

NEWS RELEASE

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Brexit, Staycations and Omnichannel retailing: Wilko hosts GIMA Day Conference

The second of two GIMA Day Conferences of 2016 saw the highest ever turnout with over 90 GIMA members enjoying talks from industry experts, networking opportunities, and the chance to meet top buyers from Wilko. The event was hosted by the value variety retailer at Clumber Park Hotel and Spa near Worksop, Nottinghamshire on Thursday 8th December.

GIMA Director Vicky Nuttall welcomed GIMA members and other delegates with a review of 2016, including the news that the organisation had raised £13,600 for garden industry charities Perennial and Greenfingers as well as the addition of 38 new members. On Brexit, Vicky added: “Although we are entering uncertain times, with the government yet to announce a plan for leaving the EU, we will endeavour to provide the most up to date business support services, data and advice to help members adjust to potential challenges.”

With this hot topic in mind, the conference began with a fascinating in-depth view of post Brexit Britain and what that might mean for the garden industry.

Josh McBain from Future Foundation said: “Although it is still unclear what the government has planned, this is not a UK-only story, this is part of a wider narrative. Due to rising anti-EU sentiment and the mainstream view of the union as a poor deal for leading economies, we are more than likely headed for a hard Brexit, as the EU will want to deter other countries from following suit.”

There was bad news but also some good, added Josh: “The pound will continue to affect inflation and therefore consumer spending, and with crude oil prices expected to recover from an artificial low the price of manufacturing is set to increase. However, there is a significant boost in tourism for the UK, expected to rise by 7% in 2017, with £2.4bn forecasted to be spent by Brits taking staycations. In short, this sector does face challenges – but also great opportunities.”

Philippa Stubbs, Managing Director of British Garden Centres echoed these thoughts: “Increased domestic tourism is certainly giving us a real boost. Not only are most of our 10 garden centres all within easy reach of each other, but we also own leisure parks, where customers stay and then include the garden centre as part of their staycation activities. Garden centres actually present a very attractive low cost family outing - so long as there are adequate play facilities and versatile, well-run restaurant areas.”

Phillippa revealed that British Garden Centres is looking to expand its own branded goods ranges further and gave a few hints for suppliers looking to work with them. “We want to create an exquisite shopping experience for our customers, make it easier for them to shop and provide a great day out, and the products we sell must reflect these core values. We are looking for innovative products, with concise packaging - UK made is a huge plus, as are sensible price points with clever

deals that don't devalue the product category. More supplier sponsored staff training would also be well received as it really does work to motivate staff and sales."

Cadix Managing Director Kate Ebbens stood next to update delegates on Garden Re-Leaf 2017: "The Garden Re-Leaf walk will take place in Cambridgeshire next year, with a route that will stretch 20 miles with a start and finish at two of Scotsdales' centres. With Garden Re-Leaf occurring on the 17th March, the same date as St Patrick's Day, walkers and other fundraisers will have even greater opportunities for fun and fundraising in 2017."

Briers and Gardman were said to have raised £57,000 from combined product sales and £30,000 from retailers' Plant-athons.

After lunch, **Wilko Chief Operating Officer Sean Toal** underlined his business' objectives for the future, touching on some key aspects for suppliers to take into consideration. Hard working families, 'Empty nesters' and university students are key demographics for the company, he said, and also a greater need to educate customers to help them save time and money. "We need to make the customer journey easier to navigate. Our customers' time is precious and with garden products, many of them don't have a clue where to start. So we've got to have information for our team members, on-pack and on-shelf, for ease of navigation, ease of shop, so they can make choices more easily. And we need your help with that."

The Wilko buying team followed their COO with a presentation that provided further insight into the business for the benefit of suppliers in attendance. Wilko senior buyer Kate McCartney revealed that during the last 12 months, the company had served a total of 200 million customers, but more specifically in the garden and outdoor category 40 million units sold generating £115 million worth of sales. The company's 400 stores are located in a wide variety of locations, from urban shopping malls to out of town shopping destinations, with plans to open more in 2017. Digital sales were becoming especially important she said, with 20% of sales accounted for online.

Lloyd Taylor, head of garden and outdoor buying at Wilko, talked in detail about omnichannel retailing: "More than ever suppliers need to embrace digital. The lines that perform well online, believe me, if they are right for our customer, will feed through to the shelf. We consider digital and bricks and mortar as not just the sum of its parts but something much greater, and a fundamental part of the customer experience."

Own brand ranges are worth £850m a year to Wilko, who would like to work more with suppliers on creating further ranges that are quality and value for money. But equally important, especially to their customers, said Lloyd, were brands: "We can't credibly sell own brand products such as ferts and chems, unless we have built a reputation on supplying trusted brands. We want the big brands, and in general a well edited range that doesn't overwhelm our customers."

To conclude, Lloyd said: "We want to help customers digitally, and instore, get to the solution they want, the product they want, with as much ease and confidence as we possibly can."

The next GIMA AGM/Day Conference will be held on the 23rd March 2016, venue and guest speakers to be confirmed.

To keep up to date with GIMA news, visit the GIMA website, get in touch with the GIMA office on 01959 564947 or email info@gima.org.uk.

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Notes for the editor:

The **Garden Industry Manufacturer's Association (GIMA)** is a dynamic and proactive membership organisation representing the majority share of suppliers and manufacturers operating within the UK gardening industry. Formed over 15 years ago, its goal is to promote the commercial, trading and industrial interests of its members. For further information call the GIMA office on 01959 564947 or email info@gima.org.uk