



UniformReuse.co.uk Case Study



Coventry Building Society

Key facts

- Coventry Building Society employs 1,411 staff and purchases 5,000 pieces of corporatewear every 2 years.
- End-of-life clothing is sent to Wilcox Industrial Supply.
- High quality pieces are sent for reuse in Africa and Asia.

Background

Coventry Building Society was established in 1884 and is now the fourth largest building society in the UK, serving well over 1 million customers. The company employs 1,411 staff (512 in the branch network of whom 450 wear uniform), and purchases 5,000 pieces of corporatewear when it re-brands every 2-4 years. Environmental issues are always at the core of Coventry's business policy, and they have been operating a corporate clothing take-back scheme for the past four years. This was recently changed, however, as the initial set-up was unsatisfactory: little value was retained from the garments which were all ragged and shredded, or incinerated. Coventry felt that, given the high quality of the garments being disposed of, it would be a far better use to have them re-distributed and worn again.



Initiatives

After substantial difficulty finding a collector who would take corporate clothing, Coventry made contact with Wilcox. They were invited to tour the Wilcox reprocessing site, where the different options for clothing were explained and demonstrated.

Now, every time Coventry rebrands, the old worn and unused garments are collected at each branch, and a lorry collects all the bundles for deposit at the Wilcox site.

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At the processing site, clothes are sorted into wearable and un-wearable. Those of a high enough standard are sorted into assorted bundles - to avoid too many of the same items ending up in the same bag. These are then sent to less economically developed countries (LEDCs) such as African and Asian nations.

Any clothes that are unsuitable for resale are sorted by textile type in order to be recycled, or cut down to wipers. Not all fabric types are suitable for wiper rags, however, and - as a last resort - if no reuse application is found, the textiles are shredded for recycling. This then utilises at least some of the embedded energy from the material.

Outcomes

Since changing operations, 4,000 individual garments (over 2,000kg) have been collected through in-branch take-back. All of this has been processed through Wilcox and gone on to reuse 'as is', in overseas countries. Sending the clothing overseas minimises any security issues that would otherwise have been apparent had the clothing been reused in the UK, yet still maximises the value held in the garments themselves, as no processing is required. To ensure the corporatewear gains the greatest use, Wilcox sorts and bundles garments such that no single village or town receives numerous items of identical nature.





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Advice to Others

Locating an organisation which would accept corporate clothing became a big obstacle for Coventry, and could have dissuaded another less dedicated company to have given up. Perseverance can often be key, but the availability of the directory on the Uniform Reuse website should help in the future.

Suitable infrastructure to allow collections was also an issue and, with little storage space, Coventry had to organise frequent deliveries to Wilcox. This was not a significant cost for such a large organisation, as trips could be included in other deliveries. However, smaller organisations, or those with less frequent collection/delivery arrangements, may find this a slight difficulty. Ensure there is a system in place to allow for collections to be successful and find out in advance whether a reprocessor will be able to collect and store garments on your behalf.

Additional Information

Websites

Coventry BS www.coventrybuildingsociety.co.uk

For contact information please search the Directory on www.uniformreuse.co.uk/directory



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