SUSTAINABILITY: PUMA

Throughout 2012, *WSA* will have a sustainability feature in every issue. In this first article, we consider how Puma is working towards creating fully compostable or recyclable products, in an attempt to address the sustainability issue head-on.



Cradle-to-cradle

In May last year, German sportswear brand Puma announced the results of what it called the world's first Environmental Profit and Loss Account (EP&L). Then-CEO Jochen Zeitz said the EP&L was a shift in how companies can account for the true costs of their reliance on ecosystem services. The brand's new CEO, Franz Koch, who took over in April 2011, has been following in Mr Zeitz's eco-friendly footsteps. Mr Koch recently told German business magazine *Wirtschaftswoche* that the brand is working with partners to create products that follow cradle-to-cradle principles – in other words, clothes and shoes could be shredded and buried in the garden.

"We are confident that in the near future we will be able to bring the first shoes, t-shirts and bags, that are either compostable or recyclable, to the market," Mr Koch said. He explained: "It follows two circuits, the technical and the biological: I can use old shoes to make new ones or something completely different, such as car tyres. In the biological cycle, I can make shoes and shirts that are compostable so I can shred them and bury them in the back garden. We are working on products that meet these two criteria."

Sustainability push

Cradle-to-cradle design is a holistic framework that aims to create systems that are not only efficient, but essentially waste-free. The concept models human industry on nature's processes, in which raw materials are viewed as nutrients circulating in healthy, safe metabolisms. A t-shirt

In 2010, Puma launched its sustainable footwear packaging which uses 65% less paper than the brand's previous packaging, at the Design Museum in London.

Puma

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that is manufactured in the most sustainable way as possible, and then decomposes at the end of its use can therefore be said to follow cradle-to-cradle principles.

Puma's plans to create compostable clothing follow parent group PPR's launch of its sustainability initiative last March, called PPR Home. The initiative was allocated an annual budget of €10 million to invest in sustainability projects and is led by Mr Zeitz, now executive chairman of Puma and chief sustainability officer at PPR. Among the first of the initiative's projects was the launch of a Creative Sustainability Lab initiative to help cultivate creativity, innovation and sustainability. The first partnership, which began at the start of 2011, was with eco-label certification Cradle-to-Cradle – and was apparently the inspiration behind Mr Koch's recent announcement.

Of course, this is not the start of Puma's drive for sustainability. In 2010 Puma revealed its five-year sustainability strategy with the unveiling of its Clever Little Bag, a reusable bag produced to replace shoeboxes and made from 65% less paper as well as having a reduced water, energy and diesel consumption.

Back in July 2010, campaign group Greenpeace published a report on a year-long investigation it carried out into toxic water pollution in China, which it said established links between a number of major clothing companies and suppliers in China "who were found to be discharging persistent and bioaccumulative hormone disruptors" into Chinese rivers. Puma was one of the brands named in the report, and responded by publicly committing to the elimination of all releases of hazardous chemicals from its entire product lifecycle, and across its global supply chain by 2020.

Problem solving

It's important to mention that Puma's efforts at sustainability began long before Greenpeace started finger-pointing. However, in his interview, Mr Koch graciously supported the campaign group's efforts. "It is good that organisations like Greenpeace point out weaknesses," he said. "Standing shoulder to shoulder with our competitors, we want to achieve that no more toxins are used in the manufacture of our products by 2020."

In response to magazine's questioning of why Puma used toxins in the first place, Mr Koch said: "We developed the S-index to increase by 2015 the proportion of sustainable materials such as recycled polyester, in our international collections. We have defined prohibited pollutants in our list of banned substances, which we introduced in 2001 and are binding on all of our suppliers. Nonylphenol, which was found by Greenpeace



Franz Koch, the CEO of Puma.
Puma

in low concentrations below our threshold, is currently used in textile production. Unfortunately we are dependent on the solutions developed for the chemical industry of our processing, textile auxiliaries and for this there are currently no alternatives. But we work with our competitors and Greenpeace to find out a solution to this problem."

Compostable possibilities

Compostable clothing is not an altogether new idea. In October 2011 German fashion designer and microbiologist Anke Domaske launched a milk fibre for use in textiles that is water-resistant, tearproof and compostable. Ms Domaske's company, Qmilch, will move its production to Hanover in 2012 to begin producing for textile and fashion customers.

Japanese mircobiologist Masanobu Fukuoka created a bioplastic derived from potato starch, which is now used to produce waterproof 'Spud Coats', which are fully compostable. At the end of its product life, the coat has integrated seeds so that plants grow out of it once it is returned to the earth. A small clay ball, integrated into the raincoat, houses the seeds, so that when a consumer 'plants' the coat, the seeds are nourished and grow into new plants.

Furthermore, in July 2011 US designer Linda Loudermilk debuted a completely compostable swimsuit made from plant starch, which breaks down once buried below ground for 180 days.

Although Mr Koch did not specify when Puma would launch its compostable products, it is implied in his statements that they could be ready for release in the near future. Watch this space.

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