

Roundtable

Insight on What's Next

WHAT PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW IS, WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN AFTER the recession," according to Ellen Karp, who shared her perspective on future consumer behavior at the recent *Textile Insight* "Insight on What's Next" roundtable discussion. The lunchtime seminar in New York City brought together trend experts from diverse fields who engaged a high-energy audience with presentations that focused on consumer market research, fiber/fabric technology advances and the challenging retail environment, including catalog and internet sales.

Karp engaged the crowd with a rapid-fire delivery of evolving consumer buying habits as a result of the down economy. "These days most people have LOHAS values in place. What's interesting is how this "recession behavior" is intersecting with "sustainable behavior." I refer to this as "restrained consumerism," said Karp, founder and CEO of Anerca International, a consumer insights and market research firm based in Toronto, Canada. (LOHAS is an acronym for Lifestyles Of Health and Sustainability.)

Norma Wilkins-Gross agreed that luxury is no longer highest priority with consumers. "The new marketing message is value," she explained saying that her company is shifting its focus to more mid-range items. "The recession made people realize that we don't need it all. People don't want disposable fashion — they want meaningful products," said Wilkins-Gross, VP-merchandise for Cuddledown, a home textiles specialist in Portland, ME. "Value is what we'll concentrate on. Quality at a fair price and durability are key." Wilkins-Gross is responsible for product development, design and marketing for the company's catalog and internet businesses.

James Delattre, VP-global sales and marketing for NanoHorizons, addressed how trends from different sectors need to coordinate to be successful. NanoHorizons Inc. is the developer and manufacturer of SmartSilver nanoscale antimicrobial additives for textile, health care, and industrial applications.

"I believe tech trends have to be in line with consumer trends and with marketing trends. If the engineers are off tinkering with new technologies that the customer doesn't find value in or are not in sync with marketing, then that is not beneficial," said Delattre, who fielded several questions from the audience following the presentations. He and others networked for a long time after the roundtable officially ended.

Keeping our eyes on tomorrow's possibilities and bringing together senior apparel and textile executives from leading global brands to discuss

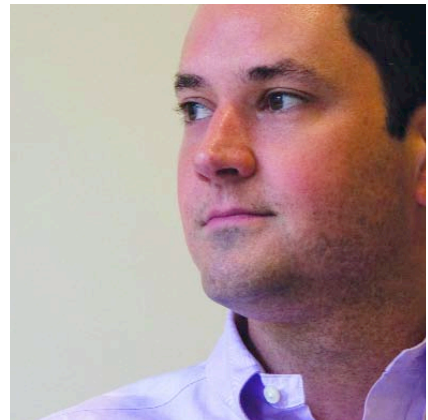
"LOHAS values are being embraced. People are learning to live green through the recession."

**ELLEN KARP
ANERCA
INTERNATIONAL**



"Tech trends have to be in line with consumer trends and with marketing trends."

**JAMES DELATTRE
NANO HORIZONS**



these opportunities is the mission of "Insight on What's Next" roundtable series. Dina Dunn, general manager of Blink LLC in Greensboro, NC, served as panel moderator for this recent "Focus on Trends" roundtable. The event was held at Outdoor Retailer's New York City offices with lunch sponsored by Okeo-Tex.

The next Insight on What's Next seminar is scheduled for a lunchtime presentation at the Marriott Hotel on July 21 during the Outdoor Retailer Summer Market trade show in Salt Lake City. The theme is "Design to Dollars."

A Sideways World

In her effort to address concerns about where we are going following the recession, Karp put together a list of themes outlining future consumer behavior. What's important, she says, is authenticity. "People want purity of things. We are now more a nation of label readers. Nowadays, the means are as important as the end result," Karp states. "There is a rise in the responsible consumer and people are becoming more judgmental. Look how they responded to what went on with AIG."

Karp said she is often asked if the recession will result in people stop being "green."

Her answer: "No. In fact, LOHAS values are being embraced," said Karp. "People are learning to live green through the recession."

She explained that people are buying less and shifting away from the need to have it all. "The trend is more toward incremental gratification and shared consumerism," Karp said.

Karp also used the phrases "compassionate consumerism," and "brand-ed relationships" as future trends. She told the audience, "You are selling lifestyle, and value. You are not selling a product."

Lastly, Karp reminded the audience that today's world is culturally flat. "Now it is a "sideways world," she says. "This has huge impact for product development."

Big Nano Opportunities

Delattre also recognized growth in green initiatives and value in functionality as two strong trends going forward. However, he sees eco evolving. "It's not enough say it comes from the cornfield, (green) is a larger story than that. You have to think of all the elements of eco — water consumption, pesticides, etc. You can't just say this comes from a piece of bam-

INSIGHT ON WHAT'S NEXT:

A forward-looking roundtable discussion series held bi-monthly. Thank you to our sponsors **Outdoor Retailer** and **Okeo-Tex**.

boo. Now you really have to look at the fine print.”

He emphasized the importance of designing fabrics that are inherently low-energy consumption. “You need to consider the energy saving through that fabric’s entire lifecycle,” said Delattre. “Fabrics that are designed to dry quicker, require less detergent, and are durable are the trend.”

On the performance side, Delattre highlighted moisture management and antimicrobials as two drivers. He also mentioned the rise in performance blends. “Here you get the best of both worlds, with products like Cotton Inc., TransDry and Optimer’s Dri-release.”

Delattre’s main point was to show how nanotechnology fits into both eco and performance sectors. “In terms of green, it takes a lot less stuff to achieve equal or better functionality using nanotechnology. And less is best when it comes to the environment,” Delattre explained. “With functional benefits, nanotechnology can up the performance of any textile in any number of ways.”

Adapting to Change

After 36 years in business Cuddledown has established itself as a leading player in the home fashion business with a loyal catalog clientele. But with sales down, Cuddledown is working hard to keep pace with a changing marketplace. According to Wilkins-Gross, the company is seeking new ways to go forward both in terms of product selection and sales structure.

“Consumers have closed their wallets. These days consumers need a trigger to buy,” she said. Interestingly, the company launched an organic textile offering thinking eco would resonate with Cuddledown shoppers. But customers did not respond, and Wilkins-Gross believes consumers were “equating organic with pricey.”

On the other hand, Cuddledown introduced a sleepwear line that has done exceptionally well.

“You can’t rely on what worked in the past, and think that will work in the future,” said Wilkins-Gross. “You can’t play it safe you have to take a risk.” She said Cuddledown is testing more types of apparel, such as leisure wear.

In addition, the family-owned company is working to drive sales to the web. With costs escalating for postage and paper, catalog sales have lagged this year. “Our goal is to transition to the internet,” said Wilkins-Gross. “We want to broaden our consumer base and look for new opportunities. But at the same time keep our uniqueness and stress customer service.” ♦

“The new marketing message is value. People don’t want disposable fashion, they want meaningful products.”

**NORMA WILKINS-GROSS
CUDDLEDOWN**



A Gathering to Learn and Network



Trend Talk: The simple idea of bringing together senior apparel and textile executives from leading global brands to discuss a wide range of forward-thinking topics is what sparked the formation of our “Insight on What’s Next” roundtable series. Executives, shown above, gathered recently in the Outdoor Retailer offices to spend a casual lunch hour learning the latest trends influencing different sectors of the business and following up the presentations with some networking with our panelists and others in the audience. In this age of quick emails and instant tweets, it’s nice to know that relaxed, face-to-face conversation within a group of textile managers still proves productive and rewarding.