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When big goes green

**marie claire**  
PARIS



# When big goes green



When Marks & Spencer decide to commit to the environment, the results are bound to be visible. This Spring the world's first green lingerie factory will open its doors in Sri Lanka. An ambitious and financially challenging project bound to become a benchmark in the industry. Intima Asia interviewed Pascal Little, Head of Technology at Marks and Spencer and Dian Gomes, CEO and Director of MAS Holdings.



PASCAL LITTLE

**Pascal Little is the head of technology for Lingerie at Marks and Spencer. As so he manages a team of technical specialists in the development of the lingerie, sleepwear and hosiery range. His team is responsible for the delivery of some amazing technical innovations such as M&S 'magic' shape wear, exclusive ladder resist sheer hosiery and 'body soft' and 'body miracle' bras. The team are also responsible for the quality and ethical management of M&S' supply base. The lingerie division at M&S covers around 1/3 of the UK lingerie market, 5 times that of their nearest competitor.**

**Mister Little, going green is a term we are hearing about a lot in the rapidly changing apparel market. Can you brief Intima Asia about the history of Marks and Spencer's Plan A and what it means for your apparel business?**

*Plan A is a £200 million, 5-year commitment to our environment. Covering 100 separate initiatives under 5 specific pillars, it impacts on every part of how we do business. It is important that our plan is structured in this way given the size and complexity of our business and also to ensure we do not 'cherry pick', but have a comprehensive and measurable plan.*

*The 5 'pillars' cover commitments to climate change, waste, sustainable raw materials, fair partner and health. Our commitment to climate change is to be carbon neutral for our operations in the UK and Ireland and helping our customers and suppliers to reduce their carbon emissions too.*

*Our customers expect us to take a leading role on environmental and sustainability issues for the future.*

**Tell us about your concept of the green store.**

*We have developed three 'model green stores' in the UK. Each of these stores includes a variety of innovative details around store lighting, refrigeration, building materials, recycling of waste etc. to drive down our carbon footprint. The learnings from these stores will then be rolled out through the rest of our store chain.*

**Can you give us more details on the green factory project?**

*We are really excited about the fact that in May 2008 the world's first green lingerie factory will commence operations in Sri Lanka. This factory is designed to be an iconic build, encompassing some of the most innovative ideas around construction and materials. Partly built on stilts to minimize the impact on local topography and drainage patterns, maximizing the use of natural daylight and with the largest solar power installation in Sri Lanka, the factory will use 40% less power than a standard factory of similar size. Green roofs will help lower the temperature in the factory enabling the use of more energy efficient air conditioning. The factory will be independently accredited to Platinum standard, the highest possible rating from the American Green Building Council (LEED). We are developing further projects in Sri Lanka, the UK, China and Bangladesh and the learnings from these projects will be shared with the rest of our manufacturing partners to help them with their own projects. We have tried to create a range of projects that represent new builds and refurbishments, different geographical locations and different industry sectors to provide a point of reference for all of our manufacturing community. In each case we will demonstrate that these projects not only minimize impact on the environment but also make sound economic sense in the face of rising energy costs.*

**Is Marks and Spencer aligning with any environmental groups?**

*We are in regular contact with a number of organisations including Forum for the future, World wildlife fund, Greenpeace and Oxfam to consult on our plans. They provide valuable input and challenges as we go along.*

**What can we expect from Marks and Spencer's partnering in the apparel industry in the future?**

*We have established partnerships with MAS, Brandix and Hirdiramani for the development of benchmark green factories in Sri Lanka, Westbridge furniture in the UK, Tristate outerwear in China and SQ knitwear in*

*Bangladesh. These projects are at various stages of development but should all be completed within the next year. We are already rolling out the learning from these projects to our wider supply base.*

**In your opinion what are some of the key technological trends you are seeing in the apparel industry?**

*In lingerie some of the most exciting technical developments are happening in the field of seam-free garment construction. The new bonded constructions provide some wonderful creative opportunities which, combined with innovative moulding, are being used to create beautifully discreet seam-free garments such as our 'body miracle' range. There are some exciting ideas coming out of Japan on elastane that have led to the development of our UK exclusive 'sheer ladder resist' hosiery. Some of the new machinery developments with increased patterning capability have been used to create very beautiful curved selvedge fabrics that will enhance fit and comfort. It's a very creative time right now in the lingerie industry. Continuing on an eco theme, we will soon launch a beautiful range of lingerie and sleepwear separates made from sustainable raw materials using organic cotton and modal. All of our lingerie strappy vests are using fairtrade cotton. In total M&S is the largest buyer of fairtrade cotton using 1/3 of the world's production.*

**Is profitability in your apparel industry an issue given that Marks and Spencer's have been able to invest so heavily to build a green factory and still provide such low price points to the consumers?**

*We have worked in partnership with our suppliers to provide some excellent value in our stores. This has been successful in delivering huge volume growth, which has benefited our vendors. In addition to the development of our green stores, we have sponsored elements of the green factory projects but the majority of the investment for these projects has come from our manufacturing partners. They have demonstrated great vision in employing new sustainable technology to deliver energy efficient factories that will deliver financial savings over time. This is important if we are to successfully persuade all of our suppliers to follow a similar path.*

**What are Marks and Spencer doing to raise awareness levels and to influence the apparel consumer?**

*We regularly talk with our customers through a variety of discussion forums. We have promoted the move to lower temperature washing through our 'think clima-*

*te - wash at 30 degrees' campaign, we have introduced a clothing recycling initiative with Oxfam whereby customers receive a £5 voucher for Marks & Spencer when they bring back old M&S garments to an Oxfam outlet and we recently announced that we would charge customers 5p for a plastic carrier bag. All of these initiatives have been well received and successful in helping to drive change in customer behaviour and awareness.*

**In the development of your green store and green factory concepts what have been some of your biggest challenges so far and how have you realigned your strategies to overcome them?**

*The delivery of all of our projects within Plan A has required strong leadership from the very top of the organisation. Our CEO, Sir Stuart Rose has provided a very clear vision from day one. The organisation of our plan around the pillars of climate change, waste, sustainable raw materials, fair partner and health has provided the necessary structure to deliver measurable improvements in a complex and diverse business such as Marks and Spencer.*

**How do you think apparel retailers will differentiate in 5 years time and how will that be different from today's competitive landscape?**

*We believe that environmental and ethical considerations will form an increasingly important purchasing decision factor for the UK consumer. These issues are now at the forefront of the political and public agenda, and awareness is growing.*

*Of course competition will increase and customers will demand great value, quality, design and service but increasingly they are telling us that they want to know that the products we sell have been developed and sourced responsibly.*

**As a conclusion, what role can we expect Marks and Spencer to play in shaping the future of 'going green' in the apparel industry?**

*We have set out to create a series of relevant 'benchmark' model green factories. We hope to cascade the learnings from these to all of our suppliers. We set out originally to build two, by this time next year we will have six! So many suppliers are now already saying they want to do something similar because increasingly they realize that energy efficient design makes commercial as well as environmental sense. Once the success of these projects becomes more widely known then I expect the momentum in the apparel sector to build 'greener' factories will grow.*



DIAN GOMES

**Dian Gomes is the CEO and Managing Director of MAS Intimates, the largest division of MAS Holdings Providing design to delivery solutions for lingerie. The company supplies to leading brands in the world including Marks & Spencer, Victoria's Secret, GAP, DBA, Nike and Adidas. Mr Gomes is also a director of MAS Holdings.**

**Mister Gomes, Going green is a term we are hearing about a lot in the rapidly changing apparel market. Can you brief Intima Asia on what it means for your apparel business?**

*We have always been an ethical apparel producer. We have heavily invested in uplifting the lives of our employees, as well as the communities we operate in. Our focus in empowering employees, especially the women that make a majority of them, culminated in the MAS Women Go Beyond programme, which has won global recognition. Our efforts to change the conditions by which the industry is run has had a positive impact in Sri Lanka and globally. Going green is the logical next step.*

**You are working on a very exciting project with the Marks and Spencer's Apparel Group. Can you tell us more?**

*We are building a green manufacturing facility - part of the Plan A initiative Marks & Spencer launched in Spring 2007. Our mandate was to be the first and 'iconic' - to inspire other plants that will come up across the world.*

**Tell us more about your concept of the Green Factory and what does that mean for the physical plant?**

*We wanted to build a plant that is carbon neutral, has high energy and resource efficiencies, designed for high worker wellbeing including natural lighting and views, and that honours the location and the environment. MAS Intimates Thurulie uses about 40% less energy compared to a similar plant. In the tropics, the biggest contributor to the energy load is cooling. We are using green roof (roof with vegetation on top) and cool roof (roof with high reflection of heat) and extensive vegetation around buildings to reduce the heat coming in to the buildings. And then we are using evaporative cooling to manage the internal thermal comfort. Approximately 10% of our energy is generated on site by solar. The balance electricity is purchased via a green power purchase agreement, to make the plant carbon neutral. Our water use is half that of a conventional plant. We use dual-flush toilets and low-flow fixtures. We recycle grey water harvested from the roof to be used in toilets. We have an on-site anaerobic digestion treatment plant for sewage. We are using natural light extensively in the building. We couple that with efficient atmospheric lighting and LEDs at needlepoint. We are hoping to*

*stay between 20-40% of the lighting usage of a comparable factory. We have high indoor air quality and outside views for all employees. Special eco-bricks (with low embodied energy) are used for walls, and we are doing minimum excavation construction, with some buildings coming up on stilts. There is a drive for bio-diversity renewal.*

**In your opinion what are some of the key technological trends you are seeing in the apparel industry?**

*There is a big demand for organic cotton and for 'green' products. There are a lot of exciting innovations in high-tech fabrics, and part of them are driven by green considerations. We are seeing a move towards high-tech garments and a complex construction that adds performance as well as aesthetics.*

**What is the economic viability of such a project?**

*We wanted to build an eco-manufacturing plant that is financially viable - that was part of the brief. It does have a slightly longer payback period. This plant is 'built-for-lean' and that brings in optimal resource efficiencies, and is a major influence in making the project viable.*

**How would you define success for the MAS Holdings green manufacturing business?**

*Our definition of success has two elements - the first is to be the benchmark against which other plants are measured, and the second is to be green and profitable at the same time.*

**Is MAS Holdings aligned with any environmental groups?**

*No we are not. We have worked with some groups who gave us input, and we have worked closely with academia - both from green construction and ecology. We have engaged some local environmental groups at various stages, and solicited input.*

**There is an understanding that whilst you are exclusive on this project with Marks and Spencer that you will take the learnings from the project to create other green manufacturing facilities for other customers. Is this true?**

*We will definitely leverage the learnings - we are currently looking at how to use them to better our existing operations. This plant was built on an express timeline of 13 months including the concept. We need some reflection before moving forward. Whether we will offer something similar to other customers is yet to be decided.*

**Is profitability in your apparel industry an issue given that you have had to invest so heavily to build a green factory and still provide such low price points to the industry?**

*Yes margins are razor thin in the industry, and it is tough.*

*MAS Holdings made a strategic decision in 2005 to implement a lean production philosophy, MOS, adapting the famous Toyota Production System (TPS) to the apparel industry. We are leveraging MOS to reduce our cost base. MAS Intimates Thurulie is our first plant that is designed for MOS, and the enhanced efficiencies are helping us to work with the industry price points.*

**What are MAS Holdings doing to raise awareness levels and to influence the apparel designer to manufacture with them?**

*Our relationships with our customers are based on long-term strategic partnerships. We offer exceptional service, and complement the brands effectively. We have the ability to innovate not only on product, but also process and elevate the brand value of the customer. This project is an example of how our innovation helps brand positioning of Marks & Spencer. It is this ability to think with the customer that makes MAS a powerful partner for all our customers.*

**How do you think the Green Factory initiatives are going to influence the industry?**

*This facility is also a learning center. We are showcasing the plant and the technologies behind it to those with an interest, because we would like everyone to move to a more sustainable mode of operation/living. We have already inspired a number of other companies to follow, both apparel and in other sectors, and this is even before the plant is operational. The list includes manufacturers in Sri Lanka, China and Bangladesh. It will only increase after we start operations.*

**Environmental issues can generate significant positive as well as negative buzz for a company. How is MAS Holdings monitoring and/or even nurturing their "environmental reputation"?**

*The first step is to create a facility that can stand-up to scrutiny. This is a pioneering effort, without any blueprints to follow. And the feedback we had from our engagement processes has been good. We have been promoting education around sustainability - MAS Eco Go Beyond is one such project, where we teach school children in the vicinity of our operations about sustainability. This is a project that has been endorsed by UNEP and UNESCO.*

**In the development of your Green Factory concepts what have been some of your biggest challenges so far and how have you realigned your strategies to overcome them?**

*Managing thermal comfort was the biggest challenge we had. Sri Lanka is a high heat/high humidity location, and that is a toxic combination. We wanted to look at alternatives to air-*

*conditioning, simply because of the excessive energy use it implies. We had to innovate to reduce the environmental heat getting in to the building so that we can use low-energy climate control systems like evaporative cooling. Extensive vegetation (approx 75% of the site) enables a change of the microclimate, and the green roof/cool roof combination helps reduce the cooling load significantly. This allows us to use evaporative cooling to create good conditions inside the buildings.*

**What volumes of lingerie will your Green Factory manage each year? Will you also manufacture swimwear in this factory?**

*The plant will start small and we will be moving gradually to full capacity of 1300 operators by 2010. For 2008, the plant is expected to make 1.3 million bras. We will not manufacture swimwear in the plant.*

**Do you have a Research and Development team established to consistently innovate in both production and materials technology?**

*MAS have multiple research and development teams working on all aspects of our business. Some of our material innovations include elastics made out of organic cotton, recycled polyester and corn oil. Our design and development center innovates around lingerie design and product development. We work closely with all our customers to deliver innovative products to consumers.*

**What standards specifically did you choose as your guideline for building the Green Factory? i.e. the United Nations Global Compact guidelines - ISO 14015 standard "Environmental assessment of sites and organizations the Global Reporting Initiative's Environmental Indicators etc...**

*We used the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standard developed by the US Green Building Council (UNGBC). This standard was picked as it is comprehensive and tackles all the major aspects such as the site, energy efficiency, water efficiency, material usage and indoor air quality. LEED is becoming a global standard with a number of countries adopting it as the de-facto green building standard.*

**MAS in brief**

MAS Holdings was founded in Sri Lanka by Mahesh, Ajay & Sharad Amalean as a small apparel manufacturing facility in 1987. It is now the largest apparel exporter in the region with revenue volumes exceeding US\$ 800 million and employing over 45,000 people globally. The product range includes lingerie, high performance sportswear and swimwear. MAS has JV partnerships producing elastics (Stretchline), warp-knit fabrics (DOGIEFA), lace (Noyon), accessories and bra cups. In 2007, MAS launched its own brand, Amanté. They have also ventured into the private sector and managed industrial parks dedicated to the apparel industry.