

Case Study - CottonBottoms

Company Background

In 2003, 6.8 million disposable nappies were landfilled in the UK per day, with tax payers paying for their disposal. According to the Environment Agency, some parts of the UK only have four years of landfill space left, posing a serious environmental problem.

In addition, the UK is struggling to comply with the landfill limits imposed by the Landfill Directive, which, if not reached will incur a penalty of £10 million a day. The Government's Waste Review has set a target for 30% of household waste to be recycled or composted by 2010. Disposable nappies are the largest product group in the waste stream and have been targeted by the Government as a key area to be reduced.

In 1997, CottonBottoms was founded by Joanne Freer to support and source environmentally friendly nappies for parents and to reduce the amount of unnecessary waste produced by disposable nappies.

Today the company has grown to become the leading supplier of 'real' nappies in the UK, consisting of four franchises and one head office, with three central functions:




- CottonBottoms Nappy System – manufacture and distribution of cotton nappies
- Nappy Laundry Service – weekly hire of the nappies to parents, day nurseries and 20 NHS maternity wards, with a collection service that launders the nappies to hospital standards. The service enables customers to have “a clean conscience regarding disposable nappy pollution to the environment – without having to wash (their) own nappies” – Customer Lucia Faussett
- Promotion of Real Nappies – promotion and provision of training regarding environmental, baby health and economic benefits of real nappies on a national and local level

Despite market domination by leading international disposable nappy manufacturers, and with small marketing capabilities in comparison, CottonBottoms is increasingly gaining recognition on the High Street, with retailers such as Boots, Woolworths Big W and John Lewis all supplying its products and others, such as Index and Argos, are showing a strong interest in stocking the products.

Sustainability Initiatives

- Supporting parents in choosing modern cotton nappies
- Minimising nappy waste that goes to landfill
- Environmental responsibility throughout the supply chain and manufacturing process

Summary of Key Achievements

- CottonBottoms is the only company to have brought real nappies back to the High Street 
- CottonBottoms cotton nappies are certified with the Oeko-tex Mark that recognises they have been tested to stringent standards and are free from harmful chemicals 
- The company currently saves around 5,521 tonnes of waste being landfilled each year 
- Winner of the LGC Best Public Private Partnership Awards 
- Winner of the Crystal and Gold Green Apple Awards 
- Winner of several Mother & Baby Magazine Awards: Best Buy Award (2002) for the Nappy Laundry Service, Favourite Award (2002) for Swimmis Swim Nappies, Baby Silver Awards for most environmentally friendly product two years running (2002, 2003)  
- First company in the UK to utilise Waste Minimisation Act, November 1998, initiating a council rebate scheme for waste savings 

KEY



ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS



BUSINESS BENEFITS



ECONOMIC BENEFITS



SOCIAL BENEFITS

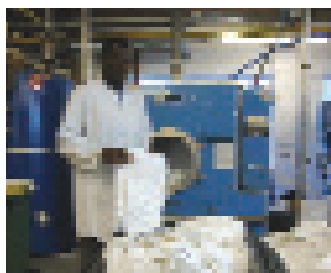
Contribution to a Sustainable Economy

The company donates worn nappies to the charity Hope & Homes for Children. The charity provides support to those who have lost their homes and families through war or disaster.

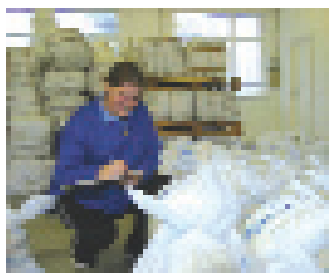
Nappies are delivered and laundered for 20 hospitals across the UK, free of charge, to encourage uptake by new parents. The hospitals benefit from reduced costs and waste. The company's franchise expansion will mean that more hospitals and nursery schools can benefit from using cotton nappies – bringing real nappies to the attention of more parents nationwide.

The company has joined with the BBC to develop a range of 'Andy Pandy' wraps with an information label for this initiative.

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Member of staff laundering cotton nappies



One tonne of waste per child saved using cotton

An £80,000 grant from the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme enabled the commissioning of a report on which CottonBottoms worked in collaboration with local authorities and Surrey University to determine how hospitals are influencing parents' choice of nappies.

The findings concluded that most parents had already decided which nappies they would use in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. This has influenced the way that CottonBottoms approaches parents by providing information at this stage, in addition to the company's visits to ante and post-natal classes to educate and train parents about real nappies.

Extensive time is spent on partnership work with various government organisations and initiatives which are often highly supportive:

- To reduce nappy waste the Government funded Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP) is investing £2.6 million to encourage a further 155,000 households to use real nappies by the end of 2006, as well as implementing a £30 million advertising campaign called 'Recycle Now'
- CottonBottoms has been approached by 14 different organisations (mainly local authorities) which are applying for WRAP grant money for nappy projects and wish to work with CottonBottoms
- The company sits on the panel for the Government's Life Cycle Analysis of nappies and is currently supplying information in order to compare the environmental impact of cotton versus disposable nappies from manufacture to disposal
- The company sits on real nappy networks, works in partnership with local and national governments and lobbies MPs to raise awareness and encourage integrated thinking between the NHS and Defra regarding setting up a real nappy 'on Ward' policy nationally

CottonBottoms pioneered the facilitation of the West Sussex County Council cashback scheme in 2000 for users of their cotton nappies. There are currently 65 babies involved and its success has led to many more similar schemes throughout the country.

Enhancing Environmental Quality

CottonBottoms nappies save around one tonne of waste being landfilled for each child that uses them – one customer had used the nappies on five children, saving around five tonnes of waste being landfilled, another wrote to express her concern about disposables: "my bin bags were full to the brim of disposable nappies, if this is just the produce of one baby, imagine what the rest of the nation produces!"

When seeking potential cotton manufacturers, CottonBottoms approached a vast number of worldwide cotton growers with its pre-determined criteria, such as chlorine-free bleaching and ethical practices (no child labour). The Oeko-Tex mark recognises these environmental and ethical principles, and CottonBottoms is currently considering applying for a Fair Trade mark.

Environmentally sound packaging is used, with card from sustainable forests, soya inks, chlorine free materials and recyclable plastics. On researching competitors, CottonBottoms discovered that most packaging had soft plastic that, when chewed or sucked by babies, could cause potential liver problems. Consequently, its packaging suppliers sourced safe alternatives.

Hire and laundering of the cotton nappies enables bulk washing, which saves significant amounts of water and energy. The washing machines used are steam fed and water minimising. Eco-friendly detergent is used, which is fully biodegradable and low in phosphates and nitrates. An ecological footprint by 'Going for Green' shows these procedures to be the most environmentally responsible.

In 2003 the company had a government Action Energy review of the building, out of which many recommendations were implemented, although some, such as using steam from the boilers to re-pipe the building, are awaiting significant capital investment.

CottonBottoms drivers strive to make the majority of their deliveries at 4 am in order to avoid traffic and thus reduce fuel consumption, emissions and time. The drivers use fuel-efficient diesel vehicles, and carry out deliveries and collections at the same time.

Plans are underway to expand the number of local service centres for the nappy laundry service from four to cover the UK, and thus reduce transport distances.

The company operates an informal car-sharing scheme and travel by train where feasible.

Improving the Social Wellbeing of Stakeholders

The company produce a quarterly newsletter of which 3,000 copies are distributed to parents, retailers, suppliers and government. The newsletter discusses ethical issues and the environment, promotes its retailers and is printed on paper from sustainable forests. In addition, a monthly PR, Advertising and External Communications Report is sent to all key accounts and professional partners of the company.

Free telephone advice is provided through a Customer Support Team.

CottonBottoms is currently working towards its Investors in People certificate, and annually awards an Employee of the Year shield. Weekly communications meetings are held giving staff an opportunity to input ideas towards company strategy.

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