

Outdoor

INDUSTRY COMPASS



Digital is here - but what is it missing for the Ingredient Sourcing Industry?

By [Charles Ross](#) | 23 April 2021

The one positive thing agreed is that Covid-19 has accelerated the transformation to digital. It has offered more than a stop-gap solution, but has it provided a complete solution? If this question had been asked 18 months ago, everyone had made plans for a digital version this decade, but not quite this fast.

It is worth looking at those downstream of outdoor brands, as the **Amazon** model has done more to progress direct-to-customer over the last quarter of the century than anything else; it has been comparatively easy for this model to have been copied successfully. Some brands had always been DTC like **Rohan Designs** in the U.K. or **Alpkit** that did the same but without the retail sites. The loyalty of the customers of these retail brands has always been stronger than the industry average as the marques have relied on a better quality of communications through to the end-user.

The interesting developments have happened up the sourcing chain with ingredient suppliers. Just as **Performance Days** (and the **Functional Fabric Fair** in North America) have grown (almost corresponding with the decrease of

particular marques at the big **ISPO** shows) mainly because of the more focused attendee to the specialist shows, but especially because the timing suits better with the design calendars. There are those brands that will just buy what is on offer, but there are those brands that will ask for what has not yet been developed. Having the pull to product development is always a better idea as their customer is listening to more from the people who put money into the system.

Solutions

There have been three distinct versions of an answer in the Ingredient market. The virtual, the conversational, and the contact solutions are the easiest grouping methods.

YKK has just launched a fully functioning virtual showroom that aims to offer every solution they want their customers to consider. It is an impressive undertaking but reminds me of the top-down version as the product in their portfolio I was most interested in was not even mentioned: the **Thermolink** zipper (which was one of the stars of the last ISPO event). Their virtual showroom demonstrates the broad range of the portfolio.

The next has been used by those ingredient brands which have consumer awareness, of which **PrimaLoft** and **Polartec** are good examples. PrimaLoft has focused on product development, thus creating technical stories (the latest being the **Finisterre BioSmock** that won an **ISPO Outstanding Gold Award**). Polartec has brought further thinking to the market through their *Science of Sustainable Fabric* [webinar](#) (that had over 900 different computers accessing the event live).

The third solution has been used by those brands that do not have the profile. They have focused on *Zoom* meetings to replace the face-to-face events directly. The biggest hassle of these is that they have become just another sales launch type tactic being used by so many brands, which (speaking with my fabric development colleagues at brands) has made them boring to attend a long time before the interesting product is revealed. Retail brands have professional sourcing teams that do the research beforehand, usually involving the website. If they have to go through the introduction of the company first, including history and third-party certifications, which is usually information that was already gathered, it does not add to the experience. Ingredient suppliers that have a history with brands can get straight into the meetings without feeling they have to include these boring bits. **Amaterrace** and **Concept iii** have been doing this well: Both are brands that are highly recognized by fabric developers but are virtually unknown outside their sphere.

The positive for this last category has been offered by Performance Days which has developed [The Loop](#) over the last year. Performance Days (and the Functional Fabric Fair in the U.S.) have an event centered on three key features: a fabric forum display that displays rival materials alongside each other as well as those innovations judged to be leading the way; a presentation arena that has more than just product launches as trend advice and panels debating issues are hosted; plus, a relaxed social event in the evening that allows for the friendly nature atmosphere to continue; there are also stands for the gaps in between. The Loop provides a simple virtual sourcing solution for their exhibitors as fabrics can be searched by category and ordered through the simple portal. It has circumnavigated the boring bit and provided an efficient answer. It might not be the Google of fabric sourcing – but it is the closest thing the industry has.



Source: Performance Days

The Future

The best thing about a face-to-face meeting is that one can easily judge the concentration levels. The moment that the attention is lost. The best tactic is to move on and engage another, more interesting subject. The digital world can do plenty, but it cannot do everything: perhaps new ingredient sourcing is the current limit. In time Covid-19 restrictions will relax further, and brand employees will be allowed to visit shows again, plus host international ingredient visitors to their offices. Until then, all eyes will be focused on the next (virtual) [PerformanceDays.com](#) starting on May 17.