The Summit: when politics, people and producers meet



For the sports activewear industry, one of the megatrends for the foreseeable future will be sustainable development, according to Tom Garvey. As a trustee of the Committed to Green Foundation based in Belgium, and a former deputy director general of Environment at the European Commission, he should know. His conviction is that, for the years ahead, the pursuit of growth which is environmentally sustainable will be the immediate and urgent goal of businessmen, consumers and governments. As a result, therefore, environmental concerns are on the brink of becoming the keystones for all business philosophies.

His forceful arguments appear in an edited version of his presentation on page 51 of this issue. Essentially he claims that all three groups are now converging and doubters will have little or no alternative but to get on board on this trend.

This was just one of the major presentations made at the recent conference organised by World Sports Activewear in a joint venture with DuPont Cordura, entitled The Summit. Held near Tarragona, Spain, it was the second such conference of its kind and once again attracted international attendance from across the sports activewear industry on both sides of the Atlantic.

In a dramatic illustration of where textiles of the future will be going, Dr Dianne Jones of WRONZ Euralab switched on (and off) the projector lights by touching the surface of a sample jacket which already incorporates soft-switch technology. In a vision of the future now, one could envisage an inebriated wearer fumbling around his garment trying to find the right switch to unlock his front door, in the meanwhile causing radios to blare at full blast, switch channels on the TV, lights to go out, curtains to close and open and the home computer to print out next week's shopping list - and then to find out that he had put on the wrong jacket. Her presentation certainly gave added meaning to intelligent fabrics. The market potential for such powerful technology must be overwhelming. Checking physical wellbeing and training schedules would be simplified and safety concepts could easily and unobtrusively be built in. The key to such technology is that the drape and handle of the fabrics remain unaltered.

In one of the most exceptional presentations made at The Summit, Shuji Komatsu, a Board director at Goldwin, a major Japanese manufacturer and distributor with a turnover in excess of ¥52.6 billion, detailed the current state of the Japanese sports market and also presented his own forecasts for the future of the industry. He suggested that the specialised sports business market will shrink and that several sporting goods manufacturers will disappear in the process. The demand for lifestyle merchandise business, with products in daily use, will expand, providing opportunities for new market development. There will be a tendency for brands to create fashion trends. Aggressive brand strategies will substantially change the present distribution format. The aging society will help focus merchandise development - the health business - on this sector of the market. At the same time, more promotion will go into developing the growth of individual sports targeted at the youth generation and, in order, to sustain the overall market, more programmes and support groups will be developed to increase the number of participants in life-long sports activities. A full version of this view of Japan appears on page 32.

The main themes of The Summit were Moving Markets, which included analyses of innovation and business and the role of brands today and in the future; Product Trends and Developments - which included a detailed presentation by James Lamont from adidas, illustrating how innovation was virtually the basic platform for product development for the international brand; E-commerce - the way forward. Maria Stefan, executive director of the SGMA, and the driving force behind the development of the Supershow spoke on the future landscape of collaboration in the industry. Megatrends - economics and markets, was the final theme of the seminar which ran from Thursday afternoon through Saturday.

Sponsors of the event included DuPont Coolmax, DuPont Thermolite, ispo, Sanitized, Vibram, Lenzi Egisto and DuPont Kevlar.

[A limited number of copies of The Book of Papers - the presentations given at The Summit - are available on application from World Sports Activewear. Dates for The Summit 2002 will be announced shortly and will be published in this magazine and on its associated website www.sportstextiles.com]