

Experience Dimension Visual Merchandising at EuroShop 2020

Display Mannequins: Sustainability has many Setting Screws!

Extravagant, high-quality display mannequins have always been a major attraction for visitors at EuroShop, running once again in Düsseldorf from 16 to 20 February – and they are indispensable to fashion retail. Especially in shop windows they are the emotional tool that often decides whether shoppers enter the store to begin with. Now, however, display mannequins are being assessed by an entire different parameter: sustainability. There are various approaches to this: mannequins in (more) sustainable, recyclable raw materials or the renovation of disused, old mannequins. But there are also other approaches here not so popular as yet: inshoring – shifting back production to Europe, efficiency improvements in transport as well as an extended service life of mannequins.

Until the 1930s and after the war until the 1950s display mannequins were made of wax or paper mâché. Since then most mannequins have been made of glass-fibre reinforced polyester impregnated with resin (GFRP). These mannequins are mass produced in the Far East but mostly designed and finished in Europe. According to current knowledge cured GFRP does not present a health risk and therefore the material is not classified as special waste although it only bio-degrades very gradually.

However, processing resin and glass fibre requires a meticulous approach to the manufacturing process. Improper handling, insufficient exhaust systems or inappropriate filters at the production sites can cause health problems and add to greenhouse gas emissions.

Alternatively, mannequins can be made of polypropylene (PP). Polypropylene does without the plasticizers that are considered a health concern and is therefore also rated as less detrimental to health. But its production also requires chemicals. Mannequins made of PP are less expensive, but their stiffness and degree of detail is inferior to those made of GFRP. Both plastics are recyclable – so mannequins should definitely not end up in landfill in any case.



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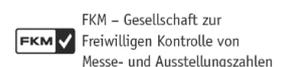
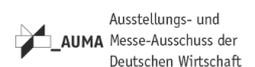
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Plastics do not decompose like organic substances into compost but remain intact as plastic waste for many decades if discharged improperly.

Italian manufacturer Bonaveri set itself the aim of cutting CO2 emissions in the production of mannequins. In line with the belief that “fashion comes and goes, but nature stays forever” the company launched a mannequin in 2016 that is made of 72% sugar-cane based bio plastics – the so-called B Plast®. What’s more, these mannequins are coated with an orange-oil based varnish (B Paint®). The remaining 28% of their raw materials are plastics that are still required for stability reasons. With this material composition Bonaveri offers a viable alternative to 100% plastic mannequins in terms of durability and stability and this at just 10% higher prices compared to conventionally produced mannequins. In 2016 Bonaveri already reduced CO2 emissions along the complete value chain of mannequin production by 25%. “And we keep aiming for further optimisation,” says Business Development Manager Dr. Marzia Ricchieri. In its development work Bonaveri is supported by external institutes such as the *Politecnico di Milano* ensuring that the complete lifecycle of the mannequin is independently certified.

Some manufacturers even take back mannequins to properly dispose of them. Other manufacturers alternatively offer renovation instead of disposal and therefore reintroduction into a circular economy.

Andreas Gesswein, owner of Genesis Mannequins, has carried out sustainability research for many years. He has manufactured and tested mannequins from 100% natural fibres such as flax, coconut, bamboo, jute, viscose and wood fibre. “100% compostable mannequins do exist – but they are not marketable yet in terms of price and rigidity constraints,” says Gesswein.

High-Emission Transport

The Swabian company Vertex, for example, has concrete plans in the pipeline for manufacturing display mannequins in Germany thereby rendering high-emission transportation from the Far East superfluous. But signals from retail are still missing – retailers are not yet willing to pay for such sustainably produced mannequins.



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In his development work Andreas Gesswein is consulted by the Fraunhofer Wilhelm-Klauditz-Institut (WKI). This institute also showed him that glass fibre still offers the best stiffness properties for mannequin production and can be recycled provided the individual components of the display mannequins are sorted cleanly at the end of their lifecycle. Genesis mannequins today consist of glass fibre and organic resin, with a water-based surface coating. This is important because unlike varnished mannequins where the paint cannot be separated from the base material anymore, these mannequins can be broken down into components for recycling.

When considering recycling properties and the carbon footprint in general, energy consumption should not be neglected either. Recycling critics believe this also emits substantial amounts of greenhouse gasses. Even developments such as Bonaveri's mannequin based on sugar cane can be criticised on account of its raw material sourcing. But all manufacturers agree on one point: there is a lack of unambiguous legislation that obliges producers to make comparable indications on the complete value chain.

Another renowned mannequin producer is Moch, a company from Cologne. Looking back on 112 years of corporate history this producer has established mannequin reconditioning as one of its business lines. To the mind of owner Dr. Josef Moch, anything long-lasting can be sustainable if it is good quality. "True sustainability means not using resources at all," says Moch and adds: "One option is to recondition used mannequins. For our customers this is an attractively priced and up-to-date solution – and we are even creating jobs in the process."

A Second Life

These mannequins can achieve a second 20-year service life with new faces and new paint. In this way Moch Figuren has given thousands of mannequins a "second life" – which can be found at stores all over Europe. Moch avoids empty runs for pick-up and delivery by thorough planning and cooperation with competitors.

However, comprehensive eco footprints for reused and reconditioned display mannequins should be as complex and challenging as the assessment of production and recycling processes themselves.



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By Gesswein accounts, Genesis mannequins last between 10 to 20 years depending on how they are treated by their owners. But mannequin design also follows fashion. “With very active and fashion-conscious brands a mannequin in the main retail area is only used for between three and five years,” says Andreas Gesswein.

Danny Bonami, owner of the Belgian producer of the same name, focuses on timeless design and, hence, the longevity of his mannequins. He offers buyers, who use his mannequins for extended periods, a timeless mannequin design. The faces can be exchanged with help of magnets thereby ensuring a quick change of the look & feel.

Visual merchandising coach Karin Wahl believes display mannequins are indispensable in fashion retail: “It is only the mannequin that reveals the drape of a garment.” So display mannequins are a fixture in retail and manufacturers’ efforts to come up with sustainable product solutions for this are clear to see. They follow various approaches here. Due to the difficult framework conditions such as the lack of relevant legislation there are no easy and comprehensive solutions for sustainability on the horizon yet.

“Considering that a brand operating 100 stores has 5 mannequins in each store this already adds up to 500 mannequins made of crude-oil based plastics,” says Dr. Ricchieri who goes on to say: “Customers have to be educated about the importance of sustainable mannequins.” Bonami sees this as a key task in which plenty is invested. It does not come as a surprise therefore that Bonami will dedicate a whole area of its exhibition stand to this “green theme”.

EuroShop 2020 is held on approx. 127,000 m² of net exhibition space and is open daily to trade visitors from Sunday, 16 to Thursday, 20 February 2020, from 10.00 am to 6.00 pm. 1-day tickets cost EUR 80 (EUR 60 purchased in advance online/e-Ticket), 2-day tickets are EUR 120 (EUR 100 purchased as e-Tickets) and season tickets are EUR 180 (EUR 150 e-Tickets). Admission tickets include a free return trip to EuroShop on all networks of the VRR transport authority (Verkehrsverbund-Rhein-Ruhr).

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Correct as of: October 2019



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