THE GIFTWARE ASSOCIATION: Chairman's report 2015/2016

Membership

The GA continues to enjoy high retention figures for suppliers of 81% however there has been a further decline in Retailer performance of 8% versus last year dropping to 66%. We welcomed 160 new member companies during 2015 and the first few months of 2016 which increased by 34% on last year.

Trade Fairs

The GA attended a number of trade fairs during 2015, exhibiting at six (Giving & Living, Scotland Trade Fair, Spring Fair, The British Craft Fair, Home & Gift and Autumn Fair). The first quarter of 2016 the team visited 15 shows increasing its knowledge.

The Association continued to run seminars at a number of these shows, promoting the GA to a wider audience as well as increasing the understanding of the challenges faced by our existing and would be members.

Gift of the Year

The 2016 Gift of the Year competition has been extremely successful, with a number of entries equal to last year's record number. The feel of the competition has been revamped slightly, with a new design for the Winners' Brochure that attracted a great deal of praise.

The award ceremony was held at the close of the opening day of Spring Fair 2016 at the NEC, with the awards being presented by Cath Kidston. The coveted Judges' Choice award – for the outstanding product across the 20 categories – was won by Ginger Ray for their Heart Drop Guest Book Frame, for which they also won a free stand at Autumn Fair 2016 from the show organisers and headline sponsors i2i Events.

We are enormously grateful to all of our sponsors including our headline sponsors i2i Events, organisers of the Spring and Autumn Fairs in Birmingham, as well as our primary magazine sponsor Progressive Gifts & Home, GA insurance brokers TH March, Ravensden, Henri Davis, AnchorCert, Premier Decorations, Lindi de Souza, Widdop & Co, Arthur J Gallagher, The Customs Consultant, the NEC, GES, GA Copywatch (Gately PLC, Eversheds and Barker Brettell), GA Costwatch and GA Legal Helpline (Steeles Law).

Meet the Buyer Events

The GA held two Meet the Buyers in March 2015, with John Lewis and Achica. Feedback from both has been extremely positive. Another event with John Lewis is planned for April 2016 and has already attracted over 50 applicants.

Members' Day

The GA's 2015 Members' Day with the theme "The Next Generation in Gifts" had a record attendance, with speakers from SEO Traffic Lab and Funding Circle, as well as a panel debate featuring members of the next generation from John Lewis, LSA International, Gifts From Handpicked and Thabto.

The GA took this opportunity to recognise the outstanding achievements and contribution to our industry of John Allan by giving him the Elkan Simons award, presented by David Simons.

The event was livestreamed online to viewers who were able to enjoy the day, even if they were unable to travel to the event in Birmingham.

The presentations and debate were followed by a networking lunch, small group seminars and one-to-one surgeries with service providers and experienced members, where members could find valuable support and advice.

Industry Awards

The GA was delighted to present its prize for the most innovative and commercially viable gift range at the British Craft Trade Fair to Kate Ramsey for her range of felt scarves. As well as the kudos, she also received a year of free membership in the Association. As sponsor of the Honorary Achievement Award at the Greats Gift Retailer Awards, the Association presented this industry-wide accolade to Mike Burgess of Parlane International while The GA's prize at the annual Pewter Live trade show was presented to Laura Colebrooke for her make-up brushes, who received the option of a year's free membership.

Lifestyle App

The Lifestyle App has been a new initiative launched at the latter part of 2015 and was created to replace the member to member voucher scheme and a new way of giving something back to the businesses and people who help make the gift and home industry one of the most vibrant in the country.

The app is a must for members exhibiting at core trade shows to use the GA's unique marketing channel to help strengthen their brand and get retailers talking about their products. Members have been able to reach to a network of tens of thousands of retailers through both the GA and the show organisers. This has given those members who have participated discounts and unique experiences. The app is free to download, and you can get it from the <u>iTunes Store for your iPhone</u>, or from <u>Google Play for Android</u>.

Communication and Warnings

The GA's newsletters, Reflect and Giftwrap continue to be popular. In February 2016 the decision was made to send Reflect out on a Thursday which saw a dramatic increase in its open rate from 23% (avg. for last 15 issues of 2015) to 31% (avg. of most recent 9 issues of 2016).

The GA has continued sending out warnings on scams and fraudulent companies, with a building database of dubious companies reported to us by our members.

In addition the Associations informational updates have been solidified into a new regular communication called 'Business Voice' in which they focus upon legislative and regulatory changes affecting our industry. This label separates such updates from our marketing and events communications.