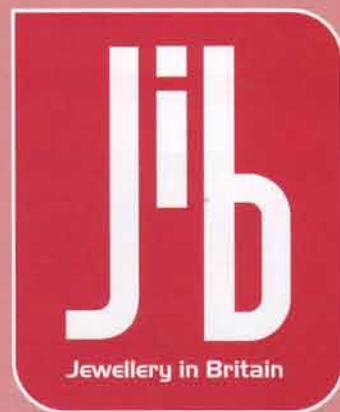


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THE CREDIT CRUNCH, metal prices and red tape top jewellers' worry list

Economic uncertainty, the rising price of precious metals and government regulations are perceived to be amongst the greatest threat to businesses across the jewellery supply chain, a survey from the British Jewellers' Association (BJA) has revealed.

The purpose of the survey, which appeared in the last issue of this magazine and was entitled 'Beating the Credit Crunch', was to assess the state of the sector and to identify the issues and priorities it faces. 51% of the responses received were from UK manufacturers, with the rest from designer makers, wholesalers and independent and internet retailers.

Threats

Participants were asked to indicate what they felt were the greatest threats to their businesses. Top of the list were the credit crunch (62%) and rising postal costs (46%) (perhaps due to greater awareness following the BJA campaign on Special Delivery). Also rated as of concern were competition from imports (43%) and the risk of designs being copied (41%). Surprisingly, especially as the BJA considers it to be a key element of its forward strategy, the lowest level of perceived threat emerged as a lack of consumer confidence in precious metals, diamonds and gemstones (13.5%). However 35% of respondents thought it was important to have an ethically sound supply chain for jewellery and 57% thought they had enough information to judge this.

Other issues which commanded attention were, predictably, preventing robberies (59%) and protection for premises (57%). Government 'red tape' in the form of employment legislation (48%), health & safety (41%) and directors' liabilities (29.7%). Specific to the jewellery trade were worries about rising metal prices (72.9%), Royal Mail (65%) and overseas carriage services (49%). There was little concern about the lack of a hallmark for palladium (8%).

Services

The most useful business services were credit checks (32%), web design (19%) and legal helplines (19%). Least useful were IT consultancy (5%), invoice factoring (3%) and order fulfillment which scored nothing. 78% of respondents said they used an advertising or PR consultancy, but curiously only 41% allocated a budget for marketing. Only 3% used TV, 5% radio and 35% direct mail to promote themselves to clients.

Exports

60% of respondents were exporting but the average element of turnover from exports was just 15% and 87% did not exhibit at overseas shows.

Most popular potential markets for non exporters were USA and Japan. 60% visited overseas shows with Basel, Hong Kong and Vicenza being top choices. 51% had sourced off-the-shelf products from overseas manufacturers and 38% had their own designs produced abroad. Most important UK shows were confirmed as Spring Fair and IJL. Eight companies spent over 20 days a year at trade shows but for the rest the average was around eight days.

The Internet

Internet use is rising with 97% of respondents having internet access at work, 70% made business purchases online, 54% used websites for industry news and 33% used it to check out potential suppliers. 81% had their own website. Use of third party websites for promotion revealed 47% using the BJA website, with just 8% using Spring Fair, IJL and the Goldsmiths Company sites.

Respondents saw the most important roles for a trade association as dissemination of information and news (65%), followed by negotiation of trade fair discounts (59%), government lobbying (51%). Codes of ethics were seen as important by 49%

as was acting as spokesman to the media and providing a logo as endorsement (46%). Offering specialist advice was important for 41% as was provision of a forum to exchange views.

Geoff Field, Chief Executive of the BJA, told JIB that the survey had been very illuminating and illustrated that occasionally the issues on which trade associations focused were not of prime concern to their members, adding that threats such as the credit crunch were clearly beyond the influence of bodies such as the BJA!

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London Jewellery Exports Project gains additional funding



Pendants by Ornella Annucci

For full story see page 21

Rapid Manufacturing gets CREATIVE

Imagine a technology that allows you to literally 'print' your 3D designs directly into metals such as gold, titanium or stainless steel, without the need for tooling, casting patterns or fabrication. Dr Phil Reeves of Econolyst Ltd believes that this technology has arrived.

The 3rd International Conference on Rapid Manufacturing (RM), which took place in July at Loughborough University was attended by over 140 delegates from 15 countries. It clearly demonstrated the progress being made in the RM technologies that are now readily accessible to the jewellery and giftware sectors.

So what is RM? This is the name given to the production of end-use or series component parts made using Additive Layer Manufacturing technologies. ALM technologies have been widely used for over 20-years as a way of making both prototypes and casting patterns, however it is only within the last few years that we have seen the technology being used directly to make end use

parts such as medical, automotive and aerospace component, in addition to household products such as wall lamps, light shades and even furniture, all applications that were demonstrated at this year's RM conference.

Recent developments in process technology now allow very fine detailed parts to be directly manufactured in a range of precious and non-precious metals suited to the jewellery industry and giftware sectors.

Conference speaker Lionel Theodor, dean of the design studio FutureFactories (www.futurefactories.co.uk) presented a fascinating paper on his technological journey to embrace RM, which has now



Icon pendant produced using a DMLS machine produced by EOS GmbH



From computer rendering (left) to completed RM trophy (right)

resulted in the production of a range of 25 digitally designed pendants called 'Icon' manufactured directly from 3D CAD data using Direct Metal Laser Sintering (DMLS) of Titanium powder.

The pendants, which have been manufactured using an EOS M270 DMLS machine (www.eos.info) have been specifically designed to maximise the capabilities of the technology and would be impossible to manufacture using traditional production techniques. Following production, the pendants have been barrel tumbled before a final manual polish. The finished 'product' is then fitted with a simple silver chain. FutureFactories also demonstrated how DMLS technology can be used to manufacture high-value bespoke giftware, such as a bespoke prize awarded at the conference.

This was manufactured in stainless steel powder by UK based 3TRPD (www.3trpd.co.uk).

Research by both EOS and Selective Laser Melting technology vendor MCP Tooling Technologies (www.mcp-group.co.uk) has already demonstrated that the technology is capable of processing noble metals including gold. Albeit to date the Rapid Manufacture of commercial gold products has been limited to the reconstructive dental market. However it is only a matter of time until the technology is embraced as a production process for high value bespoke jewellery and giftware production in a range of noble metals.

The 4th International RM conference will take place in Loughborough on the 8th and 9th July 2009. For more information, please visit www.rm-conference.com



Three unique digital designs