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NEWS

UPDATE

COTTON TRADERS – THE GARDEN CENTRE CLOTHING PARTNER



In this week's edition of Concession News, we look at how Cotton Traders have fine tuned their retail proposition to communicate directly with their customers and establish themselves as one of the leading clothing retailers within the garden centre sector.

Established in 1987 and traditionally a mail order company, Cotton Traders opened their first retail store within Cheshire Oaks in 1998. In October 2003, Cotton Traders opened their first garden centre store. They have since focused their efforts on developing their garden centre model after market research told them that garden centres are where their customers like to shop.

In this time, Cotton Traders have become one of the UK's most loved clothing retailers. They currently have over 700,000 customers on their database who receive regular email offers and send out over 17 million catalogues every year. In addition they despatch 25 million inserts across various, national media titles per year.

At the time of their first garden centre store, they were trading within high streets and outlet centres and had identified garden centres as the way they wanted to grow the brand.

They now trade from 75 garden centre sites across the UK. The unique, retail model they install in to garden centres enables them to communicate directly with customers based on individual shopping requirements.

As garden centres bring their own unique trading format including seasonal variances in footfall and reliance on good weather, Cotton Traders realised quickly that they had to build their own customer base for the garden centre stores.

Therefore, each communication is tailored to the individual customer and they are directed to their nearest store or back to where they have previously shopped to ensure new and repeat footfall, all year round. These tailored promotions and events calendars ensure customers are given a new shopping experience with every visit. They guarantee that the offers they promote within their



catalogues are available within their stores.

On their marketing prowess, **Nick Hamblin, Managing Director of Cotton Traders** commented *“Marketing our brand is very important and we invest heavily to ensure that our customers are aware of our ranges and where they can get them. Our retail proposition works very well within garden centres as the customers that visit these sites are a perfect match to our own customer profile.”*

As a result of this focus on driving footfall in to garden centres, garden centres have seen a huge benefit as a result. Garden & Leisure for example, opened their first Cotton Traders store in Cadbury in 2005 and noticed an immediate sales uplift in their clothing department. They have since found space for a Cotton Traders store in all of their sites ranging from 800sqft – 2000sqft.

Of working with Cotton Traders, **Operations Director for Garden & Leisure, Carol Paris** said *“We initially introduced Cotton Traders to our Cadbury Garden Centre in 2005. Since then they have installed in to all of our garden centres as we find their clothing offer to be perfectly suited to our customer base and complementary to our existing clothing offer. Cotton Traders work very hard on their marketing and brand awareness to communicate their offers to our customers, which helps to ensure repeat visits.”*



The main reason why these leisurewear ranges, exclusive to Cotton Traders, work so well in garden centres is due to the diverse mix of comfortable, practical clothing which encourages customers to be active. They have ladies, men’s and unisex ranges from Small to 5XL or sizes 10 to 26 which are updated every season.

These ranges coupled with an excellent shop fit design and specialist trained staff brings new impetus to the garden centre clothing offer, increased footfall to the whole site and more reasons to visit in any weather.

Nick Hamblin added: *“Garden Centres are our preferred host for our retail stores as we enjoy excellent relationships with our current landlords. We like working with them to benefit the whole site and working together gets better results than working independently. Our continued expansion in to garden centres is an exciting time in our growth and we are keen to find more new sites.”*

Keith McIntyre, Managing Director of First Franchise said: *“The Cotton Traders offer is a perfect fit for garden centres. They engage the customers by communicating directly to bring them in to their stores and when they are there, they encourage an active lifestyle through carefully selected ranges. Over the years we have been working with them, Cotton Traders have proved that they add value to the garden centre clothing offer, market the entire site with their host and add an excellent, professional brand to the sector.”*