



## SOURCING: Reducing time for fitting samples

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One of the biggest challenges faced by retailers, brands and their suppliers is how to speed up garment design and development when most of the people involved in the process work in different places - often in different time zones and speaking different languages.

For UK-based Crystal Martin International Ltd, part of Hong Kong's Crystal Group and one of the largest volume suppliers of apparel to Marks & Spencer and Mothercare, the issue was most pronounced when it came to bras.

"The problems of patterns, componentry and grading of bras bring an added complexity to the fit process," explains David Holland, IT support and communication manager.

"These styles would all require between ten and 20 fit sessions depending on the complexity of the fit and the type of the garment."

Until recently, the majority of these fits would be carried out in the customer's London office, requiring a round trip of some 300 miles for each of the garment technicians or graders - which in turn would take up most of the working day along with the associated travel costs.

Crystal Martin, whose products include ladies' formal and casual wear, lingerie, nightwear, knitwear and underwear, is a full service supplier providing design, fabric, garment and pattern technology, manufacturing, merchandising and delivery to its customers.

### **Faster fit sampling**

To try to speed up fit sampling without the use of virtual prototyping, it has spent the past three years evaluating and using FastFit360, a web-based tool that allows retailers and suppliers to view samples and communicate style and fit changes visually over the Internet on real models.

The tool allows actual images of the samples, in either photographic or 360° video format, to be viewed online by retailers and their suppliers from anywhere in the world.

Changes to a garment can be highlighted visually, while a thread of comments attached to the image helps avoid confusion and reduces the need for email conversations.

The idea is to enable workers around the world to collaborate visually, to cut down the number of physical samples, and to reduce the time and cost of shipping them across the globe.

"It was thought that if the process could handle fitting of bras it could handle any garment," David Holland notes.

The first fit session is currently still carried out in London so that the customer has a 'hands-on' feel for the garment and can identify and issues that need to be addressed as its development progresses.

However, subsequent fit and grading sessions are now carried out over the Internet between the

vendor and customer's offices using FastFit360.

This ensures everything that happens with the style is recorded and reviewed by the customer - but the expense of the London travel and the lost time are now gone.

Holland explains the process: "Garments are not only approved in one size but in different sizes for grade purposes, requiring different human fit models to cater for every bust and cup size.

"To try and have these people all available as and when required is difficult.

"Using a system like FastFit360 the models don't necessarily have to be there on the same day, each fit session on each model can be saved until all are complete, so there is further cost saving of being able to capture fits on different days."

### **Cost savings**

Savings in terms of staff time from 115 styles over three different internal departments came to \$80,000 per year.

But another \$60,000 was saved by reducing travel costs - even though the supplier and customer's offices were only 300 miles apart in the same country.

The critical path for garment approval has also reduced from 9-12 weeks to a current 6-8 weeks.

However as Holland explains: "Most production is currently overseas and the sampling is also done by the overseas factories and then shipped to our head office in the UK, usually by courier as it is required urgently for fit.

"By sending these fit sessions over the Internet from overseas, further reductions in the approval time scales will result as garments will no longer have to be continually couriered from the factory to the UK for approval."

According to Roxy Starr, EVP of design & development for FastFit360, retailer Marks & Spencer is also beginning to introduce FastFit360 throughout its departments.

Other companies using the technology include MAS Holdings in Sri Lanka and MAST industries in the US. It can directly integrate into a company's PLM system, regardless of which PLM system a company has.

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