



Technology trims time

Atul Dhakappa explains the significance of **Product Lifecycle Management** in handling the market pressures of the fashion industry

The fashion industry has undergone tremendous change in recent times. These changes have been at multiple ends of the value chain, affecting different participants in the industry. These changes have led to increased pressure on the top-line as well as bottom-line for most companies.

Customers in today's retail environment are becoming increasingly demanding and expect to be offered innovative styles at attractive prices on a frequent basis. This poses a continuous challenge for the fashion industry. The industry, therefore, must find new ways to secure growth and profits, while ensuring customer satisfaction. Tactics based simply on reducing product development and manufacturing costs are no longer sufficient to maintain a competitive advantage. As retailers attempt to improve profits, cash-flow and consumer loyalty, they

need to continually introduce newer concepts and add value to their own private labels.

Fashion brands and retailers are using information technology to accomplish these tasks with greater efficiency. The Product Lifecycle Management (PLM) software tools available today have increased in sophistication and are able to incorporate a wide assortment of techniques and best practices which can be useful to these companies.

PLM in fashion

PLM, as a business strategy, is steadily gaining wide acceptance amongst fashion brands and retailers. Companies that adopted PLM right at the start are beginning to see significant reductions in new product introduction lead times and are enjoying greater profits. PLM is not just a set of technologies,



but a strategic business approach that integrates people, processes, business systems and information.

PLM has proven to be an effective tool for getting products to market faster with reduced cost and higher quality. It enables organisations to manage all information about their products, from the initial concept to commercialisation, by integrating all areas of the company and the extended supply chain in a single collaborative forum. PLM provides a solid foundation of best practices that can minimise time-to-market, reduce costs, mitigate supply risks and ensure compliance.

A unique advantage of a fashion-centric PLM solution is that it provides a collaborative design environment with streamlined workflows and extensive re-usability. Line planning and product development applications can allow for the successive development and sharing of sketches, product line storyboards, patterns and 3D virtual samples. Designers, brand or line managers, technical developers, pattern designers and manufacturing partners can share the same updated true-to-life visual representations of the product at all times and can interact at different stages of the design and development processes to simulate, specify and finally validate all collection items.

Fashion brands and retailers are thus investing in PLM applications to deliver more styles in less time and improve time-to-market. To summarise, PLM tools offer a wide variety of solutions and best practices to address the specific challenges in the fashion industry, and help organisations in:

- ◆ Getting products to market faster
- ◆ Increasing collaboration across the extended ecosystem

- ◆ Consolidating knowledge and creating a data repository for new product design/development across the extended enterprise
- ◆ Improving predictability and turnaround times by increasing standardisation and re-usability across the key processes
- ◆ Enabling dashboards to track key processes and workflows

D.R.A.P.E.D

D.R.A.P.E.D is an implementation methodology for the adoption of PLM in an enterprise. D.R.A.P.E.D is a graded six-stage process, and is an acronym for Define, Rationalise, Attest, Propose, Execute and Deploy. Each stage has clearly defined entry, task, validation and exit criteria. Each stage also has a set of tools and templates that are ready for use in a customer engagement. Each phase deliverable is marked by customer interactions and discussions. Through the use of D.R.A.P.E.D, engaging with a customer on a fresh implementation becomes far quicker. As a result of this, customers are able to start leveraging the benefits from their new PLM investment in their business workflow very quickly. Geometric has developed this methodology based on its extensive experience in numerous PLM implementation projects.

Ensuring product realisation in fashion and apparel

From the moment a product is conceived right through its detailed design, development, release to manufacturing and eventual sale to customers, there are a variety of IT systems which streamline innovation and

operations. Some of these IT systems are specialised for specific functions and others are more enterprise in nature.

Firms providing PLM solutions enable users to operate in their own specialised domains, yet contribute to global product development through the use of a single integrated PLM system. They provide integration solutions to enable seamless data exchange between graphic applications and design systems, design systems and PLM systems, PLM systems and reporting tools, PLM systems and other enterprise systems like ERP and supply chain systems.

Increasing speed to market for new products

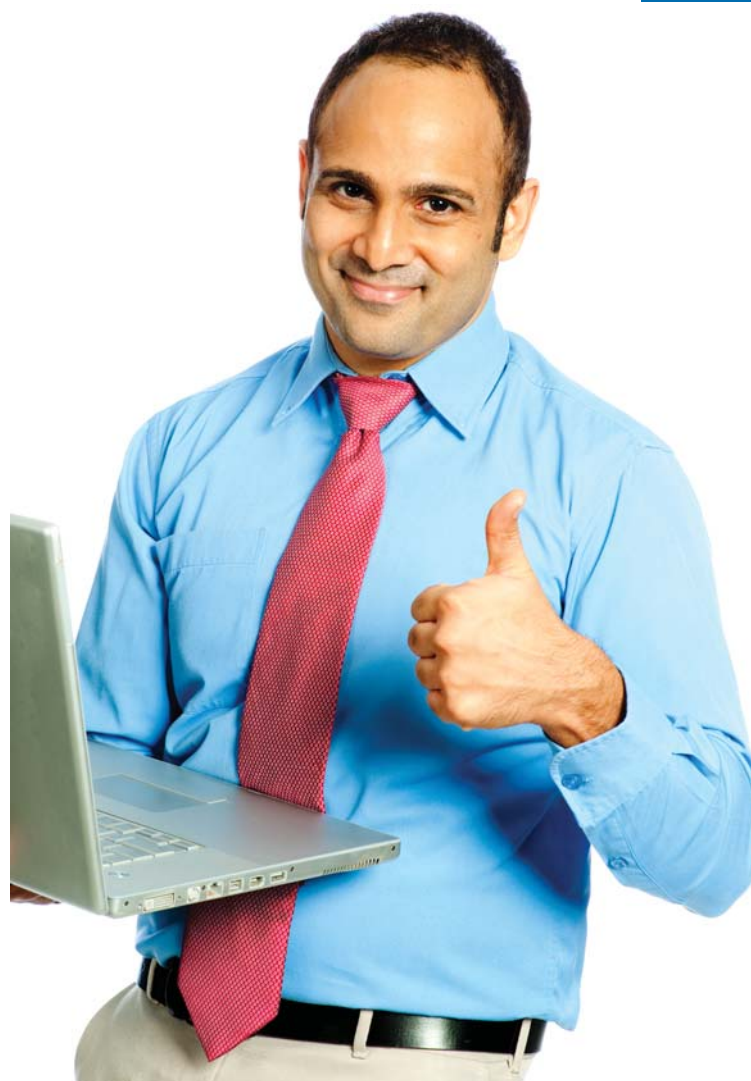
The common goal of every product development effort is to increase the speed at which they are able to introduce new products in the marketplace. Therefore, many fashion brands and retailers have continuously put in efforts to reduce product development time. In a rapidly-evolving market place, speed is of essence and this serves as a catalyst in bringing about a newness and exclusivity in the product and increasing the flexibility and responsiveness within the organisation and its supply chain.

Managing global sourcing

In today's challenging economic environment and increasingly competitive landscape, fashion brands and retailers face pressures to reduce costs, increase profitability, maintain quality and reduce time to market. Effective management of the sourcing function is an important variable in achieving these objectives. In order to remain competitive, many companies are identifying, developing, and placing production with capable business partners globally. Some of the factors to be kept in mind include geo-political stability, the reliability and quality of certain infrastructure components such as transportation systems, transfer pricing arrangements, tax incentives and issues, access to high-quality management talent and exposure to environmental and labour issues.

Many companies are rapidly moving towards technology solutions that help align their global trade functions with their operational demands. Better management and streamlining of global trade processes can significantly improve operating efficiencies and cash flows.

To overcome the challenges of a rapidly-changing fashion ecosystem, fashion brands and retailers need to respond quickly to the changing trends to capitalise on market opportunity. Moreover, the product quality has to be maintained to reduce returns and charge backs. In order to maintain low production costs, companies need to improve the efficiency of product development and sourcing, optimise sampling cycles and consciously reduce costly rush orders.



Fashion brands and retailers can also achieve increased production efficiency through strategic actions, and by investing in technology to coordinate activities from line planning, through design and sourcing, to delivery. Technology can provide centralised access to unified product information across the supply chain, and provide visibility about the status of projects across the entire line plan, to help companies manage their complex global supply chain and manufacturing operations.

Many companies are exploring a number of options for getting products to market faster, increasing collaboration across the extended ecosystem, investing in a single product-driven and process-oriented knowledge base across the extended enterprise, encouraging increased standardisation and re-usability across the key processes, enabling dashboards to track and review process flow issues. 🇧🇪

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