

RETAIL

## Walpole puts sustainability at center of British luxury manufacturing and retailing

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*Walpole's great and good at the CEO & Chairmen's annual dinner at the Four Seasons Hotel in London Jan. 13: From left to right, Marco Gentile, EMEA president for Burberry; Michael Ward, chairman of Walpole and managing director of Harrods; Helen Brocklebank, CEO of Walpole; Andrew Maag, CEO of dunhill; and Jenny Urquhart, chairman of Johnstons of Elgin. Image credit: Walpole*

By MICKEY ALAM KHAN

British luxury lobby Walpole inaugurated the first phase of its go-green manifesto with commitments from more than 100 member brands to support the initiative and prioritize sustainability in their companies.

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The commitment came at Walpole's annual CEO & Chairmen's dinner Jan. 13 with attendance from senior executives at Burberry, Harrods, The Savoy dunhill, Mulberry and Johnstons of Elgin. Walpole's British Luxury Sustainability Manifesto is closely aligned with the UN Sustainability Goals.

"If British luxury is to achieve its target of 65 billion in sales over the next five years, sustainability has to be at the heart of every brand's strategy," said Helen Brocklebank, CEO of Walpole, in a statement.

"For millennials and Gen Z, who will account for half of all luxury sales by 2025, true luxury only comes with a clean conscience," she said.

Green back

**Walpole** has 270 members comprising the who's who of British luxury manufacturing, retailing and services.

The move to sustainability is to move in lockstep with consumer desires to transact with conscientious brands that respect the environment and workers.

Four principles will guide Walpole's sustainability manifesto:

1. Lead the transition towards a circular economy
2. Safeguard the environment and natural resources
3. Guide partners and suppliers towards sustainable practices
4. Advocate equal and respectful working conditions

In addition to pressure from consumers, marketers also face regulatory and political directives to comply with green initiatives. Add to that expectations from the workforce.

A Swytch survey last year on employee sentiment found that about 70 percent of employees would prefer to work for a company with a green footprint.

Walpole cited a similar sentiment in its 2020 Walpole-McKinsey Sustainability in Luxury Survey as well as focus groups conducted within Walpole membership.

In those surveys, an estimated 90 percent of brands identified sustainability as a top-five priority for their business largely driven by the increased focus on social responsibility and changing consumer expectations and purchasing behavior, per Walpole.

#### Common ground

Of course, a one-size-fits-all approach to sustainability is not possible, given the number of sectors within the luxury business.

What was common in terms of sustainability challenges was responsible sourcing of raw materials, waste management such as recycling and reuse, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The members acknowledged that while they had an edge on key sustainability issues, there was a need to collaborate with supply chain components and fellow brands.

"The luxury industry needs to collaborate and enact policies and programs at scale to protect the environment, implement more sustainable practices and support workers in its supply chains," said Pam Batty, vice president of corporate responsibility at Burberry, in a statement.

"While there is no quick fix, we are hugely supportive of Walpole's British Luxury Sustainability Manifesto, which will bring together established and emerging U.K. brands to implement systemic change and build a more sustainable future for our industry," she said.

Now that the manifesto is out with clear sustainability aspirations that can be set, tracked and measured, Walpole will provide ongoing guidance, resources, tools and forums to its membership as they embrace sustainability within their organizations.

LEADING BY example helps, especially if it comes from the top: Michael Ward, chairman of Walpole and managing director of British department store chain Harrods.

"As an industry that has always been upheld by the highest standards, British luxury has an obligation to lead from the front when it comes to sustainability," Mr. Ward said in a statement.

"There is no doubt that the commitment to quality and strong values that define our industry must now incorporate measures that prioritize sustainability within our individual businesses," he said.

"Walpole's British Luxury Sustainability Manifesto is the unifying platform needed to focus our individual strategies, share best practice and demonstrate our commitment to one of our industry's biggest strategic priorities.

"I am heartened and inspired that Harrods will be standing alongside the wider industry as we continue our own sustainability journey."

[Please click here to down Walpole's 2020 British Luxury Sustainability Manifesto](#)