

WORN AGAIN



Analysis

Worn Again has been around for 18 years and was a genuine pioneer in the field of chemical textile-textile recycling.

The fact that it is still pre-commercialisation after all this time can be interpreted in several ways. On the one hand, this is an illustration of the challenges involved in developing and commercialising a novel textile recycling process which focuses on fibre blends. For many years, industry insiders have suggested to us that the processing of fibre blends, commercially, at scale, was unrealistic for all manner of reasons (technical, financial, lack of demand for such fibres).

We did ask Worn Again Technologies when it expects to be profitable. They told us: "Our vision is to ensure that all textile materials are circular. We will continue to invest in technologies that advance this goal."

Because this didn't answer our question, we pressed them on it. They then told us: "Profitability is a function of internal and external factors. We will continue to invest in our vision."

Hardly reassuring from a would-be investor perspective. Is this lack of commercialisation due to the lack of a strong leadership team? Is it because the technology is hard to scale? Is it because getting financial backing to scale has

proved challenging? These could all be factors.

An alternate way of looking at Worn Again Technologies is that the company was/is a 'canary in the mine' for novel textile recycling technologies. One could make the argument that the company was so ahead of the curve on these issues that it was waiting for others - investors, brands, other supply chain stakeholders - to catch up.

Supporting this hypothesis is the recent investment in Worn Again Technologies.

The regulatory and cultural landscape (in terms of sustainability becoming central) has also changed considerably since 2005. If the industry was not ready for Worn Again's technology back then, it quite possibly is now.

Others which have followed will have learned a lot from their journey.

The strengths of Worn Again Technologies are the recent investment, the partnerships and collaborations with brands and manufacturers, and the experiences which have been gained by the original founders. The high profile of Cyndi Rhoades, a regular on the speaking circuit, also bodes well for the company's ability to continue attracting future investment.

We like the establishment of the Swiss Textile Recycling Ecosystem. As Worn Again it-

self acknowledged: "For us to truly solve the environmental impact of waste textiles, it is vital that more clothes enter the formal collection market, that these are efficiently sorted."

Our reservations are at a fairly basic level. How many clothing items have been produced using Worn Again Technologies recycling methods? How many items of clothing produced by these technologies have we seen in apparel stores? How many pilot collections?

We are not aware of any to date, which does seem ironic given the *raison d'être* of companies such as Worn Again is the production of new clothing from old clothing.

We asked the business about this. They told us: "While our demonstration plant will be capable of processing 1000 tons of polycotton per year, to date, Worn Again is a technology supplier, not a manufacturing company. We are scaling a technology that will verify our materials as both circular and high-quality for re-implementation within the supply chain." Likewise, the other elephant in the room is profitability. We'd like to see firmer timelines around when the company expects to make a profit, especially given how quickly this sector can burn through cash. Also, on the above talk of verifying materials, should this not already have happened by now?

Others we spoke to had similar reservations but were also quick to praise the work of Cyndi Rhoades and her co-founder for being pioneers in this space.