

Sourcing quality

TnP reveals the results of our latest survey, commissioned by Bureau Veritas Consumer Products Services: “Sourcing, quality and compliance: what is the future of the UK toy industry?”

As the safety compliance issues are stepped up, the industry becomes more acutely aware of how difficult and potentially expensive it can be to adhere to the newer and more stringent guidelines.

TnP spoke to a number of industry professionals from the supply and retail side to discover how they tackle the thorny issue of producing or selling the safest products, balancing the books and seeking out new areas in which to produce - all this while maintaining quality and not compromising on margins too!

Here are some of our findings, which were announced at the Bureau Veritas open day, “Navigating the Future of Toy Chemical Compliance”, in their Warrington testing laboratory last month.



GROSSMANS

There has been some talk in the press about emerging toy markets like India. Do you see a change in your sourcing patterns?

Yes, we always look at sourcing from other countries; however, on the whole, China still comes up top.

With the implementation of the chemical requirements of the Toy Safety Directive, have you found it difficult to co-operate with your factories/agents in Asia?

Not really. The problem is that there are always changes in legislation. This is really constant.

Do you think your quality assurance budget will change in 2014?

With the extra work involved, our budget has to increase.

As a Quality Assurance professional, what is your biggest fear/nightmare?

Having to face an ethical problem as the factory you have used has been found to have poor working conditions.

What will be your main challenges in 2014 when it comes to quality, safety and sourcing?

We just need to be more vigilant!

THE ENTERTAINER

As a Quality Assurance professional, what is your biggest fear/nightmare?

For us having to face a product recall because of an unsafe product, or an ethical problem are potential nightmares.

What will be your main challenges in 2014 when it comes to quality, safety and sourcing?
Working with our new franchise partner to make sure all relevant quality and safety specifications are met for a new market.

HASBRO

There has been some talk in the press about emerging toy markets like India. Do you see a change in your sourcing patterns? Yes, we are constantly reviewing manufacturing and sourcing opportunities outside of our traditional regions. We will evaluate whether new sources can satisfy our strict global ethics policies, quality and safety policies and supply chain transparency requirements.

With the implementation of the chemical requirements of the Toy Safety Directive, have you found it difficult to co-operate with your factories/agents in Asia?

We have invested a lot of time and effort in working with our vendors' factories to develop systems that ensure we can meet all requirements of the Toy Safety Directive including the chemical requirements. Our vendors' factories have been cooperative and have themselves invested in new testing technologies and IT systems to help manage the considerable data collation activities.

Do you think your quality assurance budget will change in 2014? The on-going implementation of new requirements has resulted in an increase to our QA budget as we invest in new IT systems, test equipment and the additional increase in on-going testing costs.

As a Quality Assurance professional, what is your biggest fear/nightmare? We deliver millions of units to consumers worldwide and so we have a highly systematic and rigorous way of working that ensures all our products meet or exceed EU and global safety standards; so a big fear would be that our process lets us down. This is why we constantly ensure our safety processes are state-of-the-art and fit for purpose.

What will be your main challenges in 2014 when it comes to quality, safety and sourcing?

As QA professionals, our main focus is to ensure that corporate policies and procedures continue to reflect the ever-changing safety requirements worldwide. In this respect we will continue to refine how to efficiently ensure conformity with the various chemical restrictions and how we gather information from our supply chain.

A GIRL FOR ALL TIME

There has been some talk in the press about emerging toy markets like India for instance. Do you see a change in your sourcing patterns?

I will be exploring other markets to source from within the next five years as the Far East becomes more and more expensive to use as sole manufacturing location. At the moment other countries do not have the infrastructure that China has; for my brand it is a long term strategy and not one I will implement soon.

Do you think your quality assurance budget will change in 2014?

It will increase as my product range expands and items become more complicated. I will therefore need higher levels of QA.

What will be your main challenges in 2014 when it comes to quality, safety and sourcing?

I think ensuring that the manufacturing facilities that we use have fully trained their staff. In the Far East the work forces change very often and as we are a small company with a relatively small amount of product being produced, one unskilled artist can affect our production run.

ORCHARD TOYS

There has been some talk in the press about emerging toy markets like India. Do you see a change in your sourcing patterns?

No - Our plan is strongly to continue manufacturing in the UK.

With the implementation of the chemical requirements of the Toy Safety Directive, have you found it difficult to co-operate with your factories/agents in Asia?

No - not affected as a UK manufacturer.

Do you think your quality assurance

budget will change in 2014?

We believe to our knowledge this will stay the same.

As a Quality Assurance professional, what is your biggest fear/nightmare?

If we had to pick one it would be having to face a product recall because of an unsafe product.

What will be your main challenges in 2014 when it comes to quality, safety and sourcing?

Predominantly keeping abreast of any plans and regulations that might be introduced now or in the future.

VIVID IMAGINATIONS

There has been some talk in the press about emerging toy markets like India. Do you see a change in your sourcing patterns?

We have historically monitored and investigated manufacturing costs in other regions due to rising labour costs, raw material costs and shortage of workers. Hence we will continue to explore other regions but there is a long way to go before the infrastructure and logistics are in place to make a move possible.

With the implementation of the chemical requirements of the Toy Safety Directive, have you found it difficult to co-operate with your factories/agents in Asia?

We have been preparing for the new chemical requirements for a long time, including visits to all of our key factories in China and a presentation to them all about the importance of the Bill of Materials (BOM) without which we cannot carry out the all-important Chemical Safety Assessment. It has certainly been a challenge but with extra coaching and visits we have seen dramatic improvements in the quality of information that we now receive.

Do you think your quality assurance budget will change in 2014?

With the new Toy Safety Directive it's not mandatory to carry out finished product testing to show compliance. We now take a different, newer (and better) approach where with the improved BOM and a much greater understanding of what goes into our products, we are able to carry out targeted testing on products which can help to reduce the costs.

SAINSBURY'S

There has been some talk in the press about emerging toy markets like India . Do you see a change in your sourcing patterns?

We are always looking for new and exciting products for our customers so that we can continue to offer fantastic quality and value. Exploring new markets and sources is a part of this strategy.

With the implementation of the chemical requirements of the Toy Safety Directive, have you found it difficult to co-operate with your factories/agents in Asia?

Customer safety is always a priority and as such communication, understanding and trust with our suppliers is now more important than ever. Wherever possible we endeavour to work in partnership with all our suppliers to ensure transparency and access to the relevant information.

Do you think your quality assurance budget will change in 2014?

We continually review ways to use our resources most effectively to manage risk. This doesn't necessarily equate to increasing spend.

As a Quality Assurance professional, what is your biggest fear/nightmare?

Having to face a product recall because of an unsafe product, having to face an ethical problem as the factory has been found to have poor working conditions and receiving a full shipment of toys which do not answer our specifications and thus cannot be used. But even more than that would be losing the trust of our customers. We work hard to retain the trust of our customers, whether that's by providing quality products, ensuring consumer safety or our focus on social responsibility.

What will be your main challenges in 2014 when it comes to quality, safety and sourcing?

The challenges of this year roll into next year.

FIESTA

There has been some talk in the press about emerging toy markets like India. Do you see a change in your sourcing patterns?

Labour shortage and price increases in China can be a challenge.

With the implementation of the chemical requirements of the Toy Safety Directive, have you found it difficult to co-operate with your factories/agents in Asia?

Most factories are fine but some have difficulty in getting the information for the BOM.

Do you think your quality assurance budget will change in 2014?

It will increase due to the cost of testing.

As a Quality Assurance professional, what is your biggest fear/nightmare?

Having to face a product recall because of an unsafe product.

What will be your main challenges in 2014 when it comes to quality, safety and sourcing?

Keeping the cost of testing to a manageable level.