



UniformReuse.co.uk Case Study

Royal Mail Group (RMG)



Key Facts

- RG employs 1% of the UK working population.
- RMG send less than 1% of corporate uniform to landfill.

Background

Royal Mail Group (RMG) is an umbrella organisation encompassing Royal Mail, the Post Office and ParcelForce Worldwide. They are the largest single organisation to provide employee uniforms and currently employ around 1% of the UK working population.

The Problem

RMG aims to manage a sustainable approach to recycling and intend to deploy a process which could be adopted by the majority rather than the minority. To initiate this as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR), the problem they have is the sheer scale of the organisation and breath of products they deal with. Royal Mail has about 50 core products in the range, this includes the following types of garments: casual wear, tailored career wear, high performance wear, footwear and associated products. They need to cater for a wide range of sizes (XS to XXXL) as well as belief systems (e.g. for vegans, they source products made from 100% natural fibres, and vegan footwear).

There are between 150,000 and 170,000 compulsory uniform employees within the Royal Mail Group.

Royal Mail is subject to Public Procurement Law regulations, therefore any processes deployed by RMG must be factored into potential award of contracts as and when they go to market. Suppliers need to understand, assess and evaluate all processes which form the total end-to-end supply chain. Contracts are generally awarded for a period of three to five years with options to extend if permissible.

Previously, RMG had worked with the recycler Field Textiles, who also recycle and process materials and products for the Ministry of Defence. Field Textiles worked in close association with DSA, a managing agent, but they had not been able to track the destinations of their disposed uniforms and so could not assess how they had performed against set CSR goals and objectives.

Drivers

RMG has several CSR targets and have signed up to the United Nations Global Compact initiative and its set of ten ethical principles (which include the environment and carbon footprint management). Graham West has focused on ethical sourcing and waste disposal of corporatewear and had been working towards achieving minimal waste in disposal of corporate uniforms.

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The Outcomes

Graham West of Royal Mail (RM) persuaded Field Textiles to work independently of DSA. The need for a managing agent was still necessary and, working with their current supplier, Dimensions took charge of the returns / recycling process prior to decommissioning. Field Textiles deals with the process of recycling, however (see Figure 1).

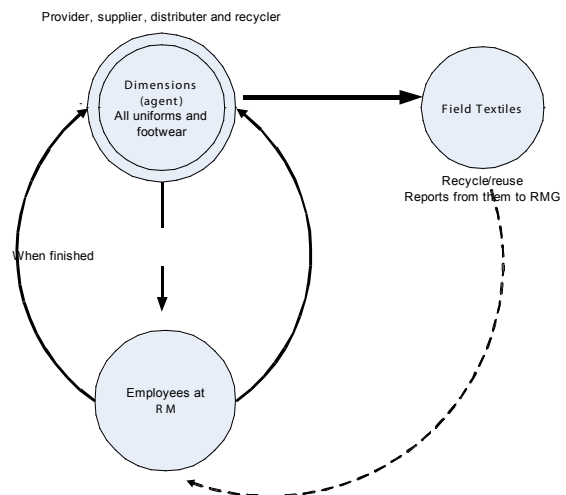


Figure 1: The flow of materials between Field Textiles, Dimensions and RM.





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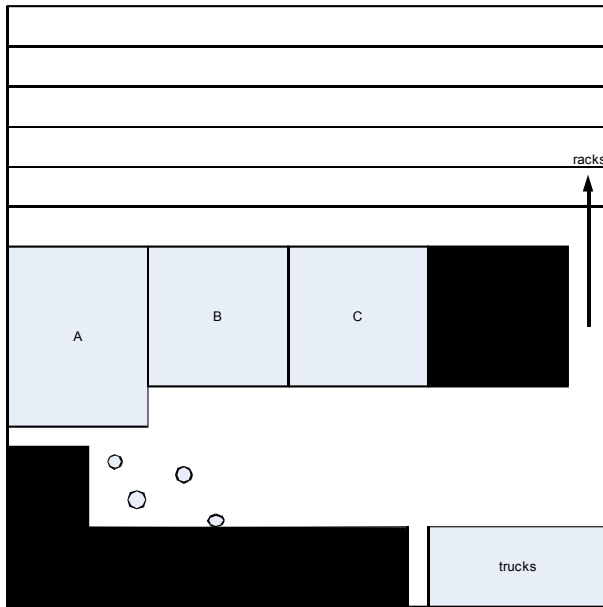


Figure 2: Diagrammatic representation of the sorting that takes place at Field Textiles for RM corporate wear.

Field Textiles operates a manual process for sorting and recycling. Figure 2 represents diagrammatically the sorting procedures at Field Textiles, with de-branding on one side, and sorting taking place into the containers labelled A, B, C and footwear (see Figure 3 for detail). The uniforms are brought to the Field Textiles depot by trucks and sorted initially for de-branding by about three people. De-branding is a matter of cutting the label off the garment. This can damage the garment and render it unusable, in which case the garments may be entered into the recycling (and remanufacturing process – depending on the fibre content) or landfill if non-biodegradable. There is a potential for unpicking the labels, but not only is this too costly in resource and time input, but it often leaves unsightly holes which make the garment unwearable. Another ten people are employed to rack the garments for reuse/resale.

All remaining products are then sent for processing, mainly for use in seat mouldings for the automotive industry. All materials that go to landfill also need to be de-branded for security. None of the shoes need to be de-branded and, depending on their condition, are therefore re-usable and can be sold on. Field Textiles tracks, records and reports to Royal Mail the destinations (pre-agreed by RMG) of all goods sent for resale and how much material has been sent to landfill.

Through Dimensions, all new products supplied to Royal Mail will be bar-coded and therefore traceable. All products are tracked from supply to distribution and disposal. Field Textiles also provides RM with a monthly report listing the destination of all products (i.e. whether recycled, resold or

landfill). The proposed implementation of the system of disposal requires three codes: A, B and C (Figure 3). Each has a separate requirement and destination within the sorting process. Potential for additional revenue back to Field Textiles and RMG is yet to be defined.

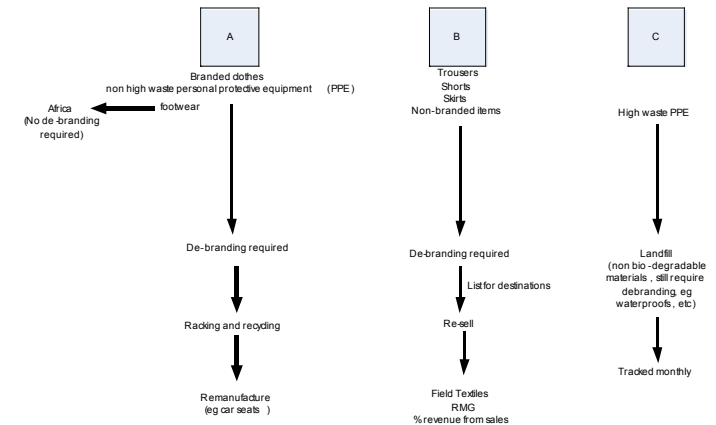


Figure 3: disposal of corporate wear through the three codes: A, B and C.

Royal Mail currently sends less than 1% of their corporatewear to landfill (0.86%) and they are working towards lowering this further. Royal Mail is considering how to take this process forward and elicit maximum use from their employees. They intend to designate each letter (A, B, C) with a colour code and label their corporate products accordingly to enable appropriate disposal into colour coded bags by each employee at the worksite. RM is also looking at investing in further research to enable touch-sensitive fabrics for employees that are vision impaired.



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Advice

When asked what they would recommend to other companies with similar aims, Royal Mail's main response was "traceability". Most companies understand that it is vital that the full supply chain can be effectively monitored, yet they often fail to consider including end-of-life management.

Further good advice includes:

- Understand the CSR goals fully, ensure you set achievable targets, and consider different ways in which these can be accomplished.
- Consider sustainability at design stage. This can include minimising waste in cuts, using sustainable and ethically sourced fabrics, and considering what options there are for end-of-life management.

Additional Information

Websites

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



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