CCES 2025
Textiles & Apparel Track Session Summary

How Reuse is Driving the Future of Fashion

For over 70 years, Value Village has been a leader in the circular economy, redefining the relationship between people, planet and profit. In this session, Tony will share how Value Village has leveraged the thrift economy to drive positive change, blending social responsibility, environmental stewardship, and business success. He'll share how shopping secondhand is not just sustainable, but a thriving retail model that consumers embrace.

Speaker
Tony Shumpert, Value Village

April 16, 2025, *Presented Virtually*

SUMMARY

Tony Shumpert from Value Village presented findings from a recent "Thrift, Industry and Consumer Insights" survey of nearly 9,000 Canadian and US consumers. Value Village's mission aligns with the circular economy, focusing on reuse. They operate 165 stores across Canada, employing around 11,000 people. Each store puts out over 35,000 items weekly. Over the past four years, they've diverted over 1.5 billion pounds of clothing and textiles from landfills and paid over $347 million to their nonprofit partners. Their operations also include recycling cardboard, e-waste, and metal.

Key Survey Findings:

- **Growing Popularity of Thrifting:** 90% of consumers surveyed have either shopped or donated at a thrift store, a significant increase from 83% in 2022. One in three consumers thrifted in the last year, with over 40% of Gen Z identifying as "Thrifters."
- **Motivations for Thrifting:** Environmental consciousness is a major factor, with many seeking to make a positive impact and shift away from fast fashion. Over 1 in 4 consumers (42% of Gen Z) plan to increase their thrift spending in the next three years, indicating thrifting is becoming mainstream.
- **Impact on Other Retail Channels:** Thrifters reported decreasing spending in traditional department stores (35%), specialty retail (34%), and fast fashion (29%).
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- **Perceptions of Quality and Value:** 60% of consumers believe secondhand clothes are as good as new, one-third find them more stylish, and the majority see them as better value. Two-thirds enjoy finding unique items. Over a quarter of Gen Z's wardrobe is now secondhand.
- **Beyond Apparel:** 8 in 10 consumers have bought non-apparel secondhand items like books, furniture, electronics, and housewares, reinforcing thrift's role in sustainable living across various aspects of home life.
- **Thrifting as an Experience:** Consumers spend over an hour in thrift stores, with Gen Z and millennials being particularly engaged. Nearly 30% view thrifting as a social activity.
- **Environmental Impact of Reuse:** Thrifting keeps products in use, reduces waste, and saves natural resources. While producing a new cotton t-shirt requires 2,700 liters of water, thrifting one requires none. Almost half of consumers care more about clothing's environmental impact than three years ago. 59% of the thrift community believes buying secondhand is more sustainable than buying new.
- **Donation Trends:** 88% of consumers donated in the last year, with 1 in 4 Gen Z and millennials decluttering their closets monthly. Donating is a critical first step in the reuse stream, and consumers donate a wide range of non-apparel items.
- **Donor Preferences:** Donors prioritize convenience (easy drop-off options, donation stations) and knowing their donations make a local difference. Removing friction and building trust in the donation process are crucial. 95% of consumers plan to donate as much or more in the next three years.

Q&A Highlights:

- **Stimulating and sustaining thrifting:** Value Village emphasizes sharing information through their annual thrift report and ESG report, which highlight the positive impact and viability of their circular business model. They also leverage social media and influencers to connect with growing consumer segments.
- **Unsold donations:** Unsold items from stores, along with items that didn't meet initial floor standards, enter Value Village's wholesale business. These materials go to global reuse partners who sort them further. Roughly 35-40% are suitable for direct reuse, while the remaining 60-65% go into other downstream processes like upcycling (e.g., Beyond Retro's collaborations with Coach and Converse for new products) or fiber-to-fiber recycling. Value Village works directly with material processors to understand the disposition of these materials, aiming to track more precisely how much material is used in

upcycling and recycling efforts, although direct relationships with those end-users are not always in place.

- **Mismatch between suitability and resale:** While 95% of donated clothing is suitable for repurposing, only 30-40% is resold in stores due to conditional issues (items not meeting Value Village's sales floor standards, even if repairable) and the universal retail challenge of matching an item with the right customer. The increasing innovation in AI-powered tools for identifying clothing condition, as well as advancements in wholesale and downstream processes, are expected to improve the efficiency of reuse and recycling streams.