

THE GIFTWARE ASSOCIATION

Chairman's Report 2016/17

Membership

An audit was conducted early in 2016 which revealed that members were lapsing faster than they were being recruited. As a result, our new strategy has been to create stronger relationships with members, ensuring that new and existing members have a strong idea of what membership entails.

As of late April 2017, the GA has over 500 fully paid members, including a gain of 42 between January and April 2017. We receive daily applications for membership, which we attribute to our assertive, friendly and creative new branding, as well as a recruitment policy which emphasises retaining loyal members over recruiting companies who are unlikely to renew for a second year. We are aiming for over 700 members by the end of Q4 2017.

Trade Fairs

The GA team attended 37 trade fairs in 2016 as part of a concerted effort to increase our visibility within the industry, and cement relationships with existing members and trade show organisers. This has included almost thirty we have never attended as an Association before. We have hosted panels and talks at many of these shows, which has allowed us to learn many of the challenges facing the industry as a whole, as well as offering us the chance to demonstrate to members and non-members alike that we are at the heart of the industry.

Gift of the Year

The 2017 Gift of the Year competition broke previous records for number of entries (1,088 up from 759), number of companies entering (241 up from 138), proportion of non-member entrants (48% up from 26%), and number of judges (28 up from 21). All of these successes were the result of an active campaign throughout the industry to promote the competition and the benefits of entering. We introduced new accolades, celebrating entered products from the day they were entered with 'Nominated' branding; we opened the competition in July rather than in September; and we opened the judging panel to select trade press editors as well as retail buyers.

The award ceremony was hosted in conjunction with Ascential Events on the evening of the first day of Spring Fair International, with each award being presented by the category sponsor. The overall winner was Giggle Beaver, with their '10 Things I Love About You' light box.

Sponsorship saw us break another record for the 2017 competition, as we managed to obtain sponsors for all 23 categories of the competition, including the Judges' Choice. This meant that we could fund the competition's costs entirely through sponsorship, allowing all of the proceeds from entries to be invested back into the Association for future projects. We are enormously grateful to our sponsors for lending their brands to the competition, and helping it run profitably, so that we can continue to offer a high level of service to our members.

Thanks to a directed effort to reduce our costs, running this year's competition resulted in a net excess of over £26,000, compared with last year's £18,000.

Meet the Buyer events

We are due to run our first 'Meet the Buyer' event with the Tillington Group of Garden Centres in May. The format of this event will be a mini trade show, where select suppliers will have dedicated time with buyers. Though spaces for the event were limited, we had an overwhelming response from applicants, with 165 applying. Though this was far in excess of the maximum number we could accommodate, we plan to run future events with Tillington and others, to capitalise on this enthusiasm.

Members' Day

Our 2016 AGM saw the induction of Henri Davis as chairman, taking over from Michael Papé. We held the event in London, at the Pewterers' Hall. The prestigious venue allowed us to launch and showcase our new branding, as well as introduce our members to the new culture of the GA; one of friendliness and creativity in how we approach questions and problems. Our brand designer, Paul Felton, introduced the branding and the rationale behind it, and we had speakers such as customer service expert Geoff Ramm. In the afternoon, we hosted seminars and one-to-one surgeries with our service providers. The event was filmed and made available online in the weeks that followed.

New Websites

The beginning of January saw us enter the New Year with a brand new website. The new site reflects our new branding and also improves the customer journey. We have chosen quality over quantity; with the website being stripped back to contain all the most important aspects of what we do in an easy to navigate format. This streamlined approach with clear calls to action enables us to handle customer queries directly whether they want to join or if they have any other query. Our existing and potential members are encouraged to contact us directly, which means we get a better understanding of their needs. The branding is in line with our new literature and marketing collateral which gives our marketing a holistic approach, while the design element reflects the industry that we are in: a colourful, hands on, creative community.

We will be launching a new website for our 'Design Deposit' scheme in the summer. This website will allow design deposits to be managed entirely online by members, and will be mobile friendly so that certificates can be viewed anywhere with an internet connection. This will allow disputes to be resolved far more quickly, for instance at trade shows.

Communications

In October 2016, we recruited a new marketing and PR manager, Chris Workman. Chris began work immediately on the new website, and has been working with the rest of the team on streamlining our communications, based on member feedback. We continue to issue our monthly e-newsletter, *Giftwrap*, but no longer send out weekly news. Instead, our new blog is updated two or three times per week, and we send out a fortnightly digest of top stories.

We have brought our communications entirely in-house, and no longer retain the services of the two consultants who previously produced the bulk of our press copy.

JDA and designGAP

The GA has added two organisations to its remit, to differing degrees. We now manage the Jewellery Distributors' Association (JDA), in order to preserve its identity within the industry, and with a view to growing its list of members. In a similar vein, we have formed a partnership with designGAP. While still overseen by founder Shirley Frost, designGAP's daily administration and member interaction are managed by the GA.

We have already grown membership of both organisations, and are optimistic that this will continue. We designed and staffed the JDA stand at Spring Fair, which was well received by members.