

The Outdoor Retailer Summer Market provides a useful networking opportunity



PROTECTIVE FABRICS STEAL SHOW

The outdoor industry remains buoyant with innovations such as fabrics with insect repellent and enhanced antibacterial properties coming to the fore. **Kathlyn Swantko** reports from the Outdoor Retailer Summer Market

The US outdoor industry has seen strong growth since 2000, and specialty outdoor retailers expect a buoyant 2007. The strength of the outdoor industry is reflected in recent research released by the US Outdoor Industry Association (OIA).

According to the study, retailers reported that 2006 total industry sales of \$7.62bn represented an increase of 11.3% over 2005 and retailers anticipate that sales for 2007 will be up 11.9% over 2006 levels. While all regions of the US showed good growth, the southern and western retailers experienced the strongest sales, up 14% and 16.8%, respectively.

Outdoor industry storefronts have also been growing steadily over the past six years, with a 15% increase overall, most of the increase being centred in the Western states, says the research.

The strength in the outdoor retail market is a positive sign for fabric manufacturers and suppliers servicing this market. The current interest in the development of sustainable fabrics is also bringing new fabric innovations to the market. The outdoor market has also become a benchmark for the textile industry. Many outdoor fabric innovations of the past

have become commonplace in the mass apparel market. As a result, the number of suppliers exhibiting at the Outdoor Retailer Summer Market (ORSM) has increased.

The ORSM, which is held twice a year in Salt Lake City, Utah, US, generated nearly 22,000 attendees at this season's event. And, according to show organisers, the supplier exhibitor base at the show, held from 9-12 August, increased by 9% over 2006 figures.

The show provides an ideal networking opportunity, according to Ted Ganio of Mountain Hardwear, a major outdoor manufacturer. "The participation of suppliers in the Outdoor Retailer Show is extremely important. The show provides outdoor manufacturers with the opportunity to do some additional PR with their retailer base, but it also gives manufacturers an opportunity to see their suppliers all in one place, and to have some important networking meetings in preparation for upcoming seasons."

Innovations

Knitting International looked at a few of the supplier innovations that generated interest at the recent ORSM.

ExOfficio, a popular manufacturer of

travel and outdoor apparel featured a new collection of Buzz Off apparel for the spring 2008 season. According to Mary Collins, sales manager for Buzz Off Manufacturing: "The Buzz Off Insect Shield is now EPA registered to provide effective insect protection through 70 washings - almost three times the initial claim of 25 washings achieved in July 2003."

Buzz Off Insect Shield for apparel repels insects and helps to prevent insect-borne diseases, such as West Nile virus, malaria and Lyme's disease.

Exofficio's Buzz Off apparel features insect repellency and in-built sun protection, allowing adventure travellers and outdoor enthusiasts to stay outside longer and better enjoy their experience. Designed with outdoor people in mind, the company's layering knit pieces for both men and women are made with its proprietary Barrier Knit fabric of 85% polyester/15% cotton, which features Dri-release for rapid dry time and FreshGuard for odour resistance.

Nanotechnology

Exhibiting for the first time, NanoHorizons used the ORSM to officially launch fabrics made with the company's

nanotechnology-based antimicrobial silver fibre, SmartSilver.

Dennis Schneider, director of marketing and sales for NanoHorizons, explains: "Our scientists understand that the best way to maximise silver ion release is to generate as much surface area as possible. The greater the extent to which microbes are exposed to the silver ions generated by silver surface area, the more they impact with these ions and are killed, thereby delivering better antimicrobial performance in a particular fabric or garment."

According to Mr Schneider, through the use of nanoscale engineering, both manmade and natural fibres can be impregnated with antimicrobial properties using SmartSilver. The results are said to be eco-friendly (because silver is a benign mineral), inexpensive, manufacturer-friendly, and consumer-friendly fabrics ideal for a wide range of recreational and professional markets.

NanoHorizons also showcased the knitted Faytex performance lining fabric Dri-Lex for footwear, which is now enhanced through the use of SmartSilver for added bacteria control. This lining fabric is currently being used in Zoot Footwear.

Other featured knit applications utilising SmartSilver included the circular knit camouflage printed patterns of Real Tree and Mossy Oak for the hunting market.

Environmental

With sustainability such an important issue within the outdoor market, 3M used the ORSM to relaunch the environmental story on its Scotchgard Protector brand of fabric protection. No company was further ahead than 3M in understanding the impact of fluorochemicals on the environment.

In May 2000, 3M made a voluntary decision to phase out manufacture of products having perfluoro-octanyl chemistry (which included PFOA, PFOS and PFOS-related products), a chemistry that was used in many Scotchgard Protector products at the time. Although extensive research showed there were

no adverse health effects at the levels found, 3M did not want to add to the presence of this persistent compound in the environment or people.

What followed was a seven-year major investment by the company to develop more sustainable substitute

technologies, which has led to the introduction of a 'next generation' line of reformulated products under the Scotchgard brand name.

At the show, 3M unveiled its new durable Scotchgard Protector finish, designed for activewear fabrics. This Scotchgard Protector moisture management product helps to transport

perspiration away and resist staining. Bonded to each individual fibre of a fabric, it forms an invisible, durable finish that stops stains and absorbs perspiration, spreading it out for more effective evaporation.

"We are very excited to provide the textile and apparel manufacturing industries with a high performance fabric protection solution that will enhance their products," says Mitch Culbreath,

business manager, Scotchgard Protector. "At 3M we are always developing and improving our formulas, so that we are best serving the industry, consumers and the environment."

Performance socks

Italian based EuroSocks is a manufacturer of sports specific performance socks and technical underwear, targeted at the athletic, travel and medical markets. According to marketing director Sandy Altman, EuroSocks uses a variety of performance yarns, innovative design and attention to exact manufacturing specifications, combined with advancements in seamless knitting on Sangiancomo knitting machines, to produce products that are leaders in the market for fit, function and comfort. The technical yarns used in EuroSocks include MicroSupreme, Wool Supreme, Dryarn, Dralon, Silver DryStat, CoolMax and Thermolite.

Mr Altman explains: "The EuroSock 'anatomically fit system' ensures that our socks move seamlessly with your foot, so that you can concentrate on your activity, not your feet."

EuroSocks's technical compression wear, called Arko, is also produced on the seamless knitting machines and is made from Dryarn, an innovative polypropylene yarn. The Arko line is available in styles for both men and women and is sold under the Athleta label in the US. **KI**



Polartec knitted hoodie from Arc'teryx's spring 08 line, featured at the Outdoor Retailer Summer Market



NanoHorizons launched fabrics such as Real Tree, for the hunting market, made with its nanotechnology-based antimicrobial silver fibre, SmartSilver