



Design with Purpose

The Challenge

Unilever is one of the world's largest manufacturers of consumer goods. Seven out of ten households around the world contain at least one Unilever product, which are used by 2.5 billion people every day. In 2010 the business launched its Sustainable Living Plan. Reducing environmental impact is one of three big goals at the heart of Unilever's strategy and the business has set itself stretching targets to achieve by 2030 around packaging, water-use and energy consumption.

Solution

Unilever and Northumbria University's partnership is unique and spans over a decade of collaboration. Northumbria University's School of Design, rated in the top 10 UK institution for Design by the Guardian in 2018, combines the very best of design thinking and practice with expertise in design-led multidisciplinary innovation. Northumbria's experienced practice-based researchers explore and stretch boundaries to translate the many possibilities into recommendations to achieve the strategic objectives for Responsible Growth, both to Unilever and its consumers. The partnership works to ensure that solutions are information rich, minimise energy and are truly sustainable, while providing clear business benefits and opportunities. Unilever has also sponsored a PhD project into long-term sustainable materials ensuring that it is at the cutting edge of latest research as well as developing products ready for market.

Impact

Northumbria's partnership with Unilever enables the business to focus on products with game-changing performance. Over the past ten years around 26 separate projects have been delivered with Unilever teams across many divisions of the business, in both emerging and developed markets. The approach is design led, needs driven, materials anchored and solutions focused. By introducing new knowledge and design methods driven by responsible innovation, the partnership provides Unilever with an effective means of evaluating projects that meet the needs of the business and its consumers. Key to success is enabling Unilever to communicate visions of the future that deliver significant value and leverage strategic support in order to bring products to market.

Organisation Overview

Unilever is a global business with over 400 brands. On any given day, 2.5 billion people use Unilever products and seven in ten households around the world have at least one Unilever product. Unilever's purpose is 'to make sustainable living commonplace.'



"We are working with Northumbria because we believe they bring something unique and special which can help us to achieve our long-term goals, particularly associated with sustainability. The university already has extremely strong design, technology and business capabilities - bringing this together under one roof, as INNOVATE has done, makes for a very attractive proposition."

Paul Howells, Vice President R&D for Packaging, Unilever.

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