CCES 2025
Textiles & Apparel Track Session Summary

Transforming Textiles: A Case Study for Advancing Circular Fashion in Canadian Retail

In this session, Shannon O'Hara from Bank & Vogue and Cécile Branco from La Maison Simons will discuss their collaborative efforts to advance the circular economy in Canada's textile industry. They will cover key areas such as resale, reuse, and remanufacturing, highlighting innovative approaches to upcycling and sustainable product creation. The conversation will address the importance of overcoming challenges related to sorting post-consumer materials, labor, and the financial barriers in order to make sustainable fashion more accessible to mainstream consumers

Speakers

- **Shannon O'Hara**, Bank & Vogue
- **Cécile Branco**, La Maison Simons

April 16, 2025, Montreal, Canada

SUMMARY

Introduction

Cécile Branco from Simons, and Shannon O'Hara from Bank & Vogue, discussed their collaboration to advance circularity in the fashion industry. Simons is a 185-year-old Canadian retailer that has 17 stores and offers 50% external brands and 50% exclusive designs. Bank & Vogue is a group of companies, specializing in procuring secondary materials, operating vintage clothing stores (Beyond Retro) in the UK, Finland, and Sweden, and upcycling and componentry through Bank & Vogue Innovations in India. They also partner with fiber-to-fiber recyclers.

Since 2018, Simons' "Vision" program has aimed to reduce environmental footprint and enhance social impact. Key strategies include using reduced-impact textiles (85% of exclusive items in 2023 contained at least 50% reduced-impact textiles) and developing a circular supply chain. This involves focusing on quality over quantity (8% reduction in imported items while increasing revenue between 2022-2023), selling resale and upcycled items, and investing in recyclability projects globally.

Their resale collaboration with Beyond Retro involves curated, theme-based collections for each season, bringing vintage pieces into a traditional retail setting. While challenges exist in sourcing multiple units of the same item, the approach allows for unique, quality-controlled offerings.

Upcycling

Bank & Vogue focuses on repair, "nip and tuck" alterations (remanufacturing products like jeans into skirts), and creating components for new products from reclaimed materials. Their collaboration with luxury brands like Coach and Converse demonstrates the potential for large-scale upcycling. For example, Coach's Soho bag,

made from reclaimed denim, boasts an 85% reduction in carbon and 95% less water compared to virgin materials.

However, a key challenge for retailers like Simons with upcycled items, is the higher cost of production due to the complexity of remanufacturing, making it difficult to price them competitively with new products. They believe consumer education is crucial to highlight the story, craftsmanship, and environmental benefits behind upcycled goods.

Recycling

Simons works with manufacturers to recycle post-industrial scrap and collaborates with innovators like Circulose. Bank & Vogue emphasizes the complexity of recycling post-consumer material, highlighting the need for precise sorting and strategic partnerships with collectors and charities. They supply material to fiber-to-fiber recyclers globally, including a significant collaboration in Mexico, which uses denim for bedding and linens.

A major logistical challenge in recycling, particularly for operations in India and Pakistan, is the lack of local infrastructure and reliance on coal-powered energy, which increases the carbon footprint of transporting materials to Western recycling facilities. The speakers underscored the need for investment in localized circular infrastructure where the textile waste is generated.