



**KINGPINS
SHOW**



Game Changers in the Denim Industry

Following is a spring 2021 interview between **Darren Glenister**, CEO of [Material Exchange](#), and **Andrew Olah**, Founder and CEO of [Kinpins Shows](#).

KINGPINS SHOW and **Material Exchange**

Andrew Olah inherited the textile related business in 1973 from his father, and turned it into denim / jeans / indigo fabrics-centric business in the late '70s. In 1998, he moved the company to New York and, in 2004, they started Kingpins as a denim chain supplier. At the beginning of 2008, they started to charge for it, which is how Kingpins Shows became a commercial entity. Today it is the largest denim trade show in the world with 70% of the company's turnover coming from the Kingpins Shows events. Their vision for years was to digitize their supplier's product lines to expand business potential for their members between in-person shows; enter Material Exchange.

Material Exchange started with a vision: creating a global digital library of materials and components for the footwear and fashion industry. Thanks to the partnerships with the United States Fashion Industry Association (USFIA) and the Footwear Distributors and Retailers of America (FDRA), our mission was shared among industry leaders. Material Exchange is, essentially, a movement to 1) digitize supply chains for transparency, cost-efficiency, time-savings and 2) to reach a long-term goal in changing the second largest polluter industry (fashion) to produce less waste and be more sustainable.

The **Connection** Between Two Industry Leaders

Emily Olah, Director of Kingpins Shows (and daughter of Andrew) listened to a podcast hosted by Julia Hughes, President of USFIA. Immediately after the event, she reached out to set up a meeting with Darren. They had been looking for a solution to digitize Kingpins Shows for the previous five years and had researched many software providers – and met with lots of disappointment. After getting off the call with Darren, Andrew and Emily said, “Material Exchange is the perfect match.”

Andrew has extensive knowledge about waste in denim materials along with practical database experience. After seeing the demo of the Material Exchange software solution, Andrew determined the basics of the platform were sufficient for Kingpins Shows. Even more, Material Exchange agreed and, subsequently, revised existing fields or developed new fields that met the specifications necessary for the denim industry’s materials definition and digitization.

The Kingpins team helped to create a data model for denim fabrics. Using Andrew’s words, Kingpins Shows now has an “amazing” data model for denim. He talked with some of his customers, and the feedback was very positive: Material Exchange not only met but exceeded all expectations.

Emily and Andrew dedicated time to personally reach out to the mills and share a click-through demo of the Kingpins Exchange as a now-digital sourcing (digital) marketplace for the denim industry. Each session is 30-50 minutes; they have held approximately 95 demos to date. The material suppliers embraced the solution because 8/10 decided to showcase their mills and materials on the Kingpins Exchange platform, most making that decision before the demo ended.

The partnership between Kingpins Shows and Material Exchange started before Covid-19. Interestingly, Darren revealed he had assumed that Andrew’s goal might have been looking for a solution to extend the Kingpins Show events “year-round” via digital with the pandemic being the accelerator. However, that was not the case.

Andrew pointed out he had two priorities about digitizing materials and its data. First, the products simply needed to be digitized. People in this industry come to the in-person shows, walk around with pencils and notebooks, using scissors to cut out little swatches, stick them into their notebooks and later share their notes with other team members. Then comes a back-and-forth communication about the captured notes – sometimes the note-taker who is presenting the notes cannot read their own handwriting. “I never understand that - why someone does not digitize all the data, put it in one place, share it, and stop the need for calling to review the notes,” said Andrew. Secondly, a digital platform would allow a buyer to easily search and consider collections on their own without the help of a manufacturer or mill salesperson.

Helping **Connect** Buyers and Mills

Darren recalls that Andrew used a PDF presentation to present collections during the pandemic when there were restrictions on in-person shows and sales meetings. Andrew explained the need for having a unified and digitized presentation of materials for two reasons. First, it can be challenging to find good employees and salespeople. Simply because you have a salesperson scheduled to visit an important customer does not guarantee the buyer will get what they want from that interaction. Second, the salesperson may not show the collection the way you want; however, when it is digitized, you can take control of that presentation content.

Once the Kingpins Exchange has the digital data, or product attributes using the data model, and there is direct communication with a supplier, the process continues to unfold. Buyers can find a material they like, order a sample and physically use it to make a decision. Suppliers find the technology is a great tool to get in touch directly with buyers or through association with the salesperson. The key is to digitize the material, record its attributes, and keep it centralized and accessible in one place. Then you can monitor what happened with the material such as how often it was searched, the search criteria used to find it, if it was quoted, etc. All that data becomes accessible without taking up space in physical notebooks with ink.



When there is a direct relationship between buyers and suppliers, the need for “middle” players may be removed from the process. While on the one hand this may simplify the process, Andrew has a different perspective due to being a middle person for most of his professional life. He believes a really good middle person can add value to a materials management process. However, the point is to get the right information to the right people to facilitate business which can happen by leveraging technology. “The Kingpins Exchange platform allows everyone to get information seamlessly, and that is the key value of it.”

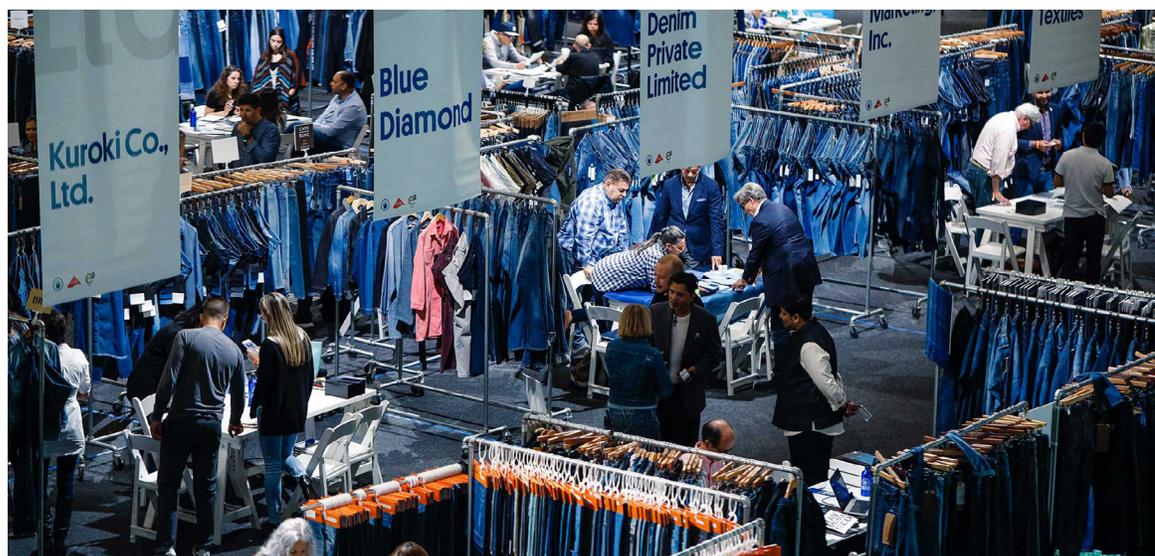
Content accuracy is a vital component of success for the Kingpins Exchange, which means ensuring suppliers are uploading inventory data and keeping it current. A differentiator in how the Kingpins Exchange approaches using the platform is that Andrew and his team are active on both sides (buyer and supplier). They are committed to ensuring an incredible experience for both sides: the customer, in finding the platform helpful and inspirational, and the mills for in-depth insights and activities they would not have during a traditional process.

The **Future** of the Kingpins Exchange

The Kingpins Exchange launched at the end of 2019. At that time, there was no physical show, only an online event called Kingpins24, which is an online talk show where suppliers can talk about and promote materials as well as share product and collection links. In early March 2020, Kingpins24 was merged into the Kingpins Exchange. The long-term benefit of digital events, in addition to in-person shows, is the ability for customers to go online while listening to the event and look for the fabrics immediately.

The software solution developed by Material Exchange to digitize the material sourcing processes is modernizing the industry that, up until now, has operated the same way since 1932. A really big, necessary and significant change is taking place now, and we are part of it. Some people don't really understand it now, but they will appreciate what it is in a couple of years.

“Especially now, we see Covid-19 is definitely accelerating digitalization. We see brands that need to become more transparent, more sustainable, and have better processes in place -that’s where Kingpins Exchange has a fantastic opportunity.” ~ Darren Glenister, CEO, Material Exchange



Creating a **Sustainable** Denim Industry

The term sustainability implies that there is a scarcity of resources over time unless something changes. Both Material Exchange and Kingpins Exchange are committed to helping create sustainability in the materials sourcing industry.



Kingpins Exchange delivers supplier profiles that include information about the mill's sustainable certificates. There is a significant need for customers to know as much detail as possible about the ready products. The consumer or end-buyer will want to know where the material was produced, were there slaves or child labor used in the process, does the fabric contain toxic materials, etc.

Andrew predicts that, in the next 5-10 years, brands will need to expose this type of data about their products. In that moment, when transparency becomes the norm, brands will not want to expose material information or a vendor they are not proud to support. As Kingpins, we are interjectors to push transparency, and to reward and celebrate the best-in-class suppliers who actively participate in and support transparency.

The Kingpins Show philosophy reflects this commitment to sustainability. Suppliers can only exhibit if they meet certain criteria. Most trade shows take any vendor who pays them for a space. This is different with the Kingpins Shows, and Andrew is quite proud of it. If a supplier does not have the required certification, they cannot have a booth in a Kingpins Show, regardless of willingness to pay or amount of money.

For example, one of the needed certificates is related to chemistry. Initially, none of the suppliers met the standard; however, they wanted to participate in the program so, within two years, all 60 mills fulfilled the requirement. Andrew is a great believer in making an impact, and this is how an individual or a company, like the Kingpins Show, can accelerate it. The Kingpins Show had a similar program on social compliance which, in the beginning, had only seven companies with certifications that workers in their factories were being treated properly. By the time they finished, all of them had certifications.

Combining **Physical and Digital** Worlds

As of the date of this piece, there are no physical shows scheduled at the moment; however, they will begin again at some point. The Kingpins Show and Material Exchange has a vision to combine the two into a “hybrid” version.

Andrew sees this connection between the physical and digital much like the Kingpins Exchange that is available 24/7/365. He states, “There are two levels of this shift. First, the attendance numbers... our show in Amsterdam, which is our flagship show, has 800 brands. Some of the brands, like American Eagle or Target, bring 10 people – even to a show in Europe.” He imagines the number of future attendees will decrease due to new business practices post-pandemic. The balance of those people who don’t attend in-person will need or appreciate digital support. He feels it is Kingpins Exchanges’ responsibility to provide as much information as possible in that scenario.

The second level of shift in merging physical and digital is the physical side of in-person shows in terms of products. Some suppliers may not want to do a full exhibit at an in-person show, but do want to showcase their products. The showcase might mean only showing two to four products, whereas a show means bringing your entire line. Showcases might mean we do more

physical shows, meaning smaller and more frequent, supported by the Kingpins Exchange platform. Additionally, he feels buyers will not rely on physical samples as much because people will learn how to make decisions based on digital information.

Darren and Andrew both feel the highest value of a hybrid or combined show is the tremendous opportunity for customers to experience physical touch of the material, then to scan a QR code, have that material's information available immediately in the platform, and be able to share it with in-company collaborators (whether or not they are at the show). This is our vision for the future events.

Bringing **New Opportunities** to the Industry

The new opportunity we created in the Kingpins Exchange digital platform for denim material sourcing, which is accessible 24/7 year-round, are the "Pavilions." Pavilions have a dedicated place in the platform, easily accessed with one click. The value of these Pavilions is that, by clicking on their page, a user can filter out and see all fabrics, mills, etc. which use their standards, have the trademark, etc. There are dedicated pavilions, including TENCEL™ and LYCRA®, with ZDZH (Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals) being the next one scheduled for addition.

In a physical show, these companies would have their own booths; however, they would never be able to showcase all their partners and products to the world in a single exhibit booth. In a digital environment, this is not the case - there are no limitations to connect all these industry actors. This brings significant value to the Pavilion owners in showing their commitment, trends, and innovations. Naturally, buyers can easily find which mills would be able to produce the desired fabrics and materials for them.



What **Needs to Change** in Our Industry

A practical example can demonstrate what needs to change in our industry. Consider what is currently needed to make and sell a denim jacket. As the fabric seller, to do the best job possible with that denim jacket, you would make that denim in seven different washes. You would go from almost white to super dark with different washes. That process costs a lot, takes a long time, generates a lot of waste, and, ultimately, the customer can say “Um, I don’t think I like it.”

Ideally, in today’s digital world, somebody might make one jacket with one wash, and all the other samples will be digital. Most likely, people will be able to live with that.

Another example is PVH Corporation’s stitch system, where they are going fully digital. They are not going to actually produce a garment unless it is approved by a customer base; only then will it be made into a physical product.

The challenges we face in digitizing fabrics in the denim industry, and quite likely in most of the fashion industry, is the variation of gradients in color.



For example, you can digitally produce a pair of jeans in CLO or Browzwear 3D design software, but the actual scan and material would be quite difficult to represent digitally. This might be one of the bottlenecks for having the desired outcome of the process.

“The process of going digital might be a challenge for a while; however, we cannot keep going the way we have been until now. We have been really indulgent when it comes to the waste that is produced unnecessarily just because of exhibiting at physical material shows.” ~ Andrew Olah, Founder and CEO, Kingpins Shows

As an example, one Kingpins Show had 60 denim mills - excluding the garment factories. Each mill had 100 fabrics, so that is 6,000 fabrics, and each has 5-10 washes on them. When the show is over, everyone throws all that in the garbage. Moreover, they do that twice a year. Also, they have collections for every market.

The waste that goes on and on in these processes, and the cost of shipping it around, is an unreasonable waste of energy and resources. We need to change and shift our behavior to be more conscious about what we are doing as an industry. We cannot continue this direction – it is literally unsustainable – so the shift to digital must start now.

Material Exchange is the fast-growing international virtual Marketplace where data meets innovation in a revolutionary technology platform to transform the materials sourcing process and simplify complex relationships between footwear and apparel brands and material suppliers. The sooner our industry moves to digital where it is appropriate, the sooner we reduce the carbon footprint and increase sustainability while enabling faster fashion. Leveraging accurate data delivers transparent, efficient, and cost-effective sourcing; protecting the planet is a by-product of doing business smarter.

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