

## 20TH ANNIVERSARY: A RETROSPECTIVE

In the second part of WSA's 20th anniversary celebrations, industry insiders discuss how the magazine has kept them informed of market developments, and give us their views on the changing face of the outdoor and sports market, and what lies in store.

# Two decades of change



**David Parkes, Concept III**

**M**emories of WSA for David Parkes, founder of textile resource and garment production specialist Concept III, go back to the very early days, working with the magazine's sales team at a show for Nike suppliers in Portland and kindly passing on a list of contacts to help the magazine's penetration into the market.

He describes the magazine as an educational and informative trade journal, "never sensational and always focused on fact", and says Concept III's years-long association with the title has helped the brand grow and gain respect in the global outdoor industry. "We believe the success and longevity of the industry depends on innovation, focus, marketing, professional education and sincere business values," Mr Parkes says, and he insists a journal such as WSA can help the producers of fibres, yarns, fabrics, finishes and finished garments that are confronting these challenges.

In providing them with information about innovation, the Concept III founder says WSA must not be "afraid to raise the bar". And at the same time, it can help their marketing efforts. It's his view that the power of marketing to support the introduction of "great product" has been the greatest innovation in the last 20 years, making the biggest contribution to moving the industry forward.

In moving forward as much as it has done, though, the outdoor apparel industry has, inevitably, attracted competition from "other apparel markets", perhaps most notably from mainstream fashion retailers, many of whom have long had their own ranges of fleece tops, outdoor jackets, moisture-wicking T-shirts and so on. Technical outdoor apparel is obviously becoming an important lifestyle offering, he says, but must "stay close to its roots".

**Ria Stern, Hyosung**

**What is your company's most important innovation?**

Hyosung's elastane was launched in a global branded campaign in 2004 with the introduction of Creora's Power Fit, bringing higher power, high heat resistance benefits, greater shaping and compression to performance sportswear.

**What do you like most about WSA?**

WSA, in partnership with *sportstextiles.com*, has always played an integral part of Creora's communication plans and I have always appreciated the magazine's On Track section – it's such a comprehensive overview of what is going on in the global sports material market – invaluable for busy execs!

**What are the most important shows for your business?**

Outdoor Retailer in The States and Paris Mode City.

**Where do you think the industry is heading?**

In the context of sports textiles, the women's market has grown significantly – just look at the growth in interest in women's golf and football – and they demand fit and function combined with fashion and style.

**Where do you see growth?**

Hyosung sees growth coming from the development of lighter and lighter weight fabrics but still with the performance benefits of their heavyweight cousins.

**Gary Smith, Polartec**

**What are your first memories of WSA?**

My first exposure to *World Sports Activewear* goes back to the early 2000s, when I was working for Timberland. I usually start by reading the two front sections, news map and on track, and keep the in-depth articles for later. I prefer the hard copy over the online version, it's best for travelling and I appreciate the tactile feel of paper and the visual presentations. I guess I'm a bit old-fashioned in that sense.

**What is your vision of the evolution of the industry?**

With regards to the evolution of the industry, I don't see one particular technology that stands out. There have been many incremental gains in the past 10 to 20 years. The single biggest change that I see is the pervasiveness of sportswear worn as daily wear. Consumers increasingly want their casualwear to perform. Comfort has also become a key function. Today's youth won't want to have to break in their new shoes, as we used to, not so long ago. This is creating a strange dynamic in that technology *per se* is less of a sales point, because it is now considered a standard feature. For their clothing, consumers now expect a number of performance features, such as breathability, odour resistance or elasticity, for items that they will wear in normal, everyday conditions. For makers of synthetic materials, like Polartec, this is a positive evolution. But in addition to their performance and sustainability, our fabrics also need to be soft and feel good. I see versatility as something that will become increasingly important. I've been using the word a lot lately with my team and I believe consumers place a high premium on versatility. Their expectations are higher, which makes this industry more challenging, and exciting.



### Martin Bentz, Outlast

Finding a copy of *WSA* for the first time at an industry event, **Martin Bentz**, president of Outlast Technologies, says he recalls being surprised at how “multifaceted” the articles were on new materials. “It is an interesting magazine,” he says, “not repetitive and very diversified.”

He says Outlast appreciates the fact that the magazine attempts to do more than “reprint press releases”, but looks

behind the scenes, does additional research and has a deep knowledge of the market, making articles “profound”.

He says that, because phase change materials are quite a complicated technology, *WSA* is one of the titles that have helped the company explain how it works. He says: “We have introduced PCM technology to all kinds of end-uses in apparel, footwear, bedding and accessories. We have positioned the Outlast brand next to performance fabrics.”

His view is that the outdoor market has always been fast moving, with new technologies and trends being adopted quickly. For brands it will become more important to position correctly and to have “something unique”, he says, otherwise it will become too easy to exchange their offering for someone else’s.

In terms of industry shows, he feels *Techtextil* and *Heimtextil* in Frankfurt, are the most important for his company’s business. And while there, for visitors who like pizza, he recommends a visit to *L’Osteria* at *Speicherstraße 1*. “It is quite loud there,” he warns, “but the service is good and fast.”

### Cindy McNaull, Cordura

*How has the industry changed and where do you see it going?*

The industry has changed in many ways over the years, but if I had to encapsulate it into a single evolution, I would say that crossover is one of the key concepts to emerge. The outdoor market used to be very “pure”, and it is now being cross-fertilised by active lifestyles and is evolving into something more hybrid.

Since 1967, when Cordura was first introduced, we focused on rugged durability. In the past five-to-eight years, our brand has attracted a new set of lifestyle companies that wouldn’t previously have come to us.

Our research indicates that consumers still want durability, while the need for comfort grows. This has pushed us to take weight out and put more comfort in. Consumers want it all: multipurpose apparel that delivers comfort, looks great and lasts.

Our work with designers is leading to a new breed of product, the kind that seems to say: ‘Hear me roar!’ It is disruptive, crossover, and this seems to be where ‘athleisure’ is taking us. This is why we are looking to launch an all-new super soft range of lightweight Cordura knits.

*What are the most important trade events for Cordura?*

We see the recent evolution of Outdoor Retailer integrating the crossover urban outdoor lifestyles as a great move that follows the same path as the new Cordura branded fabrics designed for commuter wear and urban exploring. On a more technical side, I was impressed by the recent *TechTextil* show in Texas, where attendance was up 39%.

*Have any WSA articles stood out?*

A recent article that I found quite useful is the one on labels as storytellers, which revealed the new ways in which labels and hangtags can be used. We are currently rethinking our labelling for Cordura and specifically looking for new ways to reach out to consumers. Likewise, the article on new blends with wool was published just as we were launching our *Combat Wool* range of Cordura-wool fabrics. It was useful to learn more about the fibre and see what other companies are doing with it. Finally, I’d say that *WSA*’s international outlook is another of its high points.



### Taiwan Textile Federation

A long-time supporter of *WSA*, the Taiwan Textile Federation (TTF) is an astute observer of the industry in Asia. In the last 20 years, the industry in Taiwan has evolved to have what TTF calls “complete production networks that include production of synthetic fibres, fabrics, dyeing and finishing, as well as apparel and accessories”.

Change is occurring, though, and the organisation insists that, faced with over-supply in the market, its member companies want to differentiate themselves by developing higher-value materials. The textile industry in Taiwan is highly export-oriented, which is why its years of partnership with *WSA* have been important. TTF wants this to continue as Taiwan progresses beyond ‘Made in Taiwan’ to have design there, too, followed by its own brands.

**Simon Whitmarsh-Knight, Invista**

*What has been your company's most important innovation in the last 20 years?*

I think the evolution of Lycra fibre within our customers' fabrics has supported many of the trends over the last 20 years – from comfortable compression, to the ubiquitous black leggings to the rise of the MAMIL [middle-aged man in Lycra], whose ranks I am proud to have joined recently!

*How has the industry changed?*

Having started my career selling waterproof, breathable fabrics to UK companies 20 years ago, it's been great to see the whole outdoor industry grow and lead the sustainability debate across the apparel market, whilst more recently I've been really pleased to see the impact of events like the London Olympics on getting kids into sport and raising the profile of women's and disabled sport in general.

*Where do you think the industry is going in the next 20 years?*

On a personal note, I hope overall participation in a more wellness approach to living continues to grow – not just competitive sports, but taking time with family to enjoy walks, playing with your kids and enjoying the simple things in life. From an industry perspective, I think the whole area of wearable tech will really start to take off as brands seek to capitalise on their investment in this area and users enjoy the benefits of feedback/monitoring from their gear.

*Have any WSA articles stood out for you?*

As a sporting goods professional with a non-technical textiles background it has been a valuable tool to keep learning about new technologies, developments and applications. As a (bad!) surfer, I have been interested in the articles around developments in sustainability, neoprene and alternative wetsuit technologies.

*Which is the most important show, and which bar do you recommend?*

I really value all the industry shows and am pleased to see how Performance Days in particular has refined its scope and grown. Clearly, I'm always far too busy during shows to visit any drinking establishments (!) but I hear that Gracie's in Salt Lake City is a pleasant spot... 

**S.J. Lee and Geza Maklary, Sealon**

*What has been your company's most important innovation in the last 20 years?*

Stretchable deco film and stretchable adhesive film. In terms of the developments in the seam tape area, I would say our Ghost tape: very soft, invisible inside the garment, with a matt aspect and very light.

In general, we have been developing lighter and lighter two- and three-layer tapes, the weight has been getting lighter and more stretch is used, in terms of the fabric.

*How has the industry changed?*

We used to concentrate on the outdoor market, but now we've started to also focus on the sportswear and even the intimate market, and we've developed many welding products according to market needs.

The workwear market has also become more demanding in terms of not only technical but also good-looking products, a market we will be actively pursuing. The outdoor and ski brands in general have shown more interest in trims, as a point of differentiation from their competition, as more and more brands use the same fabrics and the same garment manufacturers.

*Where do you think the industry is going in the next 20 years?*

Being comfortable will be the most important thing in the future. Outdoor brands have started to mix the sports and outdoor concepts, using stretch fabric and lightweight materials for comfort. Security will also be a big trend going forward, hence the growth we've seen in demand for reflective adhesive films.

*Have any articles of WSA stood out for you, or have any helped inform you of developments in the industry?*

I have been following all articles related to the 3D printing/weaving stories and find this a fantastic development, not only for make prototyping easier but also to make local additive/personalised production a reality.

*Which is the most important industry show for your business, and which bar or restaurant do you recommend?*

Ispo is definitely the most important show for our business in Europe. In Munich I like to go to Haxnbauer restaurant and have a wonderful pork knuckle with a Hefeweizen beer. 

**Doug Hoschek, RamTect**

**F**or **Doug Hoschek**, a 50-year veteran of the textile industry and the co-inventor of Polar Fleece, WSA's focus on product and technology rather than marketing or brands helps it get the thumbs up. And he cites wool's resurgence in the outdoor markets and its increasing use for military and outdoor safety apparel as a significant move of late.

"Fibres have moved from synthetics back to natural, especially wool, down and tree pulp, leaving synthetics as a cheap, fast-fashion, mass-retailing fibre," he says. "This opens the door to innovation, and encourages start-ups in the outdoor apparel field." He says many of these wish to only work with wool and other natural fibres and in fact attribute some global warming to the oil-based synthetics. However, he is quick to acknowledge that he built many products from synthetics over the years. "There has never been a standstill time in the outdoor industry," he says.

He suggests the culture of how outdoor products were created prior to 2000 disappeared with the rise of mega factories in Asia. "The focus of different designs are lost in the mega volumes required to work in those factories. It also allows anyone to bring out the same designs and materials without trying to be different."

But things are changing, with evidence of specialty retailers focusing on better quality. "There are many new companies that offer their own retailing, including online, and with that comes the need for close-by manufacturing."

His focus now is RamTect, developed with Hobbs Bonded Fibers – a soft and pliable wool insulation fabric using the company's no-yarn compression technology, launched at the January 2014 edition of Outdoor Retailer. After the show he relaxes in a Thai restaurant a mile east of the downtown show area. "I won't name any names though or it will no longer be a local neighbourhood hideout!" he says. 