



UniformReuse.co.uk Case Study

Lawrence M. Barry & Co



Key Facts

- Lawrence M. Barry & Co (LMB) has three broad phases in its process: collection, sorting and distribution.
- Each item that goes through the LMB system gets handled, on average, seven times.
- The company hand sorts the textiles into the following categories:
 - Reuse
 - Wiper Grade
 - Recycling Grade
 - Waste
- LMB estimates that approximately 60% of the content of a collected bin can be reused and 40% can be recycled. For a container, between 5-12% may be waste, of which below 1% is textile waste.
- LMB regards its strong relationships as key to ensuring good business relationships and practices.

Background

LMB was established 1985 with three members of staff and, although still a family run business, has evolved into 170 staff and four companies:

- LMB recycling plant
- LMB Fabrication Ltd which fabricates the recycling receptacles and conducts mini-sorting
- LMB Supplies which manufactures and supplies wiper cloths and ecological greened janitorial supplies
- LMB Education CIC which is a community interest company that works with over 600 primary schools providing workshops to help educate children on textile recycling. This is combined with a collection service which provides revenue for the schools and Local Authority.

All collections are made within the south east region, where LMB purchases donated apparel and footwear goods by the tonne from the London Borough Councils. Historically, this cost around £50 per tonne, however, in recent years prices have been driven up by traders paying up to £200-300 per tonne. These traders do not sort their collections and send waste textile products into Eastern Europe for processing or disposal. There have been instances where Eastern European countries, having obtained goods from the UK, have sorted them and created wipers which they try to sell back to LMB for redistribution.

Initiatives

Recycling has always been at the heart of the business. TP Moore, a company owned by Lawrence Barry's father, began recycling dock ropes from London's dockyards and eventually moved into textiles which it saw retained value after being discarded by owners. This has evolved into LMB today. The company now employs a large number of people who do the sorting. They have 'rag sorters' who distinguish between recyclable and reusable textiles and do an initial sort before the 'useful sorters', who have deeper market knowledge of the value of the items for particular regions in the world. Where possible, people originating from the destination markets are employed to utilise local market knowledge. Day release staff are also employed to maintain a service element to the business.

An example of local market variation can be seen in the African trade. Bales to African countries need to be single garment types, which are then graded within the market once they are in the country. Fabric type is important, as weather conditions are extreme.



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The sorting is not done using product labels or brands but by product type; there are about 160 separations for the textiles/shoes. By sorting garments by type, rather than looking at labels, it ensures that items that are sent offshore offer variety. This is important to those who purchase from LMB as in this way they can have any type of garment, from high street to designer brands within a bundle.

For the materials which are unsuitable for reuse, sorters need to be experienced in understanding textile quality as well. The flocking and shoddy making process, for example, requires a minimum of 50% wool and so if sent incorrectly to the processing centres (where they are further laboratory tested for quality) this could be potentially damaging to LMB's reputation.

Corporatewear is dealt with in a slightly different way as noted below, due to the distinct colouring and branding of items:

- LMB de-labels corporate branded items because the company feels that if an item such as a suit has been de-labelled, it is unlikely that it could be sold in a charity shop.
- It stockpiles the items donated by a company, then mixes small quantities of corporate branded items into the normal bundles, as anything more would affect the relationships with the overseas customers.
- If a logo is big or bold, it is unlikely that those garments will be worn by people living in the city of an overseas country; it is more likely to go to the more far-reaching locations.

Barriers to Recovery

As well as corporatewear, other barriers have been seen to affect LMB. These include the following:

- There is some confusion around the term "waste" with regards to textiles. If the general public donates clothes to a charity shop, it is not waste. If that donation can not be re-sold within the shop, then it becomes waste. To conduct legitimate business in the waste industry, a company needs to register, obtaining a waste carrier licence; failure to do so results in imprisonment or fine. Some companies recycle textiles but do not register. Should the government ensure that reputable rag trade merchants are involved with or influence the destination of clothes donated to charity shops?
- Polyester was identified as the worst possible fibre to use as it has little value in either reuse (where the destination places are too hot for the fibres to be worn) or in recycling (where the fibres are not usable). Most corporatewear is made from this.

- Food and other wastes are sometimes present in textile bins, spoiling the collections and often resulting in them having to be landfilled. This causes unnecessary expense and harm to the environment. Although little can be done to avoid deliberate misuse, LMB suggests clearer public guidelines on what can/can't be recycled within their bins.

Despite these barriers, LMB estimates that approximately 60% of the content of a collected bin can be reused, with the other 40% recycled. For a typical 22.5 tonne container, between 5-12% is waste, of which less than 1% is textile waste.

Textiles are hand separated into the following:

- Reuse - wearable items to be sent to 'second-hand markets' either exported or through UK retailers, or 'upcycled' into new designs
- Wiper Grade – absorbent materials such as T-shirts or winceyette are processed at LMB's wiper manufacturing plant and made into textile wipers which are sold to many other industries (e.g. automobile, airlines, French polishers, etc)
- Recycling Grade – wool or knitted textiles are sent to be processed through pulling or shredding into fibres for shoddy or yarns for re-knitting
- Waste – some materials cannot be reprocessed and are of little use/hazardous to health (often soiled nappies, food waste, broken bric-a-brac, etc) and this is sent to landfill as waste.



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On average, LMB collects 170 to 200 tonnes of textiles, clothing and shoes. 60% will be sorted and exported for re-use, 10% that isn't fit for reuse will be cut into wiping cloths and 5-10% will be sent for flocking and felting, leaving a minimal 5% waste, incorporating household rubbish, hangers and single shoes.

Overcoming the odds!

When asked how to advise other organisations that may be having difficulties in overcoming these barriers, LMB had some key suggestions:

- Request public donations in reused supermarket-sized plastic bags (keeps clothing dry and free from contamination), rather than black bin liners (virgin material) that tend to jam up their conveyor belts.
- Donation is seasonal which affects collection quantities, e.g.: before holidays, after holidays, when it rains. Pre-Christmas is very quiet but post-Christmas is very busy. Keep these factors in mind when organising collections.
- Building relationships is key to business operations.
- Don't use polyester fabrics in the design of uniforms unless it is a mix with wool or cotton.

The Future?

At present, LMB plans to continue its business in much the manner it is used to! It has no plans to incorporate RFID (radio frequency identification device) or electronic sorting processes, as this would have repercussions on its staff (a lot of them would have to be let go). It has, however, taken on a small number of fashion designers to make designs using garments that cannot be taken through the sorting process, to remake into new designs (up-cycled) and has a store in Bethnal Green where these items are sold.

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LMB has also developed an educational arm with a view towards teaching the younger members of society about recycling and has built up a relationship with the local councils and schools.

Additional Information

Websites

LMB www.lmb.co.uk

For contact information please search the Directory on www.uniformreuse.co.uk/directory

