

Responsible Leasing and The Circular Economy: The Next Evolution of Responsible Fashion & Textiles Design and Resource Management

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The principles of Eco Effective and Contextual Design are gradually being integrated into the core values and policies of organisations where a fundamental paradigm shift in mindset is occurring. The increasing practice of introducing circular rather than linear business formulas (1) are leading towards a nutrient rich environment in ways where people, productivity, planet and profit all benefit.

However its implementation is widely perceived as challenging and time consuming. An example is the fashion and textile industry where product to market lead times are relatively short and their life span is determined by fashion trends rather than their technical lifetime limitations. Yet many progressive initiatives are looking at reuse, recycling and disassembly as a means and way to prolong the lifespan of a product after its first use phase (1).

Textile products, such as towelling's and linens for the hospitality and healthcare sectors is an example where lead times are not influenced by the season or fashion trends and optimum first life expectancy is challenged to its maximum. Typically these products are rented from laundries whereby operating margins are small and monthly rental charges are perceived as one of the highest overheads for the client (typically a hotel/hospital). Also this sector consumes large volumes of disposables textile products where enhancing their effective biodegradability and/or responsible recycling properties are key.

Over 90% of the hospitality and wellness sector within UK and Europe operate on a leasing system for their linen and towelling products (2). These specific products are often seen a necessity and service rather than a product of desire. Yet what is the interrelation and role of laundries with their suppliers (often not being the original manufacturer) and what responsibilities do they hold for products at the end of their primary use phase?

Taking into consideration the complexity of various needs and demands within the fashion and textile sector, this paper will address the following challenges, opportunities and benefits of developing responsible leasing systems to all types of textile based products whether for retail or contract.

- The connection between the Circular Economy and responsible leasing rather than total ownership and where product becomes a service (3).
- Reviewing the next evolution of existing Cradle to Cradle (i.e. Circular Economy), Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and 'take back' initiatives and guidelines.
- How waste management, recycling and chemical companies can create and develop a greater collaborative role with the concept and design forming stage of a textile product.
- Responsible design efficiency for disassembly or recycling and ensuring only biogenic and toxic free products are fed back into the lifecycle.
- Responsible Leasing versus throwawayism (4) addressing the following:
 - The Psychology of Ownership: the loss of individuality and making the customer feel the hero.
 - User Responsibility: will our level of responsibility, as a collective, be enhanced through shared ownership?
 - Slow Design: How can leasing enhance creativity, eliminate throwawayism and enable responsible fashion and textiles to be more accessible?
 - Current/Up-to-date: Will the knowledge that you can always enhance and update an item give a sense of security and progressiveness?