



A+A 2017 – Background Article on Corporate Fashion

More contemporary, greener and more feminine

A+A 2017 in Düsseldorf presents latest trends

Elegance, protection, comfort and sustainability – modern workwear and protective clothing combine all these qualities. Industrial enterprises, service providers, retailers and traders are increasingly focusing on corporate fashion. Having employees with a prestigious outfit clearly differentiates a company from its competitors, emphasising its corporate image and strengthening a sense of community among the workforce. So what's the best way to combine functionality, comfort and design? Answers to such questions can be found at A+A 2017. The leading trade fair on health and safety at work will feature a wide range of products and ideas in corporate fashion – customised and/or standard collections with customer branding. Around 1,900 exhibitors will be in Düsseldorf from 17 to 20 October. Among them around 50 companies will put a special focus on corporate fashion, and a total of 200 exhibitors will offer suitable products and services in this area. Moreover, the latest collections will be presented at the daily A+A Fashion Shows in Hall 11.

The German rail operator Deutsche Bahn has decided to fit out its 42,000 employees with new workwear by Guido Maria Kretschmer, who has had plenty of experience in this area. He is a fashion designer and the presenter of "Shopping Queen", a show on the German TV channel Vox. Corporate fashion workwear from Kretschmer is worn by staff at the tour operator TUI, the telecom company Deutsche Telekom, the airline Emirates and the hotel chains Kempinski and Maritim.

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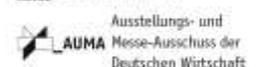
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Quite recently Deutsche Telekom completed a four-month wearing test, during which 40 staff members tested dark-blue blazers, narrow trousers and smart box dresses. “It’s important to us,” said Deutsche Bahn, “to develop the workwear together with our workforce, as they’re the ones who need to feel happy in it.” This idea sums up the entire corporate fashion sector. Purchasing decisions are less and less taken by procurement divisions. Demographic developments and the spirit of our time have created an employers’ market.

It all starts with a wearing test

Clothing plays an important part in this. “It’s an emotive product,” says Harald Goost who represents the A+A exhibitor Bierbaum-Proenen. So surveys and large-scale wearing tests are conducted to ensure that wearing comfort and colours meet not only workplace requirements, but also the preferences of the wearers. “Acceptance is very important, and this is why it’s no longer just the procurement division that decides. Instead we want to come to a joint decision with health & safety, occupational medicine and the wearers,” says Joachim Geyer from Kübler, another company presenting its innovative products at A+A 2017.

“It happens more and more frequently that we set up a plan together with procurement. And so we obtain relevant outcomes that are based on many years of experience,” says Goost. “Wearing tests usually also give new insights to employers.” To obtain findings that are directly relevant to a given company, it’s important to start by gaining a precise idea of its premises and routines. “We always look at the situation as a whole,” says Geyer. In the case of public utilities in Munich this includes the sewage systems where staff need to lean against walls and work on their knees. “The products that sell best are the ones where we’ve succeeded in fully implementing the views of the test persons, based on wearing tests and surveys.”

Fabrics: wearers' ideas vs. product life

And in fact quite a lot is being done – particularly also in regions with full employment, such as Greater Munich, where employers are making a major effort to retain their workforce. After all, people are already used to a good level of functionality and comfort from sports. Goost speaks from experience when he says, “It’s often a balancing act between the wearers’ ideas and the product life.” Four-way stretch fabrics and softshell jackets are not as resistant to wear and tear from frequent use and washing as traditional blended fabrics, which have proved their worth. Nevertheless, today’s customers are happy to accept the higher costs and possibly shorter product lives associated with new materials. Decision-makers are getting younger and also increasingly keen to ensure that their experience with sportswear is reflected in their companies’ workwear.

Kübler, for instance, fits out Porsche in Stuttgart with high-quality workwear that is based on a layering principle. Employees wear the softshell jackets throughout a working day – and sometimes even at weekends, as they’re so practical, comfortable and smart.

Ergonomic cuts and combined functions

A+A 2017 will show that features from outdoor clothing and sportswear are now very much part of corporate fashion and workwear. Ergonomically optimised cuts can be seen in offset side seams and darts. The fabrics are getting lighter and lighter. Mixed fabrics, in particular, are now typical of modern workwear. “Where functions are concerned, we divide each garment into zones” says Birgit Krauss from Uvex, which has been at A+A in Düsseldorf for many years now. This means having different levels of thermal management and involves the use of mesh materials in places which are especially vulnerable to perspiration. It also applies to combinations of material functions, for example the use of flexible materials at the sides of a garment where it needs to stretch more. A product therefore combines a variety of different properties. “In logistics,” says Krauss, “we use twill for the front

of the jacket, but softshell for the back and the arms. This makes the jacket both more durable and less expensive.” Joachim Geyer has another example: “In waste disposal the workforce are often subject to extreme perspiration during the summer, and so we add special ventilation materials to the crotch. On the inside a pleasant feeling is created through the use of cotton. Thanks to layering and the option of combining individual sections, it is possible to create a wide range that caters for different people’s varying perception of hot and cold.”

New trends can also be observed in colours – another area where a balancing act is required. On the one hand, companies expect to keep seeing surprises in the form of new colours. These are currently somewhat more subdued and earthy, and colour blocking is getting more discreet. Genuinely colourful highlights mostly take the form of shirts, including polo shirts, with a large amount of creative leeway. On the other hand, if possible, workwear colours need to be both durable and remain acceptable for eight years. But even industries such as horticulture – where gardeners still wear green – are beginning to prefer more contemporary shades and combinations of colours. Even clothes that are more uniform in character are beginning to look more like leisure or sportswear.

Ladies’ choice

In a job market where good staff are hard to find and not always easy to keep, one increasingly important element is the working atmosphere. This is an aspect where women are currently making a major contribution – by entering into new disciplines, such as automotive mechatronics and wood mechanics, and also by moving into previously male-dominated jobs such as bricklayers, decorators and varnishers, where they can now be seen more frequently than before.

There are certainly more female staff on intercity express trains and at railway stations than in the trade sector, the car industry or the postal service; but even those industries are now attracting more women.

“Female garments sold to those industries are still not very numerous,” says Goost, “and, from an economic perspective, it’s certainly not easy to equip women with suitable clothing. But if you want to get a contract, you can’t really get round it anymore.”

To design women’s workwear, it’s usually not sufficient just to modify the cut. Quite often the pockets and collars require a different approach. “For instance,” says Geyer, “women don’t like thigh pockets. And if the collar is wrong, you won’t get anywhere at all.”

Sustainability is the new trend

We can gradually see an increasing call for sustainability. Thomas Lange, CEO of German Fashion, says: “By 2020, 50% of all textiles purchased by German government institutions will need to be sustainable. Fair trade aspects feature in all public procurement tenders. But these things are also seen as important by smaller companies which mostly know their suppliers extremely well. Some suppliers in the industry have already joined the Textile Alliance set up by Germany’s Development Secretary Gerd Müller.”

Kübler has had the same experience: “Fair trade and fair wear are becoming firmly established now. Issues such as ethical conduct and sustainability are particularly important to big customers such as the Stuttgart City Council with its Green Mayor. Their procurement staff sometimes want to form their own views, and so they sometimes get our engineers to show them round our manufacturing facilities.” Sustainability principles and codes of conduct are often a vital part of their procurement policies.

More finishing, faster deliveries

What else can you offer to the customer? The competition for customers is increasingly decided by the amount of added value. This opens up options for complementary areas such as finishing, consultancy, repairs and laundry services. Another key concept is

customisation, which plays a role both for the product itself (names, special sizes, etc.) and the shipping. There is now a tendency to move from standardised to customised logistics, with a demand for personalised packages, whether it's complete or partial deliveries.

Companies are turning more and more into system suppliers. Their product ranges no longer just cover trousers or jackets, but the full range of clothing, from hats to footwear. Consultancy, too, is an important element and starts with the initial contact. Suppliers support customers by evaluating their requirements, conducting wearing tests and surveys and then evaluating the outcomes. They have had experience in equipping entire companies and can provide a procurement division with valuable support.

Future with added value

Added value also takes the form of QR codes and RFID chips. The wearer is, as it were, directly in touch with their clothing and can find out at any time how they can best look after a garment or when, for instance, a jacket was last impregnated.

But this can be taken one step further – in the form of safety systems which check at the hall entrance or at the beginning of the shift whether staff are wearing their clothes correctly or not. And it means that the government can measure certain parameters, issue warnings via sensors, support wearers and improve their health.

Today's decision-makers want to see more than the latest fashion, state-of-the-art technology or a customised approach. They also value collaboration, trust and insights – right from the very first moment. The latest trends and relevant suppliers can be found at A+A 2017 in Düsseldorf from 17 to 20 October.

Thomas Lange from the German Fashion Association has a few facts and figures on the industry:

- The economic situation has generally been good for the last three years, and so the industry has also been investing in workwear.
- Nevertheless, companies are negatively impacted by political crises, e.g. the Ukrainian conflict and problems in Russia.
- Although total sales figures have been stagnant, the number of people in employment in this industry has risen by 0.8 per cent. Many companies are looking for new staff, and they can benefit from a recruitment campaign at www.go-textile.de.
- The German umbrella association textil+mode (Textile & Fashion) has forecast 1.7 per cent growth in revenue.
- Like in the fashion industry, technical retailers are not very pleased about the proliferation of online trading. But here, too, specialists are now responding by offering their goods through webshops of their own.
- The industry is currently engaged in implementing an amendment to EU Council Directive No. 89/686/EC on Product Liability, which will become an EU standard from 2018.

Information on A+A 2017 exhibitors and products can be found online, at

www.aplusa.de

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