



European
Commission



Rewarding Eco-Innovation for Jobs and Growth



AUSDESIGN OÜ

Upcycling waste to fashion on a massive scale

AusDesign OÜ is a pioneering enterprise showing how resources can be used more sustainably in surprising places. Efficient resource use means a win for the companies involved and for the environment.

Estonia and Bangladesh might seem an unlikely combination, but that hasn't prevented AusDesign OÜ from bringing them together to mass produce t-shirts with what they claim is the world's smallest environmental footprint.

The fast-changing nature of the fashion business and the volume of manufacturing generate large quantities of waste, leftovers and surplus stock, causing serious problems where the garments are produced, and increasing environmental pressures on those providing the raw materials.

This is where the pioneering partnership between AusDesign and BEXIMCO, the largest private sector fabric and garment

producer in Bangladesh, comes in. The Estonian company takes the waste from its Asian partner's regular production orders and uses it for mass production upcycling – a world first.

The result means impressive environmental savings. Compared to a normal item of clothing, 86% less energy and 91% less water are required, and manufacturing waste can be reduced by up to 40%.

It also brings financial benefits. Markus Vihma, the head of environment and sustainability in the five-strong company, explains: 'When the price of the product is the most important factor and you take the waste material, which otherwise has no value, and you do not count its price or cost to you, the cost of the final garment is about half that of the original item.'

The company recently clinched an order for 23 000 t-shirts, all made from waste, for the Estonian Song and Dance Festival. It also provides what it calls up-shirts for sports events, music festivals, NGOs and other organisations.



Cooperation between the small Baltic company and the giant Asian conglomerate saw AusDesign among the finalists in the European Business Awards for the Environment 2014-2015 international business cooperation category.

It was recognition for a journey which had started a few years earlier. Company founder Reet Aus has always been interested in the impact of her work on sustainability, and all her fashion lines have been made from upcycled textiles and ethically produced organic fabrics.

In the wake of a PhD thesis, *Trash To Trend*, she teamed up with award winning filmmakers Jaak Kilmi and Lennart Laberenz to make a documentary on the impact of the fashion industry on the environment. The project took her to Bangladesh as she traced a pair of jeans bought in Estonia back to its origins.

It was there that she met the CEO of BEXIMCO, which produces over 50 million garments a year. A partnership was formed to find new ways of reusing the company's waste fabric, and the result is the new upcycled clothing collections marketed as AusDesign.

Upcycling involves a change of mind set in the whole production process. The material itself becomes the starting point,

rather than the designer, and close cooperation is required between the supplier, client, designer and producer.

— It makes the exercise more enjoyable and playful. You have to solve a problem. It depends on the purpose. The creation of the design requires more dialogue than usual.

MARKUS VIHMA

AusDesign OÜ is continuing to explore further horizons, and recently broke new ground by developing the first up-cycling certificate. 'We did this in cooperation with the Estonian Academy of Arts and the Stockholm Environment Institute's Tallinn centre,' says Markus. After being carefully examined by an independent auditor, BEXIMCO has become the first producer to bear the UpMade Certified Upcycling Production System.

Showcasing Europe's leading eco-innovators

The European Business Awards for the Environment

Presented every two years, the awards recognise businesses that have taken steps to improve their environmental performance and contribute to sustainable economic development. Companies compete in five categories, which reward green innovation in management, product and services, process, international business cooperation, or in combining business and biodiversity.

Businesses of any size, from any sector, can compete. Standards are high, as the competitors are already 'the best of the best': to enter the European Business Awards for the Environment, you need to have been a finalist in a national competition first.

FIND OUT MORE

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/awards/index.html>

