified decoration. GOTS and GRS certified embroidery has been available for several months, with certified screen print and transfer going live in October.

In addition to the Elevate NXT items PF Concept also launched a GOTS certified cotton tote and drawstring backpack called Orissa.

Anne Karine Lemstra, director of category



management and marketing, PF Concept, said the offer of a truly sustainable product from raw material to decoration is unique. "Usually you see certified apparel or totes offered at suppliers, but you need to find

a separate certified printer to keep the certification intact. Via the PF Store you can order a GOTS or GRS certified product and have it printed with certified techniques and inks in just a few days."

Christmas growth with Sow Easy

Sow Easy has released an accessible catalogue showcasing its Christmas and winter-themed products, including Seedsticks in festive shapes.

Sustainable products like Growing Greeting Cards and 'Grow your own Christmas tree' Seed Grow Kits are ideal to send via post. The catalogue has the option to download and share, with an unbranded version available to share with clients.

Marketing manager Shaheen Shakeel, said the products were innovative and sustainable: "Sending Christmas cheer is surely going to be done a bit differently

this year, but we are excited to be able to offer these sorts of customisable products that really connect with their recipient and are kind to our planet."

The Slough-based business has also recently revamped its website to provide users with a more streamlined shopping and browsing experience. Products are now categorised by the types of campaigns they may best support, such as 'Back to School' and 'Online Learning & Conferences'.

Hero product, the Seedstick has its own category on the website which showcases the more than 20 shapes that are available.



Mantis World new look reflects sustainable agenda

London-based clothing supplier Mantis World is marking its 20th anniversary with a branding makeover, including fresh logos and a new website.

The new look highlights the company's approach to sustainability and fairness, with logos reflecting the company's core values – people, planet and profit. The new website makes it easier to learn about where ranges are manufactured and to see where the raw materials originate from. With the focus on traceability and sustainability higher than ever, consumers have plenty of questions and the company has provided clear, easy to access resources.

At the beginning of this year, Mantis World launched an impact calculator, a handy tool for helping customers discover the true environmental cost of their garments. It shows the savings made by choosing organic, including water, energy and CO₂. The calculator is now available on every product page, adjustable by quantity to provide the most accurate data.

QR codes containing the same data, as well as a look into the supply chain, are now being rolled out across the whole range.

Founder and CEO, Prama Bhardwaj, said: "Having launched at the start of a new millennium, it's perhaps fitting that our 20th birthday coincides with these interesting times. I'm immensely proud of what we have achieved and grateful for the support of our customers and friends over the years and for those who are joining us on the next exciting part of our journey."



Senator purchases Kahla

Senator owner, Daniel Jeschonowski, has purchased German porcelain manufacturer Kahla/Thüringen Porzellan GmbH with the intention of turning round its fortunes.

Jeschonowski initiated the deal after Kahla got into financial difficulties earlier this year. He has secured the continued operations at the company's traditional location in Germany. The two companies are to continue operating autonomously from each other in their respective industries and fields of business.

Both companies will retain a 'made in Germany' strategy to maintain their USPs on the global market, he said. "I am full of drive and am looking optimistically ahead to the future of a first-class lifestyle brand with strong trading partners in the four business areas of household, the hotel and restaurant sector, advertising media and order production," he added.

Jeschonowski purchased Senator in December 2018 after a successful restructuring, returning it to being a family business.

Kahla celebrated its 175th anniversary and employs 250 people. It was owned by the Raitheil family which acquired a majority stake in 1993 and expanded this to full ownership. A total of €35m has been invested in modernisation covering machinery, robotics, and resource and environment protection.



Goldstar builds protection and wellness range

Goldstar has added two new full-colour printed face masks that enable organisations to show their commitment to caring to employees, volunteers and customers.

The two masks, the Urban Value cotton mask, and the Urban Premium antimicrobial mask, are decorated with digital, colour transfer print technique and are washable, reusable and made with two structured layers of 100% cotton.

The antimicrobial mask provides further protection in the form of an outer layer treated with SilverClear technology, a non-toxic EPA registered antimicrobial that neutralises growth of bacteria, mould, mildew, and fungus. It includes an adjustable nose piece and elastic ear-straps, and is available in olive green, black, white, blue, pink and grey.

Colin Loughran, general manager of Goldstar, said: "The quality of the masks is fantastic, with two layers of 100% cotton, which can be reused and washed, and the antimicrobial technology used in the premium mask is a great addition for those wanting to provide extra protection."



Hay Hampers sold to multinational food firm

Lincolnshire-based Hay Hampers Limited has been sold to the British arm of the international Moguntia Food Group.

Founded in the early Eighties, the company supplies selected premium gourmet food and wine products from small, artisan producers in the UK and Europe. It was taken over by the family-owned Italian company Dare & Dare in 2014 and saw its turnover grow to more than £2 million by 2018.

The 2020 financial year, which was closed at the end of August, has been the best year ever for Hay Hampers with 100,000 hampers

sold and despatched all over the world.

Moguntia is a fourth-generation family business with headquarters in Switzerland. It specialises in seasonings, sauces and functional ingredients for the food industry and has existing UK sites in Hetton-le-Hole, Durham and in Market Harborough. The company also has manufacturing sites in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, and is present in 23 countries.

Gabriele Da Re, director, Hay Hampers, said: "We are delighted to be able to announce this deal with the international firm Moguntia Food Group which we believe



creates the next phase in Hay Hampers' positive trajectory as it will open new business opportunities and markets."

Global ambition and new faces at Fluid

Fluid Branding has become a founding member of a global network of promotional merchandise agencies called Brand Unbound.

The six member firms represent the US, Canada, Mexico and Central America, Australia, Europe, UAE, Russia and China. They have been working together for the past year to serve shared global clients, and to build integrated processes and technology to support global promotional merchandise programmes. Members work together to support customers who want to aggregate enterprise-wide promotional spend, supported by global thinking and management, executed by local experts.

Miles Lovegrove, Fluid's managing director, said: "Since the launch last summer, it has been really exciting to work with these amazing distributors from across the world. We all share a deep commitment to excellent customer experiences and we've discovered new ways to work together and support each other to ensure that we're delivering meaningful merchandise to clients globally."

The Brand Unbound members are Overture, Tango Communications Marketing, Capsa, Cybergroup, and Arid Zone.



Fluid has also announced several personnel hires recently. Former BPMA CEO, Jon Birrell has been appointed operations director heading up the procurement, people operations and production departments.

The company has also bolstered its European presence with new appointments. Björn Karregat joins as sales manager in the Amsterdam office.

Fluid's office in Amsterdam opened in 2017 in response to a growing client base in Europe as many multi-nationals choose the Netherlands as their EMEA base.

Meanwhile, Maltese national Nat Brewer, is heading up Fluid's Malta office as senior account manager. The office opened in 2018 in response to a growing client base and increasing demand from the Maltese and iGaming markets.

Listawood sees growth in antimicrobial requests

Listawood reports a surge in demand for its patent protected range of antimicrobial drinkware, which is sold under the AntiBug trademark.

Developed in 2012 following concerns about the transfer of pathogens in busy settings such as hospitals and care homes, the treatment is available on its most popular drinkware items such as ceramic mugs, stainless steel thermal bottles and coffee-to-go cups and tumblers.

"Our AntiBug treatment has always been a popular line for us but in recent months demand has been growing exponentially with brands and the wider consumer being much more conscious about hygiene best practice and the risk of infection transfer," said Alex Turner, managing director, Listawood. "It is important that our customers are aware that they are supplying products whose performance is supported by robust independent laboratory test data."

AntiBug has been clinically proven to kill



99.9% of harmful bacteria within a 24-hour period and withstands repeated cleaning cycles.

This unique treatment is available on a wide selection of Listawood's best-selling promotional products; including the entire range of its Thermal Bottles, coffee-to-go cups, Pantone matched ColourCoat mugs and Duraglaze PhotoMugs.



Manic appointment

Manic Merchandise has expanded its team with the appointment of Ceridwen Prowse as a new account director.

She brings more than 15 years in account management to the Romford business, including experience in project management, delivery of creative, on-brand product solutions and marketing materials for entertainment, corporate and retail clients.

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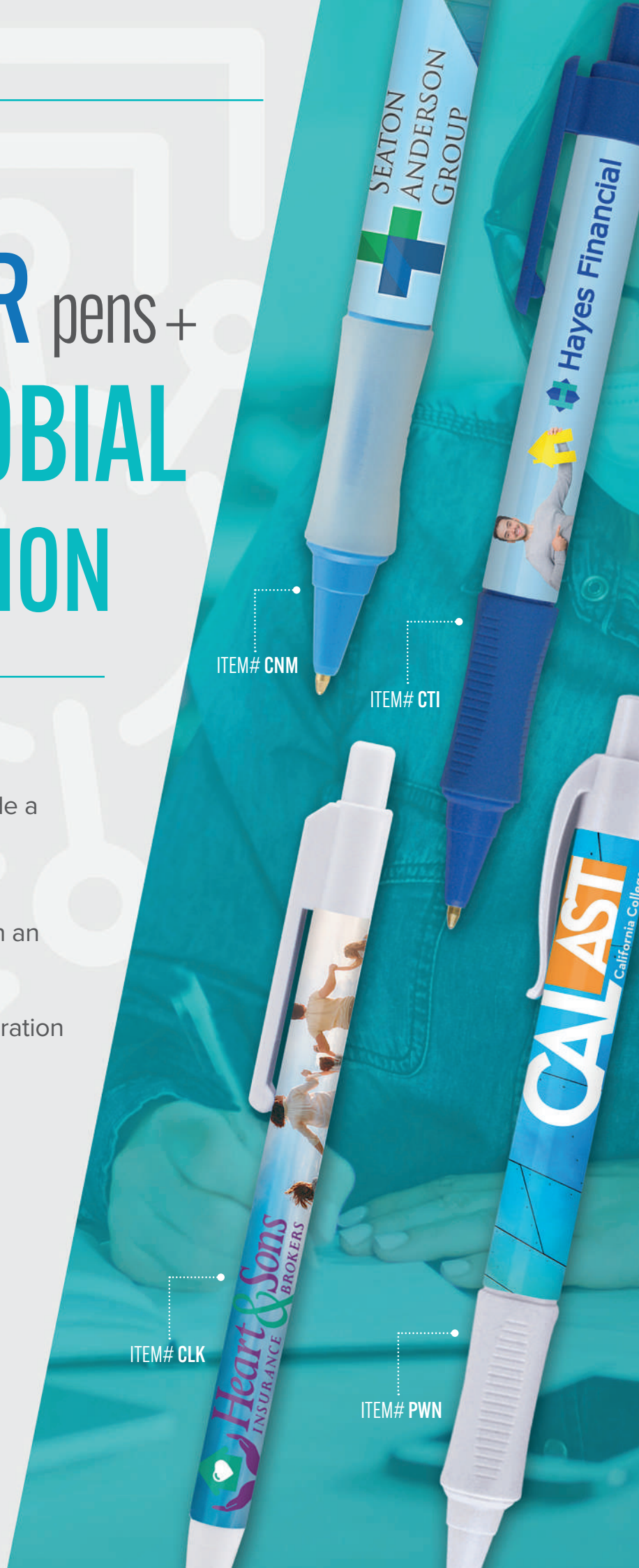
*Antimicrobial technology is not a substitute for good hygiene or cleaning practices.

ITEM# CNM

ITEM# CTI

ITEM# CLK

ITEM# PWN



Branding addition from Cross

A.T. Cross has added custom colour matching to its corporate gifting programme.

The pen company can offer an exact match for any colour requested. The colour matching programme is offered exclusively on the popular Cross Calais ballpoint pen, which has a streamlined shape.

Corporate gifters who choose Calais can also have their logo engraved or printed on the cap or reproduced on a jewellery-quality emblem displayed on the clip.

"We have a proud history of ingenuity and visionary thinking," said Nicola Shepherd, senior director of global marketing, A.T. Cross, "and we hope our custom gifts, which are ideal for the new working from home environment, inspire a renewed sense of purpose and pride among the countless business teams who have faced unprecedented challenges this year."

Forest certification renewed

The Pen Warehouse has successfully passed its recertification audit to renew its Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification, to help improve worldwide forestry practices and promote environmentally, socially and economically beneficial management of the world's forests.

The company has held FSC certification for 12 years and the symbol appears across many of its product lines, including paper products, wooden pencils, the award-winning Mood Notebook, and marketing assets.

"We are committed to being as environmentally sustainable as possible as a business and our progress in this area can be followed through our EcoSense blog," said Helen Dyl, operations director, The Pen Warehouse. "The pass of this audit complements our ISO 14001 accreditation that was renewed last year also. A massive well done to the team internally for maintaining our high environmental standards, especially at this very difficult time for the industry".



Haptica show held in Germany

Merchandise shows got back underway in Germany with the HAPTICA live exhibition in Bonn during September.

Postponed twice from its original date, organiser, WA Media worked with the respective authorities to deliver an event which met hygiene requirements and allowed a safe event for all participants.

This included wide aisles and an expansive layout, together with a one-way system to ensure that groups of people were minimised. The catering and the lecture programme were in separate rooms, the presentation of giveaways and exhibition bags occurred in a contactless manner, and disinfectant dispensers were freely available. All participants adhered to the legal requirement to wear nose and mouth protection.

There were 114 exhibitors compared with 198 last year. Visitor numbers were understandably lower at 759, down from

1,840 in 2019. Organisers said this was a respectable attendance figure in the light of the difficult conditions and ongoing travel bans. Around three-quarters of the visitors came from end user companies and from advertising agencies, the remaining quarter from the promotional products industry.

Inspiration came from two special zones, The Best Practice Show featured twelve successful examples of international campaigns, such as a Lidl spoon to cut sugar consumption, and Pollutoys that educated about ocean plastic. An exhibition of 45 winners of the Promotional Gift Award 2020 demonstrated the creative power of the sector.

The lecture programme covered everything from fine culture, to beer culture, through to fan culture.

The next Haptica event is scheduled to take place on March 17, 2021 at the WCCB in Bonn.

Bacterial protection is in the bag

Jutebag claims to be the first UK supplier to be able to offer an antimicrobial cotton bag, fully certified and tested to ISO 20743 standards.

Developed in conjunction with partner Addmaster, the 5oz bag has the Biomaster additive incorporated into the fabric. Biomaster provides lasting antimicrobial protection that has been tested to inhibit the growth of bacteria by more than 99%. 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 also for your health."

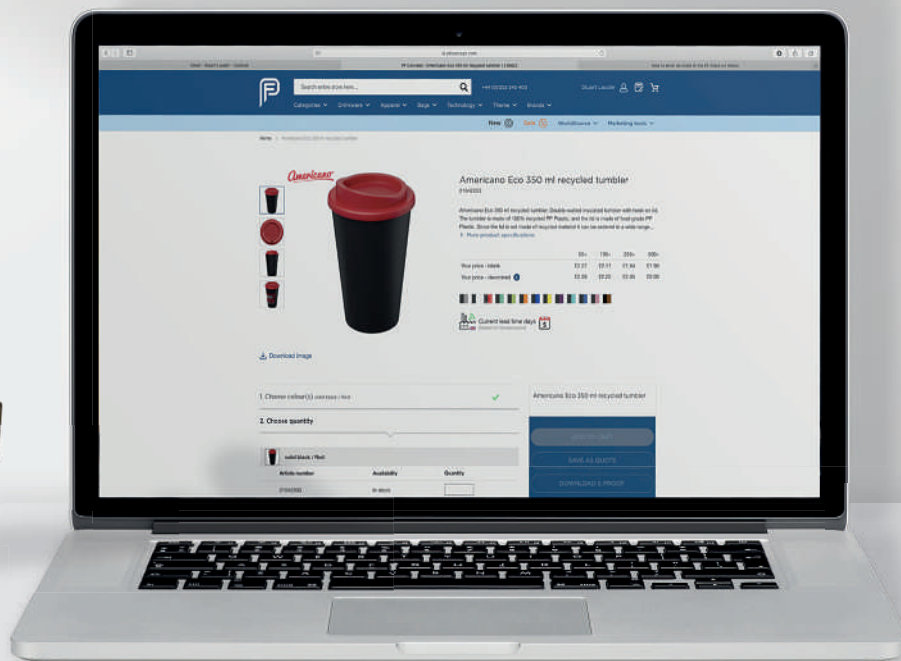




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A UNIFORM APPROACH

With many people working from home for the foreseeable future, is now the time to talk uniforms, asks **Clive Allcott**



Uniforms are a perfect opportunity to enter the clothing market. Every day the end user makes contact with a company branded person, whether it be in a traditional setting with a builder, plumber, or delivery guy, or increasingly for face to face meetings via conference calls. Why not become the supplier of those uniforms?

If your customer requires a staff uniform, then emphasise the following benefits in your presentation:

- It creates a professional-looking atmosphere.
- Staff are instantly recognisable and identifiable.
- Offering a selected range of clothing can reflect the nature of the business (sports tops for gymnasium staff, Oxford shirts for office staff, and polo shirts for retail stores).

In these days of online events,

don't forget that clients can use promotional clothing to identify employees at a virtual trade show, convention, seminar, or other professional gathering. Quality branded clothing showcases a professional image for your company and enables visitors to recognise your staff. A slogan on the garment can also provide a conversation starter.

When choosing promotional clothing it's important to give thought to what suits both the company and the purpose of the product. If hosting conference calls, the branding needs to have visual impact and be in a position where it can be clearly seen.

If clothing is to be worn daily, it needs to be durable and easy to clean. There is

little point in recommending products that need to be dry-cleaned. Ask your clothing supplier for a range of 65/35 poly cotton workwear products and the choices available.

What image do they want their company to present? If it's edgy and trendy, a T-shirt with graffiti-style lettering, bright colours, and modern artwork may work very well. However, if they want to present a more professional image, it might be a case of a simple logo and a neutral-coloured shirt.

What colours and designs are associated with the company? Try to incorporate logo colours to build an association to the brand. Many products have detail from coloured tipping, differing collar styles, and ranges that match most Pantones.



Clive, The Clothing Guru.



Lanyards



Keyrings



Badges



Ties & Scarves



Wristbands



Leisure



Umbrellas



Office



Pencil Cases



Technology



Xpress



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Snap invests for colour branding

Snap Products has invested in new bottle printing machinery to enable the business to offer multi-colour prints on its Mood drinkware range.

The machinery was ordered in Q1 of this year and means customers can order the Mood bottle with a two-colour print as standard with further print colours to be added. As well as enabling the printing of two spot colours in the same sequence, the investment means significant reduction processing time, quicker lead times and high precision printing with colour prints in tight registration.

Helen Dyl, operations director of Snap Products, said: "One of the biggest requests since the Mood collection vacuum bottle launched has been to offer a two-colour print option and now it is here. Colour is one of the most important components in any branding and this latest development means we can offer more choice to our customers in their search for a quality drinkware."

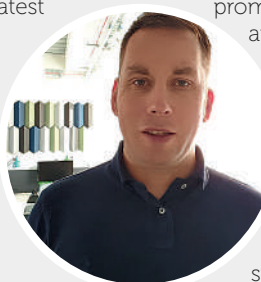
Snap has also announced a series of updates and improvements to its website, snapproducts.co.uk. There are dedicated sections for Made in Britain and Hygiene Products, which showcase Snap's in-house and UK-made product range, as well as other lines recently sourced to meet changing demands.

Galpeg Network signs One Branded

One Branded Limited is the latest distributor to join the Galpeg Network, which will provide it with both administrative and financial services.

One Branded's managing director Nick Tracey (pictured) said the move would provide stability for the next six months as he built his business, easing the administrative workload and cashflow worries.

"The COVID-19 crisis is in many ways redrawing the landscape of the



promotional merchandise market, and I decided I wanted to free us up to focus on the sales opportunities which lie ahead," he said. "The fact that there is no overhead, no binding contract and no tie-in fee was particularly attractive – it means we can 'pay as we go' and source support as needed."

Galpeg MD, Paul Green said that more businesses are turning to outsourcing to save money and offer improved service.

Prodir claims 'game changing' pen

Prodir is aiming to set new sustainability benchmarks thanks to the use of biobased, biodegradable and non-toxic biopolymers PHAs in its QS40 True Biotic pen.

Prodir claims the writing instrument combines credible sustainability and genuinely high-quality design – creating a product with impressive communicative impact. The QS40 won the Promotional Gift Award 2020 for its innovative, elegant and material-saving design. The True Biotic version is now available in seven matt colors, from coral orange, to snow white and on to algae green.

PHAs are generated naturally by microorganisms and can fully degrade without residues, closing the carbon cycle. The production of PHAs does not require the use of arable land or fertilisers that would impact on groundwater. The consumption of water is negligible, while the processes involved are particulate



emissions free.

Eckhard Sohns, Prodir's chief sales & marketing officer, said the pens are a game changer. "As opposed to other bioplastics, biological degradability is not merely theoretical, and only possible under the conditions of industrial composting facilities, but is real, rapid and can be achieved anywhere. And in saltwater too: True Biotic will also degrade rapidly and without environmental impact in the sea."

Prodir can also offer the QS40 True Biotic in an exclusive, preprinted pen case made from algae combined with FSC pulp.

More colour options for water bottles

Drinkware specialist First Editions is adding a further splash of colour to its best-selling Aqua range by introducing six new hues.

The newcomers are amber, grey, purple, navy, dark green and yellow. First Editions drew inspiration for these colours from a variety of sources, ranging from nature to interiors, alongside trends research and customer feedback. Together with the original colours, they comprise a versatile palette of modern neutrals and beautiful bolds.

Aqua provides a reusable 'bottle for life' with a prominent branding area and full-colour, 360-degree wrap print. They are 100% British-made using Tritan – a durable, BPA-free material – using energy-efficient machinery and a 'no waste' moulding process.

The bottles are available in two sizes and can be specified with added extras such as a fruit infuser, straw, and grab and flip top spout. They are fully dishwasher and microwave safe.





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MERCHANDISE WORLD ANNOUNCES NEW DATE AND EXHIBITOR GUARANTEE

With the advent of significant spikes in COVID-19 across the UK, Merchandise World has announced the decision to move the exhibition to 23-24 June, 2021.

With confidence in attending a major factor in the decision to move the date for the UK industry's premium merchandise event, the move looks to build this assurance prior to June next year. Ensuring exhibitors have time to make the right decisions about attending and ensure visitors are happy to walk the halls has been central to addressing how this important event takes place.

David Long, CEO and chairman at MW organisers, Sourcing City said: "It is disappointing to again postpone Merchandise World and we hope everyone can see our reasoning. However, we will all meet again, and when we do, it will be the perfect opportunity for us all to drive forward with building business together."

The top priority remains the safety of all involved. The revised show hall will feature additional safety measures, such as 3m

aisles, a one-way system, separate entrances and exits, temperature tests, sanitation stations, and more. The Ricoh, where Merchandise World is held, will also have staged numerous events before the event providing invaluable learnings.

Confidence for exhibitors is being boosted with the introduction of a Coronavirus Refund Guarantee.

BPMA chair, Angela Wagstaff said: "We considered all aspects of both visitors and exhibitors before coming to this decision. We want to see a thriving, vibrant show and the move to June will ensure everyone in our industry has the opportunity to attend. With the Coronavirus Refund Guarantee, we also believe exhibitors will be able to make informed decisions." 



REFUND GUARANTEE

Any exhibitor who decides to cancel their booking for Merchandise World to be held in June 2021 for any reason before 31st March 2021 will receive a 'no quibble' full refund. If the show is unable to go ahead, full refunds will apply, even if rescheduled for a later date in 2021.

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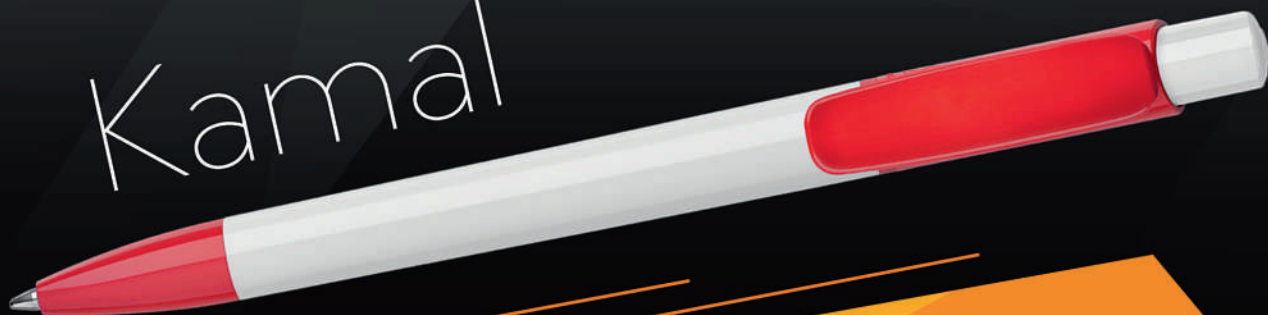
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ONWARDS TOGETHER

The BPMA's first virtual conference brought together the industry for a smorgasbord of content designed to help members on the road to recovery

With working from home the new normal for many of us, the idea of getting together as an industry has had to take new forms.

The BPMA's first virtual conference, in September, brought together distributors and suppliers for a day of learning, inspiration and sharing. Hosted by CEO Carey Trevill and supported by the BPMA team, members were able to select sessions that suited their particular needs and schedules.

"These have been such strange times recently, so we wanted something to feed your business," said Trevill.



PETER DOCKER
"LEAD WITH HUMBLE CONFIDENCE"

Attendees received their own delegate packs by post ahead of the event, ensuring they were ready for the day, which was packed with content. An important value add was the inclusion of Meetings Week, where suppliers and distributors could hold meetings online to initiate or consolidate their relationships. One company alone lined up 30 meetings in the first 24 hours.

The platform remained open throughout October to encourage further discussions, meetings and sharing.

The 3 Rs

With a theme of Recovery, Resilience and Regeneration, the day was a weighty line-up, mixed between the purely inspirational and the granularly practical. Add in some online hangouts and there was something for everyone.

Motivational speakers Peter Docker and Adrian Webster provided plentiful sparks of inspiration and food for thought for leaders in business. Docker, a former airline pilot quickly established that many of us are apprehensive in these unsettling times, but that fear can hinder us, whereas 'leading with humble confidence' can bring out the best in others.

"If you are static, nothing happens. It takes commitment to show others that 'this is going to happen'. If you share it with

“

THERE ARE LOTS OF CREATIVE IDEAS AND INNOVATION IN OUR INDUSTRY

people and verbalise it, then you can bring it about. The more you share, the more others join in – it's inspiring," he said.

Webster urged businesses to focus on TNT, or 'tiny noticeable things' that would connect with people. "People can't see big things all the time, but little things like remembering someone's name, or whether they take sugar in their tea, crash through and make an impact. They are the things that you don't need to do, but do anyway," he said.

Something for everyone

The day's content certainly covered a range of the detailed stuff that makes businesses tick, from HR to making sales, and mental health to getting paid. Panel sessions covered the topical issue of the future of events, as well as a discussion on how the sector could recover, featuring industry leading lights (see p16).

BPMA research into attitudes to sustainable merchandise in the light of the pandemic (p18) rounded out an agenda which attempted to address the key issues that concern BPMA members.

Despite the distances between delegates, BPMA chair Angela Wagstaff summed up the attitude of the industry she said was about "putting smiles on people's faces."

"Our industry is never about sitting still. For us, this is a new beginning. There are lots of creative ideas, lots of innovation coming out of this time and today has been truly inspirational."

ADRIAN WEBSTER
"FOCUS ON TINY NOTICEABLE THINGS"



Recovery and regeneration

The BPMA virtual conference brought together a heavyweight panel to give their thoughts on where we are heading as an industry

After an extraordinary few months when the UK has gone on a rapid learning curve on everything from working from home and Zoom calls, to new products and furlough, there may be cautious cause for optimism. Businesses have reopened, COVID-secure working practices have been established, and strategies are being devised. So, how are things looking?

Chaired by BPMA CEO Carey Trevill, a key panel at the BPMA conference assembled the great and the good to assess what has happened this year and where we go next.

Optimistic industry

David Long, managing director, Sourcing City admitted that the past six months had been difficult and that he had hoped there would have been more progress by now. "However, there are good signs out there and we could see a V-shaped recovery when confidence returns. I'm relatively optimistic but also apprehensive about how long it will be before people feel confident."

Looking to Europe, Michael Freter, boss of PSI said that there were positive signals. The company has restarted some face to face meetings with customers, although he stressed it wasn't 'normality'. "Activities are coming back and people are talking again," he said. "People now know more about how to deal with the pandemic."

Paul Bellantone, CEO of US trade body, PPAI, said uncertainty plagued businesses and hoped the US election might bring some stability. A problem is that merchandise is a lagging indicator and customers are not presently making buying decisions. "They are making their own decisions about how to go to market or not, and this leads to a level of paralysis."



PAUL BELLANTONE
"TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS COMING BACK"



MICHAEL FRETER
"POSITIVE SIGNALS"

Bring smiles back

BPMA chair, Angela Wagstaff reminded conference that the industry was in the business of "putting smiles on people's faces. It's a gift industry with a positive vibe. Creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship are vital. We solve problems."

Businesses have had to diversify, with PPE sales being a vital source of revenue in depressed circumstances. Graeme Smith, BPMA president added that this indicated how flexible merchandise companies had been, and had not been "licking their wounds" but adapting to new needs.

"Will there be an ongoing need for PPE and signage? Maybe not in the long term,"

he said. "We need to look at our sector's ability to unite people as a business, and realign back to what your core strengths will be. There will be changes ahead."

PPE looks set to remain a valuable market, but traditional products are coming back. Bellantone said that while PPE would remain as a product, merchandise companies would do better to focus on branded versions, rather than generic items.

The day of the conference brought a U-turn from the government on its 'get back to the office' message. With COVID rising again, working from home is still on the agenda. Wagstaff said that while businesses have learned a lot about what is possible with dispersed teams, it hasn't all been plain sailing.

Let's get figital

Hybrid events that fuse merchandise and digital are one version of the future, the BPMA conference heard

Merchandise is particularly allied to the experiential sector – the power of product media dovetails particularly well with face to face marketing. With the events sector effectively shut down during the pandemic, both industries are suffering.

The BPMA conference sought to examine the state of play with a session looking at the future of events and experiential effectiveness.

Tom Lovegrove, chair, experiential effectiveness, IPM expressed the frustration at trying to plan in such fluid times. "I've never lived in a time when data went out of date so quickly," he said. "There's a lack

of confidence but not a lack of desire for events. People are desperate to get out there, but they need to be safe."

With fear the biggest obstacle, the sector has to build confidence in how safe the industry is, he added.

Carina Filek, Global COO, Elevate Staffing said that smaller, local events, with smaller budgets were restarting and could help rebuild confidence. While the pandemic has been tough, a spirit of greater understanding is one of the positives that has emerged, she said.

"Collaborative relationships are required - we are all in this together, but no one



TOM LOVEGROVE
"NO LACK OF DESIRE FOR EVENTS"



DAVID LONG
"A QUICK RETURN TO PROFIT"

"There are flaws with working from home and at some point people did stop enjoying it," she said. "We [Allwag] are now all back, but it is a very different workplace and office. However, we can bounce ideas around and come up with solutions that you can't on your own."

Necessity has been the mother of invention, with hybrid models emerging, said Bellantone. While people miss the "spontaneous collaboration" of being together, PPAI has actually engaged with more people than ever with different tools, he said. "It's forced us to change our revenue models and what meetings look like. That's a real upside. It won't be less social. We will be able to invite more people to events in different ways."

Decision making

With the fundamental changes wrought by the pandemic, purchase decisions are taking slightly longer to be made. However, Long said it was a good sign that decisions were being made, even if the pace was slower. "There's a transition as people try to rebalance. We walked into a problem that we didn't know was coming. So far though, we haven't seen too many companies failing, because they had to react quickly. Companies have done their business plans and have restructured, so they should be

has a crystal ball as we work through the latest rules."

Andrew Rae, managing director, IPM said that there were green shoots of growth. The IPM legal department has dealt with a surge in enquiries, which indicates that briefs are out there. "But rules change all the time, and you get something like the rule of six bombshell," he said.

He agreed that collaboration was in the air. There has also been a change in attitude to suppliers, with more honesty because brands realise that suppliers have to be around to deliver when events do restart.

The demand to reconnect will come back and won't be replaced by digital, said Filek. However, it could lead to more hybrid style events, and here merchandise could play a role in a 'figital' world that fuses physical and digital worlds.

Lovegrove said suppliers should work



ANGELA WAGSTAFF
"WE SOLVE PROBLEMS"

able to return to profit quickly when business picks up."

In the meantime, it is important that businesses collaborate and communicate, said Smith. "Don't assume suppliers can do what they did six months ago, such as visuals and running samples. Things have changed and communication remains essential."

Forecasting

In such turbulent times, it is hard to forecast, but BPMA end user research confirmed there are some green shoots, and panellists were cautiously optimistic.

In the US, companies that had added PPE to their inventory would be down about 50% from January, said Bellantone. However, since April, there had been an incremental uptick in business. "PPE is moving out of the top 10 of searches, for traditional products, but there will be no giant recovery by the end of the year – nothing like normal until 2022."

Long agreed with Bellantone that 2022 was a more realistic date for recovery to pre-COVID business levels. "If it has to be smaller for a while, so be it, but it doesn't mean we will all suffer."

Triggers for recovery

The decision to push back the reopening of live events for possibly another six months is a setback, said Wagstaff. Events such as



GRAEME SMITH
"BPMA NEVER MORE NEEDED"

festivals and exhibitions are much needed to add volume and diversity to business, and the industry's own show has also been affected.

"It has been a rollercoaster ride and we need public confidence. We all want events like Merchandise World back as it's a sign of recovery and normality. We can all learn to be two metres apart and we need to be sensible. Although we want it tomorrow, realistically it won't be until the middle of next year."

Long predicted that Merchandise World, which has been moved to June (see p13), would be successful and safe with measures to build confidence. "We are optimistic and the beauty is that we can see how PSI does. Our venue, Ricoh Arena has events lined up so we can learn from them."

With change a constant, Smith said that the UK had seen a reappraisal of the relevance and role of trade associations. "We are stronger together as a community. Members may feel exposed, but they have a common supportive voice. They are never more needed and they have proved their worth."

BPMA chair, Angela Wagstaff ended on an upbeat note. "We have a tight community and we have a voice. It's being heard by government and it's looking to help on things like sustainability. There's a lot that's still happening and the industry can move forward."



CARINA FILEK
"COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS ARE REQUIRED"

harder to find out what's relevant to an audience. "I love the idea of the goodie bag before the event," he said. "It builds anticipation and prepares the mindset."

There is a massive role for merchandise before, during and after an event, he added.



ANDREW RAE
"MORE HONESTY WITH SUPPLIERS"

Putting a finger on when events return is hard, said Rae, but when a tipping point arrives, the floodgates will open. "No one wants to be first and the continuous rule changes don't help. But it's a long game. It will come back with speed, vigour and passion."

USEFUL, RELEVANT, **REUSABLE**

BPMA research shows how attitudes to merchandise have changed during lockdown

The pandemic has helped reshape consumer attitudes to promotional merchandise, with regards to product choice and its sustainability, new research by the BPMA has found.

Attendees at the BPMA virtual conference were given a sneak preview of the research, which is aimed at building understanding of the end user and consumer market to help predict trends and improve the efficacy of the sector.

Research this summer questioned 500 consumers about what merchandise items they had received and how they perceived them, especially in light of the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic.

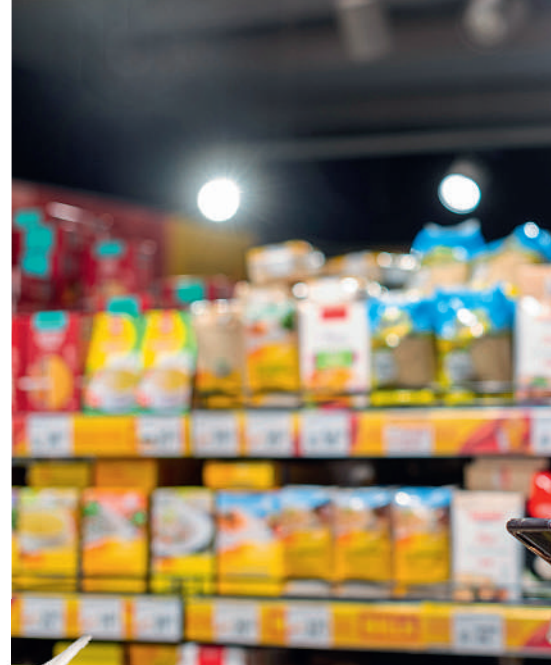
Pandemic confidence

Respondents were asked about the promotional items that they had received that

had helped them feel more confident during the pandemic. Almost two-fifths of consumers (38%) had received promotional merchandise since the start of the pandemic. The most widely received item was hand sanitiser (32%), followed by face coverings (28%) and water bottles (10%).

Looking at the three most popular items, 42% of consumers said that they expected hand sanitiser to be provided at venues or in the workplace, highlighting the rise of PPE as product group that distributors must have in their portfolios. Fewer respondents expected face coverings (29%) or water bottles (10%) to be provided, although more than half would welcome them if they were.

The market for face coverings and PPE was expected to have dropped



off over the summer but with many suppliers now reporting some stock shortages due to continued demand it's clear the need and expectation to protect will remain while restrictions remain in place.

Reusability

Questioned about their knowledge of whether an item was reusable, consumer attitudes were mixed. A high percentage (74%) were aware that water bottles could be used again,



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but only 55% knew that face coverings were. Asked about information provided on how to dispose of these items, responses varied, with 71% receiving them with water bottles, compared with 51% for face coverings and 45% for hand sanitiser.

What's acceptable

There has been a marked change in the promotional items consumers might accept in the future. Consumers said they would feel hesitant to accept some items during this time – primarily food, confectionery and drink (28%),

Key findings

- **Consumers expect the "new normal" when visiting venues or workplaces to include the offering of suitable safety measures – 42% would expect to be offered hand sanitiser and 29% would expect to be offered a face covering.**
- **There is a need to improve awareness/education on the recyclability and disposal of face coverings and hand sanitiser. These are products for which usage is currently high and likely to remain this way yet many are not aware of best practice to dispose of or recycle.**
- **Women and those aged 65+ are less likely to have ever received a promotional item.**
- **When receiving branded items, it is most important that the product is useful and relevant to consumer needs – otherwise they can be seen as wasteful. Consumers also mention the importance of eco-friendly products.**
- **Branded items have the potential to encourage positive engagement with companies, but the product must be tailored to consumer needs.**

but some also feel hesitation towards accepting clothing (18%) and mugs and glassware (15%).


Although the pandemic was driving these feelings, consumers were also reluctant to accept items that may end up as landfill, underlining the need to convey a positive message around merchandise utility.

Useful and sustainable

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.

One piece of positive news was that promotional items still deliver on the prompts for recommending a service or product (52%) and to use that company in future (51%). Merchandise still has the power to change minds and behaviour.

Following the first tranche of research, the BPMA is now entering a second wave of end user research to further the creation of sustainable standards for the industry where use, disposal and 'end of life' instructions are seen as not just important but an essential part of the responsibility of the industry.

The full report will be made available to members. 

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Don't survive – THRIVE

Current conditions will create a shake-out in the industry where agile and strategic operators can benefit, says **Paul Green**



The devastation caused by the impact of the pandemic on our much-loved industry is all too apparent. Those responsible for running trade and distributor businesses have had to make mass redundancies, possibly their hardest ever decision. I truly sympathise with the challenges they now face.

For owners of distributor businesses, now is a time for decisions. Should they carry on doing things exactly as before or make changes as a result of what has happened? Some owners of larger distributors have decided to roll up their sleeves and get back to selling. It has been an opportunity to reconnect with their true passion rather than just managing.

Working harder

Smaller distributors may have more limited choices. With furlough and subsequent redundancies, more tasks have to be completed by business owners. In such cases, the difficulties of weighing up which tasks are a priority and the associated time it takes to complete them can be challenging, soul-destroying and stressful. Some need to work harder than ever simply to keep their business afloat.

Our 'survival brain' takes over in a crisis and becomes our primary focus. This may be out of necessity rather than choice, but at some stage, a decision will have to be made about how not just to survive but grow the business in an ever more aggressive environment. Without creating the opportunity to focus on marketing and selling and innovation, this will stay a distant dream.

The right mindset

To succeed you may have to first change your mindset from survival to growth. Our

mindset or psychology – the belief in what we can achieve – determines whether we can move forward or not, even before we decide on the right strategy. Things may never get back to the way they were before COVID so our mindset may have to change and adapt to the new 'normal'. For business owners this will depend on whether we make the right choices as to what and how things will be tackled in future.

Most distributors enjoyed a profitable year in 2019. This may have been due to the 'jet stream' of prosperity which carried them forward last year, rather than because they were good at doing business, or were strategic or growth-minded. In March, or even earlier, some distributors had the foresight to join a new 'jet stream' of selling PPE, or did so in response to customer demand.


Capture business

For some, this turned out to be very profitable and exciting as the demand for promotional products fell off a cliff. Those who were most successful were innovative and capitalised on the opportunity before others realised what to do or how to do it. Now that the PPE market has settled down, it is time to review the business the distributor knows best. Now is the time to prepare for the challenges and opportunities ahead and focus on a new strategy, a growth-minded strategy that will help capture or ethically 'steal' 15-20% of the best buyers from other distributors who either have no strategy or are no longer around. Of course, you can only achieve this if you have the time to market and sell to existing customers and new prospects with fresh, innovative ideas to solve their marketing needs.

Recently a trade supplier told me that distributors are now worried that they

will lose key customers that they have come to rely on because their contacts have been made redundant. It is a known fact in our industry that one of the main barriers to acquiring new customers is the difficulty of persuading a new prospect to work with you rather than an incumbent distributor who may be well entrenched because of the personal friendship forged over years.

Act now

This new landscape will provide rich pickings for those who are agile, innovative, creative and persistent. Now is the time to build your product knowledge; to educate yourself on the latest products and branding techniques. Focusing on this will set you apart from the competition and provide your prospects with a compelling reason to do business with your company. There will be distributors who with the right mindset and strategy, will not just survive but will thrive. 

Paul Green is managing director of Galpeg Limited



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Effective working IN THE NEW ORDER

With business slowing down, promotional merchandise companies have had that rare thing – time to think about what works. Here's how they've been using it

Product Media magazine asked a range of suppliers for their views on what's changed in the last few months. With scaled back operations, staff on furlough, response and customer service have been at the forefront of industry discussions on how they continue to deliver in difficult times. The entire industry has reflected on the ways of working and how this can be improved. Investment into areas such as automation brings both relief and complexity.

Here we explore just some of the

impact the pandemic has had on plans for suppliers and the reaction from distributors as order levels rise slowly. We asked about the adjustments in effective working, how suppliers have been planning to invest and sharing some insights from their side of the merchandise fence.

CHANGING NEEDS

With recent member forums the BPMA has hosted, the overriding message of communicating change

Reconnecting with nature

Jamie Gray,
Sow Easy

Life and work have changed incredibly. The pandemic has made me think hard about the 'old normal' and is leaving me wondering why we didn't question our working practices sooner. We have surprised ourselves with how well we can work together without being together; there are members of the team who I haven't seen since March, but it feels like I saw them just yesterday. I'm incredibly proud of how we all pulled together through this crazy year. We adjusted by producing digital catalogues, hosting virtual events and presentations. We are also offering free mock-up services, and often send samples to people working from home.

Being in the midst of a global pandemic has only heightened how important taking care of our mental well-being and our planet really is. It's easy to forget how many great things did happen during lockdown, such as seeing more wildlife return, less pollution and people



reconnecting with nature. Our products are very close to both of these causes, and it is clear that we are receiving more new enquiries due to all of our products being strictly seed and plant based.

With the lack of trade shows and visits to distributors, we have looked at other ways to build and strengthen relationships with distributors who have been supporting us, and have found that my calls have been pleasantly received and what's more, they have enabled us to streamline our processes even more.



UK lags online

Haydn Willetts, midocean

At midocean we have spent huge amounts on the web shop offering and we have a full web two-print service where almost all questions can be answered. The way of working around Europe is very different to that of the UK distributor in terms of online ordering. More than 50% of all our orders around Europe are placed online. In the UK it is under 10%.

We have for many years invested and planned the development of the site. By utilising the tools available to them the distributors can respond more effectively and quickly to their end customer requests. This has a knock-on effect as it frees up time for our customer care staff to be more proactive on more involved and complicated enquiries.

Demand for eco products is back on the agenda as is confirmation on compliancy of products and social accountability. Speed of production is key it seems at present as when a customer makes up their mind it seems it is needed quickly.

In reality, both suppliers and distributors are likely to have less staff available over the mid to long term future to handle enquiries in the same way. This could lead to delays in response which could affect the lead time to produce an order. I think communication is important and suppliers need to be proactive to help train distributors to use the tools available and to demonstrate the benefits. I have customers who now use the web site and are so pleased they made the switch.



Partnership approach

Neil Horner, Laltex

We've been working towards a streamlined process for a long time. However, the pandemic has allowed us to accelerate this and we've used resources to continue to develop our online offering to the distributors. Our online portal, laltextrade.com allows customers to access their pricing, along with image and template downloads. We've also added the ability to check order status so our customers can see that their orders are on track and get live tracking. Recently we've added the ability for customers to change their own delivery addresses and now order their own samples online.

We find that customers are really embracing this as it gives them the ability to get info straight away. So, for example we'll receive an address update via email and then it's often followed up with a call checking that it had been received and updated. The distributors have a fear that something hasn't been amended in time because it may be in a queue and their delivery date is tight, so the ability to do this within seconds themselves gives them the reassurance.

As everyone knows, PPE was in high demand since lockdown. This has decreased significantly, and customers have started to order promotional merchandise again. Times are tough at the moment; all markets are continuing to return slowly. More than ever we're seeing the demand for quicker lead times and because of the slick processes we've put in place we're able to meet these demands.

Staffing levels will be reduced at both supplier and distributor level, and we're very much taking the partnership approach. As a trade only supplier we are here to support and help clients, both in a traditional way of face to face visits in person, as well as Zoom, phone, and online services that are available 24/7. We are genuinely committed to making the distributors lives as simple and seamless as possible.

Revisiting processes

Andrew Langley, Juniper Products

We have spent this summer working on new articles such as our ranges of hand sanitiser and face mask pouches, while also finalising a whole new and exciting recycled rPET material from recycled plastic bottles that we are calling COMO and will be available across 100 products in five colours from November. At the same time, we have been redeveloping our main Juniper site which we hope to have ready by the year end, and updating our award-winning notebookbuilder site.

We are working on new support marketing materials for our distributor clients so we can provide better, faster and more useful product information and a quotation service, while revisiting our own in house processes and staff functions and roles.

We are seeing trends in demand, with



lower volumes and sustainability even more to the fore, and a marked increase in demand for UK made items.

It is important to have good communication from the outset of an enquiry, to help us win business together, to avoid wasted time and effort, and to create innovative solutions that impress a client.


across everyone's businesses is paramount. Distributors have noted the direction of travel is personalised, smaller run items and at times automated platforms don't have all the answers they need.

With the requirement for log ins and passwords for different supplier sites, many distributors revert to phone calls for the instant connection, personal service, and speedy answers they crave. During the early stages of lockdown, it was hard to tell who was open and the industry utilised many different routes such as industry Slack groups, forums, and collaborations to signpost where innovation and opportunities lie.

SEISMIC SHIFT

Considering the absolute need to service the projects that are coming through, BPMA CEO Carey Trevill said: "Listening to members, it's clear the impact on staffing levels and response

times for all sides has meant suppliers and distributor connectivity is essential to deliver expected service during the toughest trading conditions we have ever seen. Suppliers have invested heavily into their systems, using the time during the pandemic to refocus on core service and supply but equally their businesses have changed and how distributors interact with suppliers has also changed.

"However, with distributor scope and demand from end user channels also shifting, the entire industry has undergone a seismic shift in how it delivers. Working together to understand demand now and in the immediate future will be key to securing the future value in the industry. It's one of the reasons we have set up the Networking Hub for BPMA members to enable the swift sharing of information and contacts and we encourage all our members to sign up for this free to use benefit until the end of the year." 

Streamline to grow

Corinna Jones, Badger Design

We are concentrating on building a new website that will be much easier to use than our current one. It will have more information and functions such as the ability to send yourself the quote, ask for samples to be sent with your compliment slip, and so on. We are hoping it will help new sales staff coming in so they won't have to rely on 20 years' experience. The pandemic has accelerated our need to streamline – to be honest, it has given

us more time to concentrate on what we need to grow. I always thought the business would be running perfectly by the time there was no business left.

Everyone is asking for more environmentally friendly items. One has actually paid the extra which has been a bit heart-warming. You put an insane amount of work in trying to put everything in place and it's very rare that a customer 'puts their money where their mouth is' so it was positive to see.

THE JOB SAFETY NET

Chancellor **Rishi Sunak** has announced the Job Support Scheme to help protect jobs through the winter. *Product Media* examines how it differs from previous furlough arrangements

The Government has recently announced new measures to support firms and their employees as the country faces more restrictions. Understanding what's on offer has needed more explanation and examples to help employers and employees get to grips with complex rules.

The Job Support Scheme (JSS) is different from the original Job Retention Scheme. Under this new scheme, staff are not furloughed, and the government will not pay staff to undertake no work at all. The aim of the scheme is to help employers who can support employees doing some work but need more time to recover.

Now with two different options – JSS Open and JSS Closed – we explain what happens for businesses who are affected by coronavirus and those who are forced to closed.

Businesses that are operating but facing decreased demand can get support for wages through JSS Open. Those businesses that are legally required to close their premises as a direct result of coronavirus restrictions set by one or more of the four governments of the UK can get the support they need through JSS Closed.

JSS Open

Under JSS Open, the employee will need to work

- A minimum of 20% of their usual hours and the employer will continue to pay them as normal for the hours worked.
- Alongside this, the employee will receive 66.67% of their normal pay for the hours not worked - this will be made up of contributions from the employer and from the government.
- The employer will pay 5% of reference salary for the hours not worked, up to a maximum of £125 per month, with the discretion to pay more than this if they wish.
- The government will pay the remainder of 61.67%, of reference salary for the hours not worked, up to a maximum of £1,541.75 per month.
- This will ensure employees continue to receive at least 73% of their normal wages, where they earn £3,125 a month or less.

JSS Closed

Where employers have been legally required to close their premises as a direct result of coronavirus restrictions set by one or more of the four governments of the UK, they are now entitled to more help. For these businesses, the Job Support Scheme, through JSS Closed, will help them through the period that they are directly affected by these restrictions by supporting the wage costs of employees who have been instructed to cease work in eligible (closed) premises.

- Each employee who cannot work due to these restrictions will receive two thirds of their normal pay, paid by their employer and fully funded by the government, to a maximum of £2,083.33 per month, although their employer has discretion to pay more than this if they wish.
- This will help protect employee incomes, limit unemployment and retain employer-employee matches so that these premises are able to reopen as quickly as possible when circumstances allow.
- Employees may also be entitled to additional financial support, including Universal Credit.

Recent survey results show that 69% of BPMA members have reported using the Job Retention Scheme (JRS) and 37% say they will use the new Job Support Scheme (JSS) from November 2020 and 49% say they intend to claim the JRS bonus for retaining employees to January 2021. Only 16% of those surveyed state they haven't taken advantage of the government employment schemes. With unemployment rising and redundancies across the industry growing, the new Job Support Scheme does present options for employers for the next six

months. However, with missing details for the latter half of the scheme, PM examines what employers and employees can expect and whether the cost of taking part could create more challenges than it solves.

Who is eligible?

Starting with who is able to access the new JSS is critical. Larger firms now can be expected to be means tested, assessed and cleared before they can use the scheme, proving turnover is lower than before COVID-19 impacted their business. If you are classed as an SME, there will be no financial assessment test which is good news for the industry with a dominant percentage of SME companies. If you are a larger firm (250 employees or more) accessing the JSS, and your turnover has decreased or remained equal to the previous year, these firms will qualify. Further information is available online to test whether firms are eligible.

An employer can claim the JSS Open and JSS Closed grant at the same time for different employees. However, an employer cannot claim for a single employee under both schemes at the same time.

You must have enrolled in online PAYE, have a UK, Channel Island, or Isle of Man bank account. It is also understood that additional eligibility criteria will apply depending on

whether the employer is claiming a JSS Open grant or JSS Closed grant.

From what date can employees be considered for the scheme?

Eligible employers will be able to claim the Job Support Scheme grant for employees who were on their PAYE payroll between 6 April 2019 and 11:59pm on 23 September 2020. This means an online submission notifying payment for the employee must have been made to HMRC at some point from 6 April 2019 up to 11:59pm 23 September 2020.

Employers can only claim for employees that were in their employment on 23 September 2020. If employees ceased employment after 23 September 2020 and were subsequently rehired, then employers can claim for them.

Are they checking up on companies?

With fraud reportedly rife in furlough claims, the HMRC is being far more cautious with this latest offering. Those who speculate on whether HMRC would actually be able to check up on employers and employees when the JRS was introduced should know that many firms have already been investigated where they believe workers were not furloughed. The promise of surveillance in this scheme means firms are urged to take heed of the need to comply.

Do companies need to tell their staff if they use the JSS?

It's really important that all changes are communicated in writing to employees. This wasn't clear for many employers at the start of furlough scheme but HMRC stress the importance of communicating this change. Employers must agree the new short time working arrangements with their staff, make any changes to the employment contract by agreement, and notify the employee in writing. This agreement must be made available to HMRC on request so it's vital to have this in place from the start. If you are a BPMA member, you can access helpful letter templates from Croner's COVID Information Hub.

Payments

Grant payments will be made in arrears, reimbursing the employer for the government's contribution. Further information will be available from the end of October.

We understand "usual wages" calculations will follow a similar methodology as for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. Full details will be set out in guidance shortly. Employees who have previously been furloughed, will have their underlying usual pay and/or hours used to calculate usual wages, not the amount they were paid while on furlough.

Employers must pay employees their contracted wages for hours worked, and the government and employer contributions for hours not worked. The expectation is that

employers cannot top up their employees' wages above the two-thirds contribution to hours not worked at their own expense.

Many employers are now considering the scheme flexibility during the next six months and the cost of safeguarding roles for when the industry returns is a critical consideration. With industry order levels ranging from between 30-60%, hard decisions are being made across the country.

What are 'reduced hours'?

The employee must be working at least 20% of their usual hours under JSS Open. For the time worked, employees must be paid their normal contracted wage. For time not worked, the employee will be paid up to 73% of their usual wage.

An important factor of this scheme to protect jobs, the government has stated employees cannot be made redundant or put on notice of redundancy during the period within which their employer is claiming the grant for that employee.

The scheme dates

The scheme will be open from 1 November 2020 to 30 April 2021. Employers will be able to make a claim in arrears from 8 December, with payments made after the claim has been approved and will be paid on a monthly basis. Grants will be payable in arrears meaning that a claim can only be submitted in respect of a given pay period, after payment to the employee has been made and that payment has been reported to HMRC via an RTI return.

Can businesses still claim the Job Retention Bonus (JRB)?


The Job Retention Bonus offers a one-off

payment to employers across the UK for every employee previously furloughed under the Job Retention Scheme that are kept on until at least 31 January 2021. Depending on how many employees you did place on furlough, this could lead to you gaining a substantial sum from the government.

To gain the bonus, your employees must be eligible for the Job Retention Scheme and you must have claimed a grant from the scheme for them. The JRB can be claimed for employees who:

- were furloughed and had a Job Retention Scheme claim submitted for them that meets all relevant eligibility criteria for the scheme
- have been continuously employed by you from the time of your most recent claim to the Job Retention Scheme for that employee until at least 31 January 2021
- have been paid an average of at least £1,560 (gross) between the tax months of 6 November to 5 December 2020, 6 December 2020 to 5 January 2021 and 6 January to 5 February 2021. Employees must have at least one payment of taxable earnings in each of the relevant months
- are not serving a contractual or statutory notice period, that started before 1 February 2021, including notice of retirement, for the employer making a claim.

Use of the Job Support Scheme (JSS) will not impact upon an employer's ability to claim the bonus, meaning companies are able to make use of both. Claims will only be able to be made between 15 February and 31 March 2021. After this date, no further claims will be able to be made.

More information can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/job-support-scheme. With thanks to Croner for additional information. BPMA members can access Croner's employment advice line. Contact the BPMA for more information. 

Redundancy options

Despite government aid, companies are facing making some employees redundant. What alternatives could be considered?

In any redundancy situation, employers need to make sure they have considered all alternatives before proceeding with a process, as it may be that employers can save the costs needed without making staff redundant.

The first thing employers can consider is laying off staff. Lay-off is where an employer no longer requires an employee to attend work for a temporary period. The employee will not be paid but may be entitled to a statutory Guarantee Payment — presently the maximum is £30 a day for five days in any three-month period — so a maximum of £145 with part-time entitlement being pro-rata. To go down this road, employers must first check staff contracts. If you are not contractually entitled to lay employees off without pay, they will need to agree to this.

Instead of a lay-off, employers could consider introducing a shorter working week as a temporary measure. Again, this will require consultation with the workforce and their written consent to the temporary changes. Employers should make it clear during the consultation that the alternative will be redundancy. A temporary reduction in hours and pay is more likely to be accepted by employees as an alternative to the finality of redundancy.

Employers are also encouraged to look into your current plans for recruitment if you have planned to expand. One option is to withdraw job offers or defer new starters, however employers should remember that unilaterally withdrawing a job offer that has been accepted will be a breach of contract and that deferring a new recruit's start date will require their consent if the offer has already been accepted. Alternatively, the company could put in place a recruitment freeze and reduce the use of temporary staff.

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Carey Trevill - CEO BPMA



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For more information email enquiries@bpma.co.uk or visit www.bpma.co.uk

T's & C's: Limited to one off use against any order over £500+vat or more with each participating company. Only BPMA Suppliers participating in this scheme will accept this offer. Please make reference to the BPMA £50 Voucher Scheme and quote your membership number when confirming your order. The voucher must be used from 9th September 2020 - 30th November 2020. Some products may be exempt from this offer. This offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer.

*This voucher must be used from the 9th September 2020 - 30th November 2020

KICKSTARTING PROSPECTS

A new government scheme offers the opportunity to plug skills gaps in the industry and help it grow its talent base

Alongside support for employers and jobs in the UK, the government has also released several schemes to encourage experience in the workplace for apprenticeships and traineeships. The new Kickstart scheme is aimed at taking those at risk of long-term unemployment into the jobs market to develop skills.

The BPMA is currently being assessed as a group representative for the new Kickstart scheme on behalf of members after amassing more than 30 prospective roles suitable for the scheme from across the membership. With many trade bodies applying for such schemes, the Department of Work and Pensions has been overwhelmed with applications for the programme, which is due to start in November.

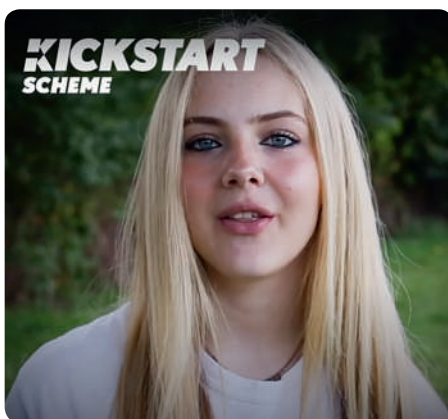
Together with apprenticeships and traineeships, which are also available as short-term experience possibilities for employers, BPMA CEO Carey Trevill has been exploring the options during webinars for members.

She said: "For those in the industry who do have openings, these funded options represent a good route to grow the workforce and bring people into our industry that perhaps never considered us as a job option. Seeing roles ranging from warehouse, designers, sales and social media, there is a real opportunity to provide genuine skills for those who are applying across a broad range of capabilities, showing just how diverse jobs in our industry can be."

WHAT'S INVOLVED?

Kickstart roles are six-month placements with an employer whose role has already been vetted for the scheme and is able to create a job placement. A fully funded placement for 25 hours per week including employer's NI and pension contribution, each Kickstart placement also comes with a £1,500 grant to assist with set up, training, equipment and employability skills.

Applicants for this scheme are on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment. Once a role is approved, an applicant is matched



with a role in their area and asked to attend an interview. Both parties need to agree to take the placement forward and once agreed, the placement is secured for six-months and reviewed at regular intervals. As an employer, you'll need to be able offer employability skills training as part of the role.

If you have under 30 roles, you are asked to apply via a group representative. Please contact Carey Trevill at the BPMA if you are considering a Kickstart placement for more guidance.

APPRENTICESHIPS – NEW FUNDING

Apprentices are another great route to bring on new skills and the government has additional funding for employers during this period for new apprenticeship placements.

The apprenticeship scheme has been open since 1 August and ends on 31 January 2021 for new apprenticeships. Certain conditions apply; they must be a new employee and have a contract of employment between the dates above, and they cannot previously have been employed at your workplace.

PAY LEVELS

The government has agreed two levels of payment:

- 16-24 year olds qualify for £2,000
- 25+ years qualify for £1,000

This is in addition to existing £1,000 incentive payment for 16-18 year olds.

Payments to employers are made at intervals during training.

TRAINEESHIPS – PROVIDING EXPERIENCE

In addition to Kickstart and apprenticeships, the government has also introduced traineeships aimed at 16-24 year olds who qualified below Level 3 (25 year olds with education and health plan). If you haven't achieved English or Maths GCSE, this is the alternative route to apprenticeships as without these GCSEs apprenticeships are not an option.

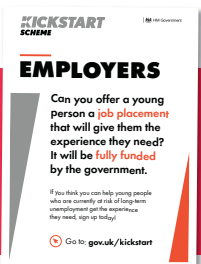
EMPLOYER INCENTIVES

Employers are incentivised to provide these schemes.

- There is a £1,000 employer bonus to take traineeships.
- Maximum 10 trainees per company.
- Candidates have to complete a six-month placement and 100 hours of work experience (e.g. two days college and two days in the workplace).
- After six months, there is an option for those on the traineeship scheme to proceed to apprenticeship or full-time work (although under 18s cannot work full time).

Note, for the first six months, there is no charge to the business and trainees do not get paid – contributions to food and travel can be made however should an employer wish to do so.

If you'd like more information about Kickstart, apprenticeships or traineeships, contact Carey Trevill at the BPMA or visit: [government/collections/kickstart-scheme](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/kickstart-scheme) for Kickstart [employing-an-apprentice/get-funding](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/kickstart-scheme) for apprenticeships [government/collections/traineeships](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/kickstart-scheme) for traineeships



MARKING OUR TERRITORY

The UK Conformity Assessment (UKCA) is set to replace the CE mark on many promotional goods. Here is what you need to know

With news at the end of October that Prime Minister Boris Johnson has warned that 'no deal' is the route the UK will be following, our preparations for transition following 31 December this year, will see changes marking our territory in more ways than one.

While we can't predict the outcome of the government negotiations, we can share the new guidelines on the UKCA mark coming into force, replacing the CE mark for UK-made goods. Here we set out the must have information for industry and when new rules come into play.

- The UKCA marking will apply to most goods currently subject to the CE marking. It will also apply to aerosol products.
- From 1 January 2021 the technical requirements ('essential requirements') you must meet – and the conformity assessment processes and standards that can be used to demonstrate conformity – will be largely the same as they are now.
- The UKCA marking can be used from 1 January 2021. However, to allow businesses time to adjust to the new requirements, you will still be able to use the CE marking until 1 January 2022 in most cases.
- In some cases, you will need to apply the new UKCA marking to goods being sold in Great Britain immediately from 1 January 2021. You are encouraged to be ready to use the UKCA marking as soon as possible before this date.
- The CE marking will only be valid in Great Britain for areas where GB and EU rules remain the same.
- From the beginning of 2022 only products with UKCA marking will be accepted in Great Britain.
- The UKCA will not be recognised in the EU market. Products that require CE marking will still need a CE marking to be sold in the EU.
- If the EU changes its rules and you CE mark your product on the basis of those new rules you will not be able to use the CE marking to sell in Great Britain even before 31 December 2021.

UK MANUFACTURERS: PLACING NEW PRODUCTS ON THE MARKET

If you have already placed your goods on the UK market (or in an EU country) before 1 January 2021, you do not need to do anything. What you will need to do from 1 January 2021 depends on the type of goods you're placing on the market. From 1 January 2021, the UKCA mark will be the conformity assessment marking for Great Britain for most goods currently subject to CE marking.

Goods can carry both the CE and UKCA markings so long as they are fully compliant with both UK and EU regulations.

FUTURE USE OF MARKINGS IN THE UK

From 1 January 2022, the CE marking will not be recognised in Great Britain for areas covered by this guidance and the UKCA marking. However, a product bearing the CE marking would still be valid for sale in the UK so long as it was also UKCA marked and complied with the relevant UK rules.

TRANSITIONAL MEASURES RELATING TO THE UKCA MARKING

For many product types, transitional measures apply. Until 1 January 2023, for most goods (other than those subject to special rules) you have the option to affix the UKCA marking on a label affixed to the product or on an accompanying document. The economic operators (whether manufacturer, importer or distributor) should take reasonable steps to ensure the UKCA marking remains in place. Products that require the UKCA marking cannot be made available without it (other than where the CE marking is being used before 1 January 2022).

GENERAL RULES TO APPLY WHEN CONSIDERING THE UKCA MARK

- UKCA markings must only be placed on a product by you as the manufacturer or your authorised representative (where allowed for in the relevant legislation).
- When attaching the UKCA marking, you take full responsibility for your product's conformity with the requirements of the relevant legislation.
- You must only use the UKCA marking to show product conformity with the relevant UK legislation.
- You must not place any marking or sign that may misconstrue the meaning or form of the UKCA marking to third parties.
- You must not attach other markings on the product which affect the visibility, legibility or meaning of the UKCA marking.
- The UKCA marking cannot be placed on products unless there is a specific requirement to do so in the legislation.

DON'T FORGET YOU NEED TO KEEP RECORDS

The information you must keep will vary depending on the specific legislation relevant to your product. You must keep general records of:

- how the product is designed and manufactured
- how the product has been shown to conform to the relevant requirements
- the addresses of the manufacturer and any storage facilities

You should keep the information in the form of a technical file. The market surveillance authority can request to see these records on request so it's essential to ensure these are kept up to date and accessible.

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT TO ENSURE GOODS APPLY?

Every part of the supply chain is expected

to conform and understand the new regulations. If you are supplying or distributing goods currently with a CE mark, expect to conform to the new UKCA mark.

You will need to use the new UKCA marking immediately after 1 January 2021 if all of the following apply. Your product:

- is for the market in Great Britain
- is covered by legislation which requires the UKCA marking
- requires mandatory third-party conformity assessment

In most cases, you must apply the UKCA marking to the product itself or to the packaging. In some cases, it may be placed on the manuals or on other supporting literature. This will vary depending on the specific regulations that apply to the product.

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT THE PROMOTIONAL MERCHANDISE INDUSTRY?

Product areas which affect our industry in particular from the manufacturing sectors set out in government guidance:

- Toy safety
- Personal protective equipment
- Low voltage electrical equipment
- Ecodesign

From 1 January 2023, the UKCA marking must, in most cases, be affixed directly to the product. You should start building this into your design process for new products ready for this date.

DO YOU NEED A CONFORMITY ASSESSMENT?

Some UK bodies such as BSI are approved bodies to assess products for conformity. It should be noted that UKCA conformity assessment differs for PPE and medical devices for those in the industry engaged in these sectors.

If your product requires the services of a notified body for third party assessment of conformity, you will need to check whether they are able to offer UKCA marking-related services. Only organisations who are approved bodies for UKCA marking will be able to offer this service. You will need to apply for UKCA marking to preserve your access to the UK market and reduce the risk of Brexit.

UKCA CHECKLIST

1. Make sure you have read the guidance at gov.uk/guidance/using-the-ukca-mark-from-1-january-2021.
2. Ensure you understand if the rules apply to any goods you are producing and distributing.

UK CA

3. What goods are going to market from January 2021? Do they comply? Do you need to apply?
4. Understand the conformity status of new products – it's everyone's responsibility.
5. Download and keep the new UKCA artwork. It is available on the Government UKCA guidance pages.
6. Plan ahead with new product designs to incorporate the UKCA.

For more information, visit gov.uk/guidance/using-the-ukca-mark-from-1-january-2021 to view the guidance and download guidelines for the UKCA mark including artwork.



NEW



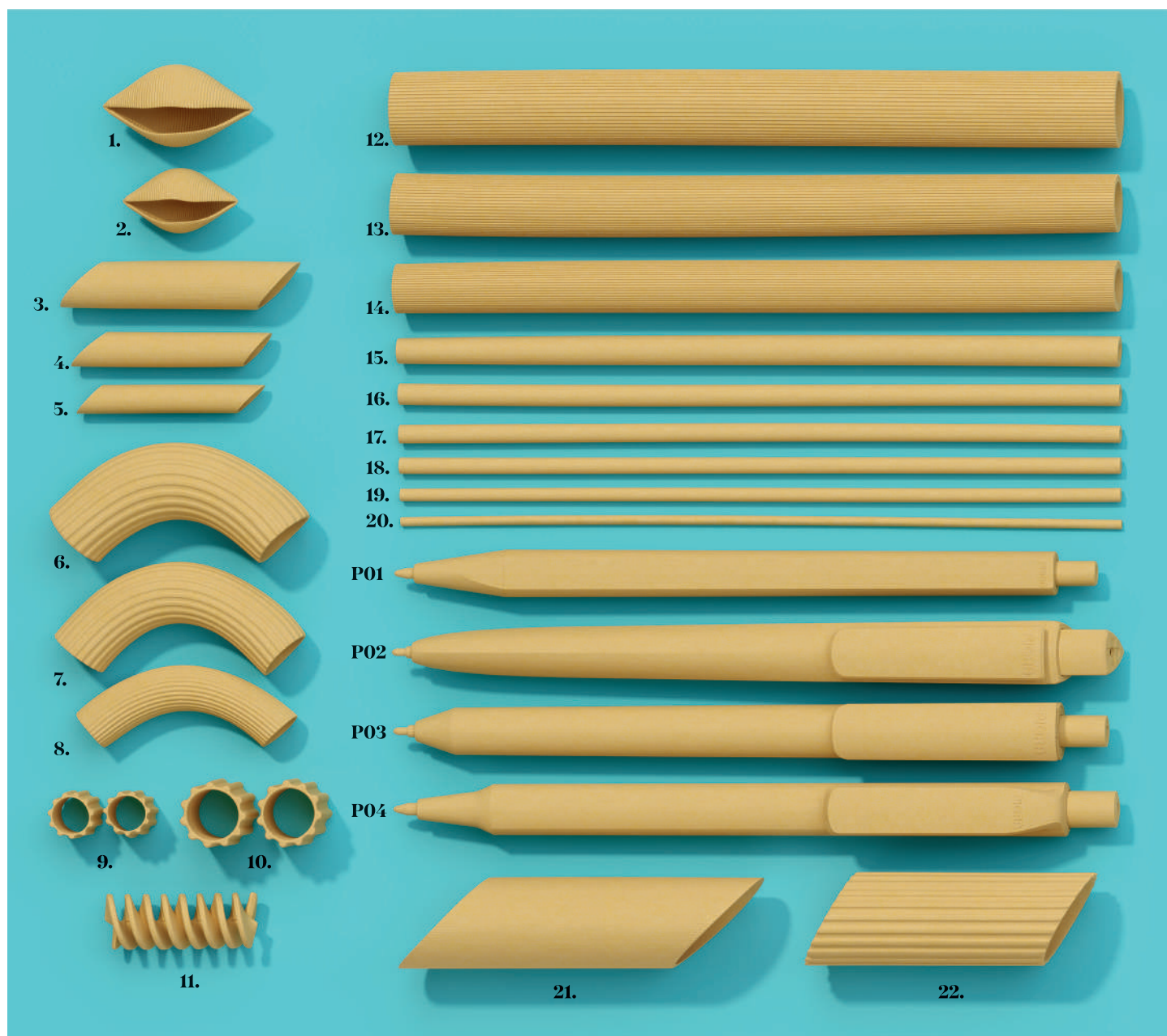



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ROAD TO RECOVERY

Staying on top of cashflow is imperative for any promotional business at the minute, says **Mike Collins**



We're in tough times with the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to disrupt life for the promotional goods industry. For many, this has resulted in serious cashflow problems and not simply due to a lack of customers but also existing customers showing no signs of paying invoices for the goods supplied on credit. Many debtor customers are hard to contact as they prioritise their needs over yours.

In the past six months alone, Direct Route has recovered more than £3 million pounds for promotional goods' distributors and suppliers. In all but a few isolated cases our clients have not paid any fees because we have either provided a completely cost free solution, for both client and customer or alternatively used the late payment legislation to recover our fees from more difficult debtor customers.

Flexible approach

We know from conversations with members that credit control teams are stretched and even though many businesses are currently cash only this does not chip away at your debtor list or easily create repeat business.

Your 'debtor list' usually comprises good customers you still want to trade with because they will eventually pay you, and customers with no intention of ever paying despite your best efforts.

If you're facing some of these challenges and are yet to use Direct Route, we hope this article reassures you that in choosing us as a longstanding BPMA

benefit provider, you're in the right hands.

We collect your small debts (£100) as well as the larger debts (five figures upwards). And we are effective. Since the pandemic took off in March, we have within a few days of instruction recovered millions of pounds for BPMA members. We know from your industry feedback that this has often made the difference between continuing to trade or not. Some debts have been relatively straightforward to collect, others extremely challenging due to many factors. Please ask about the BPMA case studies and testimonials we have in abundant supply.

Our collection team is made up of experienced employees, so you benefit from consistency of service and valuable collective experience.

Choose your option

We offer a range of debt collection services including 'softer' collection services when you ideally want to maintain a trading relationship with your customer, plus zero cost full debt recovery on debts up to £3,000 with a modest fee for collection over this amount. If you have used solicitors in the past for sending letters before action and full debt recovery, you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Automated systems are important for speedy collection and ongoing case management. We have a 24/7 online portal so that you can regularly monitor your debt case progress and we use track and trace email systems so we know exactly when a debtor opened our emails with the audit trail and supporting notes maintained on our system. This can

counter debtors who claim that they didn't receive our communications. On the rare occasions when court action is necessary, we can use this information to significantly increase the likelihood of a judgement in your favour.

Personal touch

You can talk to your local Direct Route representative. An internet only debt recovery service is okay but only when the debtor pays promptly – which rarely happens.

We offer practical advice for your credit management team. It could be that a few changes, such as the information you gather at the account opening stage, taking regular credit reports, and so on, will reduce your debtor customers. This free advice can protect business cashflow in future.

Don't delay in asking for our help and support. Whatever your need we have a solution.

Mike Collins is MD of Direct Route

Local Support Contact Details

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

London and South East

David Barker
dbarker@directroute.co.uk
07766 545871

South Wales and South West

Ron Dingle
rdingle@directroute.co.uk
07976 675420

Midlands and East Anglia

Ken Brown
kbrown@directroute.co.uk
07795 214426

North Wales and North West

Ian Jenkinson
ijenkinson@directroute.co.uk
07860 197476

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IMPAMARK MARKS 15 YEARS AS BPMA MEMBER

While many BPMA members have had a rapid learning curve with remote learning during the pandemic, one company had a head start.

Essex-based Impamark has had a split site approach for the past 13 years when managing director, Nicky Crisp set up the company's second office near Valencia in Spain.

"When the lockdown was announced in March in UK, we had already been in lockdown in Spain for two weeks," said Crisp. "We are used to working remotely. All of our systems are Linux and cloud-based and can be accessed from anywhere. Our VPN phones are answerable in both UK and Spain, and whilst other businesses were concerned about how they could physically operate, we were fortunate in that the

transition for us was pretty seamless."

Other aspects of the business have been less so. Like many other distributor businesses, promotional work fell off a cliff in April, and most of the team were furloughed. Like other distributors, Impamark started to sell PPE, and the company, which is celebrating 15 years as a BPMA member, found BPMA webinars of enormous support.


"We built a new PPE website in May and knowing that the BPMA was there to guide us through some of the certification and validation issues was invaluable. I have never been so glad to be a member of our industry body," said Crisp.

Understandably, the company, which celebrated its 50th anniversary as a family run business last year and was

named ACL Essex Employer of the Year, has had to adjust plans for 2020. With quarantine rules, Crisp has not been able to visit the UK office since February.

"After our success in 2019, we were going to take on a new apprentice this year," she said "But that is postponed until 2021. We have been Silver Corporate members of Essex Wildlife Trust for many years and had several sponsorship events planned with them – again postponed until next year."

While the 50th anniversary saw the team gather in Spain for festivities, this year's are likely to have a more socially distanced feel.

"Our plans for this year have not been finalised, but I think we will be having virtual festivities probably involving pizza and prosecco and a Spain versus UK team quiz." 



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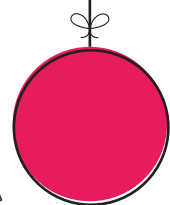


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LET TECHNOLOGY SAY THANK YOU

Promotional technology has been lower on buyers' lists during the pandemic, but the giving season should see a revival, says **Matt Pluckrose**



The promotional industry like many has had, and continues to have, a very turbulent year due to COVID-19. Sales, activity and demand for many suppliers and distributors dropped to near zero during quarters two and three, and product demand changed dramatically and very rapidly from traditional marketing tools to personal protection.

It's a year that has brought us many new forced ways of selling and communicating with our clients. For example, we now all Zoom rather than jumping in the car, Tube, train, or plane to meet with suppliers, clients and team members.

Lower priority

Changing societal conditions, government policy, and national and local lockdowns have all changed what is important to marketers and businesses. Product demand has rapidly changed, ranging from PPE and personalisation of feel good products such as confectionery, to products for wellbeing such as drinkware.

This has meant demand and sales of promotional tech have been hit hard over the past six months.

While technology remains a necessity in this digital world, it has not been a product or tool at the top of the list for our market.

However, that's about to change as we head into the late autumn and race towards the giving season of Christmas.

Time for thanks

Events, Christmas parties and many other business social events are likely to be cancelled this year meaning businesses this year will almost certainly want to say a massive 'thank you' to their teams, customers and even suppliers for their perseverance and loyalty during this challenging and terrible year.

Technology is now suddenly coming much higher and closer to the top of everyone's gift wish list as premium tech products and gifts become the must haves for the end of the year.

Tech products which are in top demand this year include wireless headphones and



mini TWS (true wireless stereo) earbuds often with active noise cancelling (ANC). This is because many people now spend much of their day on video

calls and so a useful and comfortable headset with good sound is a necessity. Some people now have a set for work and a set for personal use such at the gym.

Brand power

High street brands can add power to this category with sales enquiries/demand split between those who feel that their brand or logo is key, to those who think a recognised brand or co-branding is required (such as Phillips, Sony, House of Marley).

Another great lifestyle item for gifting is of course wireless speakers, in particular sets of two that link to each other via TWS to create a stereo effect. The power and quality of sound output is improving making these perfect to 'get the party started'.

Finally, tech items with an eco story (such

as biodegradable shells, or natural materials such as wheat or cork) continue to be very popular and make desirable gifts despite the economic crisis. This would include items such as power banks, mouse, charging cables, wireless charging plates, and stands.

Home front

Loyalty and reward gifting in 2020 also needs a more luxury feel with gift packaging and sets perhaps combined with other non-tech items. Delivery direct to home addresses is the new norm now. The first impression creates a lasting feeling for such gifts, which is even more important now these will most likely be direct delivered to people's homes.

So, to summarise, this year has been extremely tough for everyone but now is the time to discuss and plan carefully how technology can assist your client's plans and budget spend for the last quarter of 2020.

Matt Pluckrose is managing director of Desktop Ideas

BRIDGE THE GAP

With businesses concerned about their ability to maintain supply chains post Brexit, sourcing closer to home could help, says **Mark Alderson**

A recent survey has found that delays to the supply chain are UK companies' biggest fear in relation to the impact of Brexit on cross border trade.

Almost half (45%) of businesses surveyed in a report, commissioned by logistics company Descartes, considered supply chain delays to be the biggest issue surrounding the end of the Brexit transition period on 31 December 2020.

The survey comes as leaked Cabinet Office documents reveal officials' concern at the readiness of border systems to cope with the end of the transition period, with "critical gaps" in plans, according to Bloomberg.

And industry body, Logistics UK, has expressed concern about the readiness of the new Smart Freight System (the IT system that firms will need to use) to move goods across the border.

The survey, which involved 502 respondents, of whom 40% were supply chain decision-makers, found the larger the organisation, the larger the concern regarding supply chain delays. More than half (56%) of supply chain

managers in firms with over 1,000 employees worried about delays to the supply chain.

Two-thirds (67%) of larger firms were very or extremely concerned about longer delays in their supply chain, along with 68% of supply chain managers within healthcare.

The next most important concerns were tariff payments (40%) and customs declarations (40%).

Only 23% said they had high confidence in their ability to cope with the extra administrative burden of Brexit and only 18% were prepared for a no-deal Brexit.

Mix in the current pandemic and there has never been a better time to buy British. This is reflected in the results of a recent piece of research conducted by Barclays Corporate Banking who found that more than a quarter (27%) of retailers are already looking to switch to local suppliers as a result of disruptions caused by the pandemic.

Mark Alderson is the chairman of the Briman Group 



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SHARP OPERATOR

New developments at Pinterest put the spotlight on the future of retail, says **Melissa Chevin**



Over the past decade, we've seen retail move increasingly into the digital realm. The big social media platforms – particularly those which place the emphasis on the visual – are set to be the driving force behind this new, more immersive era of online shopping.

We've already seen Instagram Shopping, where browsers are led from image to checkout in a smooth process fully contained within the platform.

Targeted shopping

Now an answer to this has come from Pinterest. It has developed new ad technology tools which for the first time will enable highly contextual advertising experiences on the platform.

Specifically targeting the UK, the new ecommerce functionality will allow users to purchase products directly from a

shopping tab within search results or within its 'boards' (a user-curated collection of pins). British Pinterest users will also be able to access 'shopping spotlights' – curated lists of goods from publishers or creators.

The platform said in a recent blog post: "In a year when more people than ever will be shopping online for the festive season, Pinterest can replicate that experience for consumers and retailers through curated collections and visual discovery. We're building a place to shop online – not just a place to buy."

UK on board

The attention paid to the UK market is no accident, as our country has emerged as Pinterest's busiest region outside the US. Searches in the UK have increased 55% year-on-year, while the number of boards created has risen by 52%.

Worldwide, the proportion of

users visiting with the intention of making a purchase sky-rocketed by 50% in the first half of this year.

For brands, this can mean more immersive ways to connect potential purchasers to a product. In a sector so focused on the finished, physical item, this can surely only be a good thing.

However, with all the exciting new opportunities comes the challenge of staying on top of all these routes to a sale, organising and prioritising both time and budgets.

One thing is for sure – Pinterest and Instagram wouldn't be spending all this time and money if they weren't confident, they hold the key to the future of retail.

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



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Introducing... **Branded4UK**

Give us a snapshot of your business

The Print4UK Group is a vibrant and ambitious business located in North London and counts some of the world's most prestigious companies as clients. Now incorporating Branded4UK as well as Print4UK, the expansion into premium, corporate branded merchandise was a natural progression.

What made the Print4UK Group join the BPMA?

Adherence to strict branded guidelines is easy to take for granted and easy to get wrong. As printers we take enormous pride in getting this right. Prior to joining the BPMA, Branded4UK's options were not as extensive as they needed to be to match our high standards. Joining the BPMA has increased sourcing options, provided better quality control, and allowed us to offer more competitive prices.

How are things at the moment?

During the initial national lockdown, many of our staff were either furloughed or working from home. Rather than



retreating as demand for print and branded merchandise fell, we accelerated our plans and formed the Print4UK Group, incorporating Branded4UK and Print4UK. It's challenging at the moment but Branded4UK continues to grow with increased website traffic, more work is coming in, and all of our staff are back at work.

What is your favourite promotional product?

Products in the eco range are very much in line with our own ethical values and the range is truly awesome. It has left us wondering if green is the new black in the corporate branded merchandise world.

What trends are you seeing?

It would be remiss not to mention the, now ubiquitous, face mask. Our creative services team has produced stunning designs that are grabbing clients' attention. And, when it comes to corporate endorsement, it doesn't get much better than the Microsoft Corporation who we produced magnificent masks for.

Give us a prediction for the year ahead

Commentators say that businesses will operate differently with more people working from home, downsizing office space, and introducing shared desk policies. That might be true but print and corporate merchandising will still continue – because it works. Whether it is a marketing event or direct mail, tangible, printed and corporate branded merchandise inspires confidence and trust, and is a vital business generating tool.

The year ahead will be tough, but the work will return. The challenge will be to navigate our way through the eye of the coronavirus storm and come out the other side only moderately scathed.

A year of changes

Starting a new role is a time of excitement and change, but **Tom Robey** didn't bargain for quite as much change as 2020 has provided

November 2019 seems like a lifetime ago. I can't honestly recall half of the challenges we have faced, but what I do know is that we and the industry are strong and extremely diversifiable.

Coming from a non-profit background, the idea of working for an industry association was very attractive to me. The BPMA is here to not only promote the value of promotional merchandise to end users but also to aid member businesses in networking and achieving sustainable growth.

In normal circumstances, it should be relatively simple to plan the association's working year, conferences, and events. However, we are in 2020, and while the first three months at the BPMA started as



expected, from March onwards we saw challenges we never could have imagined land on our plates.

- Events cancelled
- Working from home and lockdown
- 1 in 4 workers furloughed
- Business loans
- Bounce back loans
- Virtual events

The focus of the BPMA quickly turned from holding events and conferences to signposting members to applicable government schemes and translating the mountain of information in the media to industry specific data.

It was also important for the association to give back to the membership where we could. We are



Willetts moves up to vice chair at BPMA

This October, the BPMA Board announced that long standing board member, Haydn Willetts, regional director UK & Ireland at midocean had been voted unanimously to the post of vice chair.

Previous vice chair Alex Turner, Listawood remains on the board as finance director, supporting all aspects of the BPMA's financial strategy and planning.

BPMA chair Angela Wagstaff said: "We are delighted Haydn has accepted the role of vice chair and look forward to confirming his appointment at the AGM in November."

The BPMA has undergone much change in the last year and as part of the progressive plans discussed at this year's AGM on 4 November, Willett's appointment as vice chair highlights the strength of the BPMA's industry position.

Challenges ahead

The new vice chair said: "I feel flattered to be asked and voted to the position of vice chair of the BPMA by my fellow board members at what is a vitally

important period for the whole of, not only, our industry but the whole event and hospitality sector. We have many challenges facing us and with Brexit almost upon us we really need to work together as suppliers and distributors to get through the challenging times ahead for us all."

Support the sector

He added: "The promotional industry has been my work home since 1992 and given me many great times over the years as well as challenges and as such I feel that it is important to offer my support where I can in the form of my time to the trade association."

Here to help

"I really hope the industry can galvanise itself and get behind the trade association for the greater good of all involved. I am available to discuss with both existing and prospective new members regarding the future direction and support the BPMA is able to offer."

BPMA members have welcomed the



news of this appointment warmly by concluding the nomination by member vote at the AGM.

pleased to have been able to provide three months' free membership over the summer.

From there we have had to rapidly focus on the many questions posed surrounding PPE, as well as setting up and holding the first BPMA Virtual Conference. In the weeks to come, we will inevitably be concentrating on Brexit.

Requirements from the membership have changed. Today, we support you through channels that were not even a pipedream a year ago. Webinars, a dedicated meeting platform, Slack groups and many more.

Although most of what we do today is remote, I am a strong believer in people relationships. Moving forward and as social distancing restrictions fall, I'll be on the road, making up for the very much lost time of visiting member businesses, listening to your challenges, reviewing how we can aid business growth and represent the industry in wider circles.

Tom Robey looks after membership at the BPMA



BPMA CALENDAR

18-19 Nov

B2B Marketing Expo – virtual event
b2bmarketingexpo.co.uk

2021

11-14 January

PPAI Expo – Direct-2-You – virtual event
expo.ppai.org

12-14 January

PSI
Dusseldorf, Germany

17 March

Haptica Live
Bonn, Germany

23-24 June

Merchandise World
Ricoh Arena, Coventry

FLUID ZOOMS TO REWARD

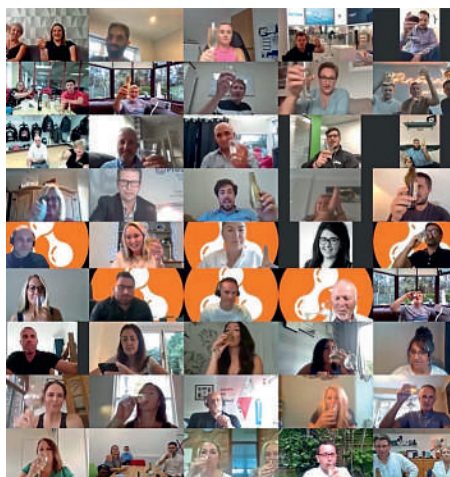
This year's awards were a bit different, but the group ensured that quality has not gone unnoticed

The Fluid team hosted its first ever virtual event in September to present its annual awards. Usually a traditional awards evening to thank supplier friends after the East of England Merchandise Show, this year's event took a different approach due to the COVID-19 pandemic and was hosted virtually via video conferencing.

This year's 14 virtual awards were presented via Zoom and the Fluid team sent out a pack to all attendees ahead of the event so that they could enjoy some nibbles and bubbles as the evening progressed. There were more than 60 attendees and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Bronte Creary, Fluid's supplier relationship manager, said: "At Fluid we really value our long-term supplier partnerships and I'm so delighted that even in these difficult times we could take a moment to reward and say thank you to our supplier friends for all of their hard work."

Managing director, Miles Lovegrove Fluid, thanked all those who were involved for their time. "We are living in very strange times, and it was a shame that we couldn't



be together in person, but we still wanted to show our appreciation and further build our partnerships in a positive way."

Paul Maye of Xindao, which was named Supplier of the Year among other plaudits, said: "Thanks very much for the awards evening. It was nice to have something entertaining and cheerful when everything else is cancelled, so well done to the team for organising this in difficult and very



unusual circumstances."

Toby Pache of Sharon Lee added: "Well done to the Fluid team for the virtual awards last night. I thought it went very well and definitely enjoyed the nibbles and bubbles."

Cathy Anderson of Adco Products thanked the company for a great night. "It was just so nice to see real people again," she said.

The 2020 winners

The whole Fluid team voted for the winning companies

Supplier of the Year

- Winner – Xindao
- Highly Commended – Pinpoint, PF Concept, DTB Europe

Specialist Supplier of the Year

- Winner – Pinpoint
- Highly Commended – The Big Display Company, DTB Europe, Juniper Products

Customer Service Team of the Year

- Winner – Xindao
- Highly Commended – Pinpoint, DTB Europe

Account Manager of the Year

- Winner – Darren Fuller, Pinpoint
- Highly Commended – Sophie Kelembeck, Xindao; Chris Nelson, Laltex Promo

Personality of the Year

- Winner – Ryan Brown, The Umbrella Company
- Highly Commended – Emily Carpenter, PF Concept; Darren Fuller, Pinpoint

Unsung Hero

- Winner – Joe Murphy, Big Display Company
- Highly Commended – Leah McDonald, Xindao; Kyra Lawrence, DTB Europe

Best Supplier Visuals

- Winner – Xindao
- Highly Commended – PF Concept, Big Display Company, The Sweet People

Deadline Champion

- Winner – Xindao
- Highly Commended – Laltex Promo, DTB Europe, Big Display Company

Fluid Futures Leader

For thinking beyond profit to support projects and make a meaningful contribution to the wider community and environment

- Winners – CHX, Juniper Products
- Highly Commended – Senator, BIC Graphic Europe, The Sweet People, Xindao

Finance Team of the Year

- Winner – Laltex Group
- Highly Commended – PF Concept, DTB Europe, FleQs

Overall Product/Range of the Year

- Winner – Mood Bottle, Snap Products
- Highly Commended – Bobby Backpack Range, Xindao; Hygiene Hook Keyring, CHX; Americano Pure, PF Concept

Sustainable Product/Range of the Year

- Winner – Mr Bio, Desktop Ideas
- Highly Commended – Watersave Umbrellas, The Umbrella Company; Bio Pens, Senator

Best Marketing Support

- Winner – Big Display Company
- Highly Commended – PF Concept, Xindao, The Sweet People, CHX

Most Dependable Fluid Friend - Lowest Problem Order Rate

- Winner – WCM&A
- Highly Commended – Senator, Pinpoint



Create the difference

Dancing cups or particularly communicative ballpoint pens? Regardless of what makes your product something special – it deserves to be in the spotlight. The Promotional Gift Award has been distinguishing haptic promotional products that stand out from the crowd since 2003. The creativity label that is conferred by an independent jury of experts thus creates that certain difference – in the perception of the target group. The presentation at the HAPTICA® live, on March 17, 2021 in Bonn (Germany) attracts additional attention.

Register your creations for the Promotional Gift Award 2021 now!

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