

CHAIR'S REPORT 2021

The Giftware Association

Our Giftware community

The Giftware Association will always represent a welcoming home for businesses and business leaders in the Giftware sector. This last 12 months has been proof of just that. We are here to listen, to engage, to support, and to promote committed giftware businesses and their products.

I personally am extremely proud of how the Association and its members are weathering the continued covid pandemic, and other challenges relating to the UK leaving the European Union. Changes in the marketplace have tasked us all to rethink and recalibrate our offer, while we await full acclimatisation to whatever the new normal holds.

What makes us... us, is our sense of community, our engagement and relationship with suppliers, show organisers and government groups. After this last year, I'd also like to add: a greater ability to listen to members, in order for us to continue to empower the great and the good in giftware.

Our membership, although reduced for the last 12 months in comparison to previous years, has enjoyed a strong sense of community. Members have been able to have their say in how the organisation looks ahead to a new strategic cycle that itself strives to do more for the membership and the sector as a whole.

Commercially 87 per cent of members are paid and the national committee and I are positive about the remainder of what 2021 holds especially as the new strategic plan unfolds.

GA going digital

Webinars

Like many associations, the GA had to turn digital quite quickly. The team was able to continue a series of webinars that were made available for the whole of the industry. The feedback was excellent with a number of members acknowledging new attendees and the chance to re-connect and share experiences with current members – a valued benchmarking exercise. Stand-alone subjects from marketing, PR, mental health and wellbeing as well as many more current affairs were popular topics, as well as guidance and support on navigating the pandemic, EU exit and the supporting financial mechanisms in place.

We also sampled having suppliers display their products to an audience of buyers, like a virtual 'meet the buyer'. While never being able to replace the traditional format, this was a good example of that well used phrase 'pivoting'. I think I speak for all the team here when I say that we are very much looking forward to our live events returning, however until then we will keep the successful,

accessible and efficient webinars in place, and I invite feedback from the membership on them moving forward.

Podcast

The GA's new podcast, The Proodcast, was developed with the initial intention to further promote Gift of the Year to a new audience. But like many things that reach a successful point, it has now started to evolve.

Moving from a concept where Gift of the Year winners would each week talk about their achievements and experiences, the podcast is now firmly set as a sector-leading opportunity to feature trade shows, service providers and national committee members, to help members get the most out of their membership with the GA. I personally think that this new medium has the opportunity to add real value to the membership with an average of 50 downloads per episode proving the relevance of the hosted conversations.

The Gift Stop

I couldn't conclude what we've been doing in digital community without mentioning the The Gift Stop. The relatively new and informal drop-in coffee hour held on a Friday gives members a chance to lightly catch up and share their experiences – great for business leaders to just chat through some of their current challenges and get access to fresh insight from other sector members. Again, I think this is an example of a valuable but efficient introduction to how the GA engages with members and supporters, both on a commercial and a personal level.

Innovating and empowering

Gift of the Year

This year's Gift of the Year competition was one of its most successful yet. The awards attracted above average attendance demonstrating the relevance the competition has in the sector with over 700 entries from 225 companies.

Without an in-person judging day and awards evening, a lot of the competition was moved online and we carried out a week of celebrations for the finalists and winners which were premiered at Spring Fair online in 2021. For the first year ever, we invited the end consumer and the general public to vote and received over 6,000 votes across the finalist products, furthering the competitions reach even more.

We saw the launch of a brand-new awards website which aided the competition in making a much more seamless customer journey, not just for entrants but for the judges too. Running alongside the competition we had a targeted digital campaign and robust email campaign too.

GIFTS OF HOPE and GIFT THEM THANKS

During the time the (very different) Gift of the Year competition was running, we also set up our 'Gifts of Hope' and 'Gift Them Thanks'. The Gifts of Hope mini competition focussed on the gifts that gave back to charity or local communities at a point in time where charity and community was so important or the local community. We received 31 entries, judged by a select group of retailers and buyers; the winner was announced just as we launched Gift of the Year proper.

Gift Them Thanks was our campaign for key workers up and down the country who had offered so much of their times to keep the country running. To celebrate these workers and their sacrifices we asked our member companies to donate products. We received over 4,800 donated products to be gifted to key workers that were nominated by the public.

Giftware Education

On the topic of innovation and empowerment I'm delighted to share that we are starting to explore how education, in various forms, can be brought into the Association. Right now, we are at an early stage but looking at the journeys of people in the sector. Working closely with the Education team at the Federation, which has been consulting with members, we are now beginning to find out what the needs and wants are for the future, in order to develop a structure. Follow this closely will be a subcommittee from the national committee. The group will monitor, steer and contribute to this exciting opportunity for us all; watch this space.

Thank you

Before concluding this report, I must express my thanks to the National Committee which supports me in my role as Chair, and the select volunteers and suppliers that help the Association be and do what it is and does.

Thanks also must be expressed to Chris Workman, who has continued to innovate, support and be there for members, always doing so with professionalism and integrity.

I must also acknowledge Sarah Ward. Sarah, although taking on a different role for the Association recently as Managing Director for the overarching British Allied Trades Federation, has now been with us in one shape or another for five years – thank you Sarah for your commitment and support throughout this time.

I would also like to express my special thanks to my fellow Officers, Henri Davies and Jeremy Corner - for their work and support throughout the past 12 months.

Thanks also go to you to the member, without whom the GA would not be where it is today. We continue to listen to you and put you at the centre of everything we do. I look forward to being able to thank you in person, soon.

Best wishes and good luck.

