

“Share your story” with Lawrence Hutchison Sustainability Ambassador Interview

Sustainability remains an important part of Colart's future success, and ambassadors are required in all parts of the business to ensure that we continue to create a network of activists promoting and challenging where necessary. Lawrence Hutchinson, our Global Head of Packaging Colart, has a key role not just in his everyday job but as an ambassador to make sure the conversation on sustainability is at the heart of our brands.

What do you like about being an ambassador?

“Being an ambassador raised my awareness of choices.”

I feel proud to be working with a great team of like-minded ambassadors helping Colart do the right thing. It requires engaging with wider teams, raising awareness to our sustainability choices and supporting them to implement improvements in their area of the business.

Being an ambassador has raised my awareness to the choices I can make in my everyday life and changed my behaviour and purchase decisions. It has also fast-tracked my learning on the subject of sustainable packaging materials.

Plastic is very cheap to make and therefore very appealing to businesses looking to supply things as cheaply as possible but it takes around 500 years to degrade

I'm sure a lot of people see these challenges our planet faces as daunting and overwhelming to the point you feel you can't make a difference and so why bother changing your behaviour choices.

A placard I saw in an article frames the challenge really well, by subverting a typical phrase (what's our back-up plan?) with 'There is no Planet B'.

I'm a big believer in incremental gains - making even small (pretty easy) changes each day in our choices, actions and purchase decisions, accumulates exponentially over time to make a big difference.

So for me, being a sustainability ambassador has raised my awareness and gives me a tremendous sense of purpose, and that's a powerful motivator that energises me to encourage and support everyone in Colart to find new solutions in their area of the business.

How do you bring sustainability to your everyday job?

A small group of us from Colart learnt a lot from supplier meetings with Tesco's Packaging Technologist, Paul Earnshaw. In fact we are using the same 4R's packaging sustainability strategy checklist they use (Remove, Reduce, Re-use, Recycle) to help us make better decisions.

Knowing 91% of our waste is not recycled and plastic takes 500yrs to degrade we are already switching from single-use plastic packaging to card instead. Ajita, with the help from buyers, is making sure that we measure

Minimise plastic and make sure its recyclable.

changes like these, across the business, to show the reduction in plastic we use. When there are no 'current' alternatives to using plastic, we can minimise the amount of plastic and make sure it can be recyclable and if possible, made from post-consumer recycled plastic (instead of creating yet more virgin plastic).

Ajita and I have presented Colart's sustainability strategy to all key stakeholders across the business to raise awareness and align on the direction the business is going. And whenever I see examples of sustainable products and packaging materials that have been implemented by other brands, I share this with brand teams and buyers to see how we can do something similar.

Tell me about a recent challenge you faced while working on a sustainability project. How did you overcome it?

Getting alignment, buy-in and action from different stakeholders within Colart is the key getting projects started but this was not always easy, as different teams had their own objectives.

Sharing learnings and showing teams what other brands are doing has helped us see that solutions already exist that we can replicate and included in brand plans. So that helped with the awareness and alignment.

Solutions already exist that we can replicate and implement into brand plans.

Other times it's required 'action' to create a solution ourselves and then share it with different teams. We did this to provide a card alternative to our plastic Promarker 6 & 12 marker sets. Working with an external partner we created a simple and more cost-effective card pack with a window cut-out so shoppers could still see the pen colours in the set. A true win-win for sustainability and reducing costs.

The biggest challenge has been getting things implemented. And the good news here is this year all senior key stakeholders, from the GLT down, have sustainability as inter-linked objectives to deliver on. From my perspective, this has been the single most important decision to making sure things get implemented. This has been cascaded down and resulted in real progress being made, across the whole business because everyone is pulling in the same direction. And for that we have our owner, Dennis and the GLT to thank.

Do you believe Colart sustainability ambitions are relevant? How do you think you can achieve them?

Embrace change.
Deliver improvements.
Offer more sustainable products.

Absolutely. There is no Planet B. We have to embrace change and continue delivering improvements in order to offer more sustainable products.

It's increasingly obvious through all the consumer research feedback we get, that sustainability is very relevant to our customers & consumers. As we are a consumer-led business, we need to respond to what they expect, or they will reject our brands for ones that deliver on this basic factor.

We can achieve this by working together, being open minded to new ideas, having a positive 'can-do' attitude, being bold in our ambitions and of course to get things done, delivering on the actions agreed in meetings.

How do you think Colart contributes to society as a whole in terms of sustainability?

Every child is born an artist. (Picasso)

Our purpose, the way I see it, is to encourage people to not lose the joy they get from this innate artistic ability to express themselves through creativity.

We offer people the tools and inspiration to express themselves – throughout their lifetime.

Colart needs to deliver our brands in ways that are more sustainable. Our consumers expect this and every one of us knows it's the right thing to do. We can't ignore these challenges and find reasons why we shouldn't change. We have to explore better options.

We have already made a great start with some clear decisions and quick wins, but there are other challenges that will take a lot more effort and teamwork to achieve.

By continuing to do the right thing, we as a company and as individuals play our small but critical part in making those incremental gains needed to become more sustainable society.

“We have to explore better options.”