

# Sustainability wins at Burtons

Veterinary equipment supplier Burton's received an award this year for the most environmentally sustainable stand in the BSAVA commercial exhibition. *David Pattenden*, Head of Marketing and eCommerce, told *John Bonner* what his team did to catch the eye of the competition judges and how their efforts contribute to a broader corporate policy aimed at minimizing the company's carbon footprint.



David Pattenden receiving the BSAVA Sustainability Award, on behalf of Burtons, from Alison Speakman (BSAVA President 2022–23) at BSAVA Congress in Manchester.

**B**urton's is known as a family business – it is still managed by its founder, Group Chairman, David Burton and his son Matt the Managing Director. So it would be easy to assume that family ties were a factor behind the appointment of David Pattenden to a position at the company based on Pattenden Lane in Marden, Kent.

Not so, he insists, the shared name is just a coincidence although he does concede that it would have raised a smile among those interviewing him for a job there 10 years ago. David was relatively fresh from university after graduating with a degree in visual arts and was then working in retail management.

"I turned up at my sister's house. Her best friend was there and told me she was working on a flyer. I offered to help her with the design and after doing so, I thought no more of it. But a few months later, she called me to say that the company she worked for had an opening for a designer."

That was the start of David's journey in the world of medical equipment. At the time, the design and production of its marketing materials were a shared responsibility between various members of staff at Burton's – he was the first person appointed to a dedicated role. A decade later he leads a team of four marketeers. "I didn't have any experience in the veterinary industry but having joined it, I love it. It is such a fun and caring community to be a part of."

In common with all other companies, Burton's wanted to be noticed. It liked to create a large, impressive stand on which to display its products at commercial exhibitions. But that changed in 2020 with the arrival of COVID-19, putting a temporary halt to in-person gatherings. The company took the opportunity to reassess its approach and to address concerns over the environmental sustainability of its business, deciding to back away from anything big, brash and instantly disposable.

Only a year previously, the company had commissioned an outside agency to build and manage its trade stands. "But these 'build and burn' stands keep needing adjusting and require the use of several vans or a lorry to deliver to the venue. There are always parts that need replacing and there's a lot of wastage at the end of the show."



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Burtons stand construction underway at BSAVA Congress 2023.



David Pattenden, Head of Marketing and eCommerce at Burtons.

"We decided to bring things back in-house. We had the experience to build a stand and so we just needed to develop a system that we could re-use and adapt. Finding reusable, eco-friendly stand parts was sometimes a challenge. There is so much to consider – not just where you are sourcing it from, but how it will be transported? How much space does it take up? Is it too heavy and how long will it last?"

The new stand can be built and taken down by the people that work on the exhibit at the show, meaning fewer journeys to and from the event. All this massively reduces the firm's carbon footprint, he says. The company has also put a lot of thought into the materials used. The flooring used on the stand is made using off-cuts from the cat kennels that it manufactures. Even the televisions used there are made with up to 30% sustainable materials in the form of Sony's SORPLAS recycled plastic products.

Their promotional materials have also changed. "We print all our literature on recycled stock with vegetable-based inks so it is sustainably sourced and fully recyclable. Our bags are from a particular company that is an ethical manufacturer, they too are reusable and biodegradable."

David says the company has adopted the same ethos for its manufacturing activities. "All our equipment is designed to be made to last, nothing is intended to have a limited lifespan. We have our own in-house repairs and service team, with the sole ethos of keeping products out of the bin for as long as possible."

"And by basing our manufacturing in the UK, we can claim a big sustainability win with reduced equipment

miles – i.e. how far your new kit has had to travel before it reaches your practice."

This re-examination of how the company operates was not a one-off event but something that is under constant review. "Shortly we will be installing new laser-cutting tech, which will reduce the energy that we use in cutting materials by two-thirds. There are a host of other renovation works underway at our head office, including the installation of LED lighting which consumes much less energy. This way we will eliminate about 1000 standard fluorescent tubes."

But sometimes switching back to older technologies is the way forward. "In the summer, our MD David Burton brings some sheep from his own farm to keep the grass down around the site. This gives the sheep a nice little holiday and removes the need to spend money operating a lawnmower."

Staff at the company have obviously thought long and hard about how to make the company 'greener'. Does David have any tips for other businesses in the veterinary sphere and outside on how to reduce their carbon footprint?

He says communication is key. "I think it is about having open conversations with your suppliers, explaining what you are trying to achieve, especially with sustainability. I have had some great conversations with people that have given me so much inspiration and have helped to overcome challenges. Spending slightly more time on planning and using reusable components may increase the initial cost, but you will see the benefits not just for your company but for the planet in the longer term." 