

Burberry supports IBM interns to develop prototype system for product traceability

London, 8th October 2020 - Burberry's technology experts were keen to share their knowledge with a younger generation. With coaching from Burberry, students from IBM's Extreme Blue internship program developed a prototype system that may help to improve product traceability and provide consumers with deeper insights into a product's lifecycle. Burberry's commitment to sustainability is long-standing, grounded in the belief that for future growth, the company needs to actively address the challenges facing the fashion industry.

Sustainability is a growing priority for the fashion industry and retailers are doing more to promote ethical supplier practices and responsible consumption. Consumers, policy makers, and NGOs alike are concerned about the environmental and social impacts of retailers and their products. Financial institutions are also demanding more accountability from the companies they invest in.

The theme for this year's Extreme Blue internship programme was "Sustainability in Fashion". Partaking students were tasked with designing, developing, and testing an innovative new product for an IBM client. Burberry partnered with the programme this year, supporting the interns to develop a prototype system that may in future help to improve traceability in fashion. Burberry's own commitment to sustainability is longstanding, with ambitious targets to 2022 covering product, operations and communities.

Mark McClennon, Chief Information Officer at Burberry said: "The passion and creativity that IBM's Extreme Blue interns showed in developing a prototype solution for a longstanding industry challenge was exceptional. We are delighted to have supported the interns in tackling this challenge, as cross-functional collaboration across industries is crucial to building a more sustainable future and inspiring the next generation of sustainably-minded innovators."

Luq Niazi, Global Managing Director at IBM Consumer Industries said: "IBM, through its annual Extreme Blue internship programme, is thrilled to have collaborated with Burberry to design, develop and test an 'art of the possible' prototype this year. We hope that both the students' experiences and this prototype can inspire new ideas around tackling sustainability and traceability for the fashion industry."

Over the past three months the interns worked with Burberry's Digital experts, who shared their knowledge and experience to help develop the prototype system. Named Voyage, the prototype uses IBM Public Cloud and the IBM Blockchain platform to gather data that might in future allow consumers to trace a garment's production journey and lifecycle, while learning more about the processes involved in its creation. It was

designed by the interns to be trialled for functionality in Burberry's mobile app.

“This project has opened my eyes to the complexity of sustainability in the supply chain,” said Nikhil Modem, a Computer Science student from the University of Durham. *“I am now much more aware of the impact each of us has through our fashion choices. I’ve started to make changes to my own shopping habits too!”*

The Voyage system works by identifying a product through scanning a near-field communication tag or entering a product ID, before outlining a product's development journey.

Tara Mulcahy-Murray, an Engineering Student at the University of Oxford, said: *“We thought about what consumers might want to know about their clothes and how we could address their concerns. Our aim was to give consumers more information about each product before it reaches the store, so they can make more informed purchasing decisions.”*

Voyage was designed for users to configure their own sustainability preferences and receive tailored product recommendations. Users might also add information about a product's journey to include additional stages in its lifecycle such as recycling and upcycling. In this way, the system could show users the role their potential purchase would play in giving a product new life and helping to minimise waste.

“By developing the Voyage prototype alongside experts at Burberry and IBM, we learned so much about a complex industry. This experience opened our eyes to the scale of the fashion supply chain and we found first hand that sharing learnings and best practice does inspire action to improve sustainability,” said Eleanor Barron, Physics Student at the University of Exeter.

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Burberry Store - Courtesy of Burberry
