

Alliance Fashion and Manufacturing Toolkit

Designers Edition

Helping to make production management
easier for fashion designers and manufacturers

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Alliance Fashion and Manufacturing Toolkit

Introduction

The UK fashion industry is one of the leading industries within the UK economy, which in 2009 directly generated £6.6 billion of GVA¹. Within this sector, the high-end designer fashion sector is thriving. It is highly influential across the entire industry, pushing the boundaries of what fashion is today.

Alongside the high-end designer businesses, the UK has maintained a small specialist and highly skilled manufacturing presence, completing the innovative high-end supply chain which should be credited, supported and celebrated.

The Fashion Alliance is supporting both the high-end designers and manufactures in this supply chain through two sets of Toolkits that have come about through focused engagement, research and collaboration with the sector.

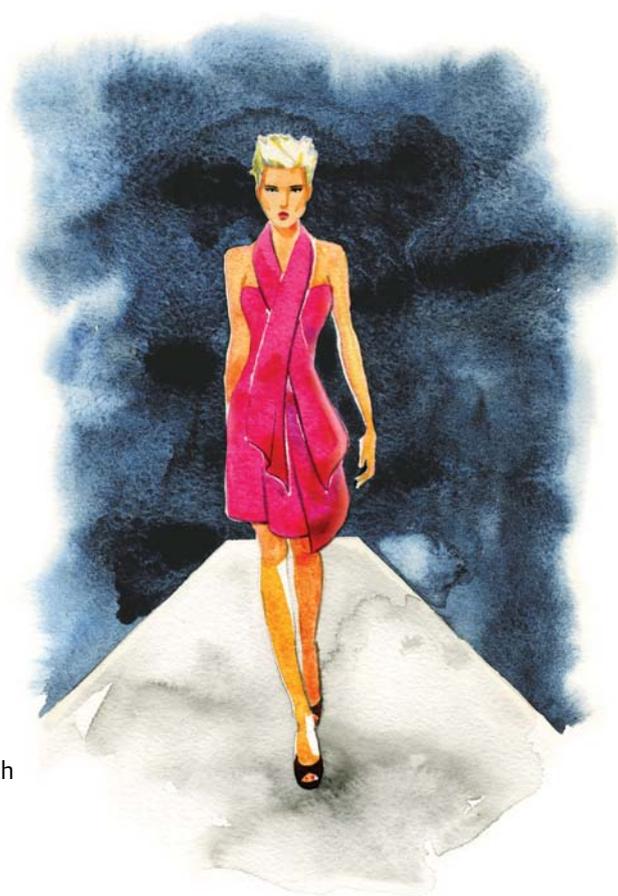
Designers

One Toolkit is aimed at the designers. Its focus is on production management, and helping designers communicate their needs effectively with production units.

Manufacturers

The other Toolkit is aimed at the specialist high-end manufacturers and addresses key issues relevant to their businesses, including growth and productivity.

Common to both sets of Toolkits is a recommended Code Of Practice which the Fashion Alliance hopes the sector will adopt. It will provide manufacturers and designers with a two-way assurance that both will adhere to a professional set of standards and working practises.



The Alliance Fashion and Manufacturing Toolkit has been created to help designers better communicate their needs to production units. Relationships between designers and manufacturers can be problematic for those who fail to understand the basic requirements. Even the most experienced of Production Managers find new challenges and problems with many of their orders. It is important therefore for designers to build up a good working relationship with their factories and to remember that factories are businesses that rely on smooth and constant production to create profits. The knowledge compiled in this Toolkit has been gathered from industry professionals with many years of experience in dealing with garment production. The Toolkit has been designed to start you off on the right foot, as you become more familiar with the materials you can use them to develop your own processes that suit your needs and the needs of your factories.

In the UK, production units go under many names but the standard model is 'CMT Factories'. CMT stands for Cut, Make and Trim – meaning that the factory does not supply any of the fabric or components, apart from thread and bag and only carries out production with the materials supplied.

This is the common method of manufacture for woven garments in the UK. If you develop production in the Far East it is more common to buy garments as 'fully factored', i.e. where the factory supplies everything from fabric to buttons to zips. In addition knitwear sourced in the UK is generally produced as fully factored, as the production of the garments is often carried out by the producers of the yarn.

The golden rule is to establish exactly what is included in the price before you confirm an order (or docket) to the factory. Having this clear from the start means that you are in full control of your profit margin and it prevents unexpected surprises when the garments are ready and the factory needs paying.

The Toolkit will give you a good start, but ultimately having good relationships will help ease any problems. Don't expect to build a great working relationship if you are frequently changing orders and dockets once they have been issued. Don't forget that, as far as a factory is concerned, time really is money!

Disclaimer

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1. 'The Value of the UK Fashion Industry' report; Oxford Economics/British Fashion Council; September 2010.

Code of Practice

The Alliance has developed a recommended Code of Practice. This provides a two-way assurance between the designer and production unit. This will assist both in adhering to a professional set of standards.

Designers

I, the designer, in the process of placing production orders with you, the factory, will ensure that:

- All technical requirements will be notified to you at, or before, the time of issuing the docket. These requirements include: order details, special making requirements, trimmings required, specification sheets and measurement charts.
- Fabric and trimmings will be supplied for this docket in good time for satisfactory completion by the due date. Any delays to components will be communicated to you by email at the earliest possible opportunity.
- We will provide you with a pattern for the docket, on which we expect the garments to be based. If the pattern requires alteration prior to production we will rectify it in good time for your cutting date. If the pattern has to be altered by you it must be with our agreement and we understand there may be a negotiated charge for this.
- We will pay the invoice for the docket within the agreed payment terms. Anything affecting our ability to pay will be communicated by email as soon as it is known.
- We will take delivery of the finished garments on the agreed date unless a change has previously been agreed in writing.
- The fabric and trimmings on the docket remain the property of the designer at all times.
- All changes to orders, dockets, dates, prices, quantities etc. will be communicated in writing to you at the earliest opportunity but no later than three working days prior to cutting.
- Any remedial work required will be notified in writing to you (the factory). You will be given first opportunity to rectify the problem, at your own expense, before costs are incurred with other contractors.



Factories

I, the factory, in agreeing to make the designer's orders, will ensure that:

- All technical issues arising that affect make, delivery date, sizing, price or quantity will be communicated in writing to you as soon as we become aware of them.
- We may be required to alter a pattern on your behalf and will only do so with your agreement and once any extra charges have been agreed in writing.
- All deliveries of fabric and components received directly from suppliers on your behalf will be recorded on the docket. The delivery note will be faxed or emailed to you the same day as it is received.
- Shortages and damages to fabric and components will be notified to you, in writing, on the same day that they become apparent.
- We will agree a delivery date for every docket and communicate any changes to you before cutting and at least one week prior to delivery.
- The docket will only be accepted by us when we have agreed the delivery date and price.
- We will invoice for the goods at the price agreed on the docket and will expect payment within the agreed payment terms.
- Any extra costs, not previously agreed, will be notified to you in writing and production will only continue upon your written agreement.
- We will preserve the confidentiality and intellectual property of your designs by not using your patterns without agreement or showing your designs to third parties.
- All fabric and trimmings remain your property. Any un-used fabrics and trimmings will be returned to you in their entirety.
- Upon notification of a quality problem we will rectify the goods at the earliest possible opportunity. This will be at no charge if it is our fault.
- If the problem is caused by a third party we will notify, in writing, the cost of any remedial work required prior to it being carried out.

Signed for the Designer:

Signed for the Factory:

Name:

Name:

Position:

Position:

Company:

Company:

Date:

Date:

Production management

Taking orders from retailers, while quite an achievement, is only part of the challenge of running a successful designer brand. How a designer manages the garment production cycle can be the difference between success and failure. Production management covers the entire cycle from production orders to the factory.

Production management of your hard-won orders is a vital skill that applies to a fashion clothing business irrespective of the size. The same pressures, problems and delays will affect you, whether you are making 50 garments or 50,000 garments a season. The only differences between these two scenarios are the numbers. The skills required to manage the process efficiently are exactly the same.

Many designers use a dedicated computer software system for the management of their orders and docket (production orders to the factory). These software tools can be a huge benefit to your business and, as you grow, they become more and more vital. They can be sourced on the internet under 'fashion production software systems'. However these systems do come at a cost and your business may not be ready to bear this administration expense just yet. If you are not ready for a software system, you will need to create your own modus operandi so that you, and your staff or helpers, have a clear sequence of actions to follow.

The procedure for putting your sales orders 'into work' (i.e. into production) breaks down into these sections:

- Collating Sales Orders
- Collating Purchase Orders



- Sourcing Manufacturers
- Factory Selection
- Production Bookings
- Building a Docket
- Issuing a Docket
- Monitoring Production
- Taking Delivery
- Problem Solving
- Dispute Resolution

Collating Sales Orders

This is the first stage in the whole manufacturing process. Without creating an overview of your production requirements you will be tackling your manufacturing process in a piecemeal fashion which will have disastrous consequences.

The ideal way to achieve this is to create a spreadsheet 'Production Schedule' showing the total number of orders against each style – and the delivery details that apply. This schedule will form the foundation of your whole production management system.

Best practice

- Use the Production Schedule.

Collating Purchase Orders

Once you have taken your orders and you know the total number for each style, you need to calculate your requirements for every fabric, button, zip and label and get them ordered as soon as you can. It is vital to obtain a clear delivery date – you should already have had a rough idea of these times to ensure that you are not quoting unrealistic delivery dates to your customers – from your fabric and component suppliers. The factory will usually base their delivery to you on the date that you can give them the complete set of components that they need to make the order. The factory cannot quote an accurate date unless they have all the fabric and trim information. Many orders are delayed each season because something is not supplied in time. £10 worth of missing labels can result in a cancellation costing thousands of pounds.

Best practice

- Get a realistic delivery date from your fabric and trim suppliers.
- Tell your supplier to use your docket or style number as a reference number on the purchase order.

Sourcing Manufacturers

Every designer needs the skills and support of a reliable manufacturer. Finding these factories can be a challenge, so make sure that you use any friends, contacts or professional networks and scour the web to identify the best candidates.

Once you have done your research and compiled a list of manufacturers it is important to assess their suitability to be part of your network of suppliers. This can only be carried out by visiting their premises and seeing how they work.

When you visit, it is very important to not just assess the physical conditions and making procedures of the factory, but also to get some idea of how well organised they are. For example, are all the trims for the factory's docket kept clearly labelled in one place?

Are the working areas clear of clutter and is their paperwork neatly organised? While good organisation is no guarantee of good quality garments, a well organised manufacturer will be more likely to have well organised production.

During your visit, make sure to check with the factory, how and when the payments are required. You are unlikely to get credit terms straight away but if you stick to your part of the bargain, pay promptly and build the relationship, it will almost certainly follow that credit terms will become available.

Points to consider

- What other designers do they work for – do those designers have the same quality and pricing strategy as you?
- Is the factory willing and able to make your quantities for your dates?
- Are the factories' Health and Safety, ethical and housekeeping working practices compatible with your business?
- Can they achieve the quality that your customers expect within the price that you can afford to pay?
- Is it feasible to have your orders in this location? Can you visit the premises easily and cheaply? Will you be able to 'pop down there' in the event of a problem?
- Is the owner/manager the sort of person you can create a business relationship with?
- Make sure you discuss and understand the factory's payment terms.
- Will the factory sign the Code of Practice?

Best practice

- Use the Factory Assessment Checklist to rate the factory as a viable supplier.

Factory Selection

Now that you have compiled a list of potential manufacturers, you have to match the factory to the orders. If your collection is multi-category and includes, for example, tailoring, jersey and soft dresses, then your choice of manufacturer will be determined by

their technical capabilities. If, when you visited them, they were making lined tweed skirts, are they going to be able to successfully deliver a docket of silk dresses? Despite what the factory tells you, your decision to work with them or not can only be based upon your own observations. The safest way to select the right factory for you, is on the basis of a sample that they make for you of the style in question – although cost is an obvious factor here.

Points to consider

- Can the factory give you the price for the quality you need?
- Can they meet the delivery date?
- Are they technically competent in that product category?

Best practice

- Get a sample made by your chosen manufacturer and agree the price.
- Use the Code of Practice to outline both parties' responsibilities.

Production Bookings

So at this stage you have your sales orders, your fabric and trim requirements and you know who is going to make the docket.

Best practice is now to make a production booking with your factory so that they can 'block out' some production space for your orders. This production booking will be influenced by the delivery date of your fabric and trims. If your component dates are delayed then you need to alert the factory so that the production booking dates can be extended. Remember that production cannot commence until all fabrics and trims are in place.

Best practice

- Constantly review purchase orders and update your production bookings if suppliers are late with deliveries.
- Keep the factory informed of delays so that they can 'juggle' their bookings and run at optimum efficiency.
- Use the Production Schedule.

Building a Docket

In an ideal situation you should collect all fabric and components in one place so that once everything has been delivered to your studio you can pass it to the factory with the docket (their purchase order). This way you are giving the factory everything they need to make the order at the same time. If it is possible, this is undoubtedly the best process, as it dramatically increases the chances of the factory being able to keep to agreed delivery dates.

However, it is not always practical and it is sometimes hard to avoid sending deliveries of fabric and trims direct from the supplier to the factory. If this direct delivery occurs, it is very important that you tell the factory and that they are able to take responsibility for recording the direct delivery and notifying you that it has come to them.

Best practice

- Build your docket fabrics and trims so that you can pass them over to the factory all at once.
- Tell the factory when you have had something sent to them so that they can look out for it.
- Get delivery notes from the factory of goods that were delivered direct to them on your behalf.
- Remember to record the different components of the garment to ensure that you are aware of each fabric and trim. Keep the information for this garment along with the information for the other garments in the collection.

Issuing a Docket

The docket is the order to your factory that tells them exactly:

- What style to make.
- How many garments and the size breakdown.
- What components they need to use.
- What the delivery date is.
- The price that was agreed when the style was sampled.

It is very important that the details are correct. For example, it is too late to change the size breakdown when the cloth has been cut.

Best practice

- Make sure the factory owner/manager is aware that they have received the docket.
- Get them to re-confirm that the delivery date is still realistic, as the production booking may have been made several weeks earlier.
- Issue a docket that clearly references the Production Booking that you put on the Production Schedule earlier.
- Ensure that changes to orders and dockets are communicated promptly to the factory and find out if the changes affect deliveries in any way.

Monitoring Production

Most professional production managers will use a variety of methods to maintain contact with their factories. Progress can be monitored by phone and email updates but there is absolutely no substitute for visiting the factory on a regular basis. By visiting their premises regularly you are more likely to develop a rapport with the factory and create a good working relationship.

Best practice

- Visit the factory at least once a week whilst they are in production.
- Use the Quality Control Checklist.
- Use the Production Schedule to monitor progress of your orders.

Taking Delivery

Once the garments are ready it is your responsibility to get them from the factory to your chosen location. The garments should be thoroughly checked for quality and quantity before they leave the factory. It can be difficult to rectify any problems once they leave the makers' premises.

Be very careful about sending interns or part-time staff to collect the finished garments. The factory will have spent a long time pressing and finishing the order and careless handling will negate much of their work.

Best practice

- Check the garments for quality and count them.
- Make sure the garments are bagged and are not going to fall off the hanger.
- Where possible, use a professional hanging garment delivery service to bring them to you.
- Take delivery of the orders on the date you agreed on the docket.
- Pay the factory on the agreed date as per the Code of Practice.

Problem Solving

Inevitably, despite everyone's best endeavours, things sometimes go awry when using factories.

The most common problems in dealing with manufacturers are:

- Delays to your orders.
- Quality issues.

- Missing or lost components.
- Fabric problems disrupting the work-plan.

How the problem is handled with the factory will have a significant impact not only on the order but also on your relationship with the management and staff of the factory as well as on your customers. It is important that production problems have as little impact as possible on your customers and their perception of you as a reliable fashion supplier.

Best practice

- If the problem has been caused by the factory, get them to acknowledge the fact.
- If the problem is quality-related use the Quality Control section.
- Where possible, give the factory time to rectify the problem(s).
- Keep the customer informed immediately of any delays or alterations to their orders.
- Use your relationship with the factory to negotiate a mutually acceptable solution.
- Have more than one factory that can make each product type.
- If the cause of the problem is unclear, try and go halves with the factory on any costs that need to be incurred.

Dispute Resolution

Getting into a dispute with a factory that is producing your orders should be avoided at all costs. Many thousands of pounds will be tied up in the orders you have entrusted to the manufacturer. In addition, your reputation in the industry will be judged on how efficiently you produce and deliver. If you enter into a dispute that cannot be easily resolved you run the risk of incurring cancellations, and other financial penalties, as well as risking damage to your reputation.

While the courts are there to deal with commercial disputes, this is really the very last course of action that you should consider and is the least favourable option.

Best practice

- Prevent the dispute occurring by negotiating a solution.
- Build a relationship to minimise the chance of a dispute happening.

Job Specification – Production Manager

This job specification has been developed to assist designer wholesale companies looking to appoint a suitably experienced person for the role of Production Manager and who do not have access to a detailed job description on which to base the post.

The ideal candidate will be experienced and conversant with the high-end designer fashion sector.

Knowledge of factory procedures and the ability to anticipate and mitigate potential problems is a prerequisite.

The overall requirement is for the Production Manager to maintain and improve the company's gross-profit margin by exercising good procedures throughout the whole production process.

The following list is a summary of the role:

Sourcing Factories

- Industry experience in working with high-end factories and suppliers.
- Being able to extract the true capabilities of a prospective supplier.
- Ability to match product to requirement.

Booking Production

- Able to collate sales orders to establish and quantify production requirements.
- Relating actual to forecast production and adjusting production schedules.

Placing Purchase Orders

- Collating sales orders to establish accurate fabric and trimming requirements.
- Negotiating prices and agreeing delivery dates.
- Entering delivery information onto critical path.
- Advising factories of anticipated fabric/component deliveries.



Production Orders

- Agreeing and placing orders with factory.
- Monitoring in-house technical team to ensure factory receives all patterns, specs etc in good time.
- Negotiating and recording price and delivery dates with factories.

Factory Management

- Experience of using any relevant computer software.
- Enter production orders on critical path.
- Able to identify source of problems that result in production issues.
- Communicating technical issues to factory and team.
- Communicating timing issues to factory and team.
- Able to build and maintain a constructive and positive relationship with factories.

Technical Team

- Communicating accurate and timely information to the technical team.
- Advising line manager of delays affecting customer deliveries and any events that impact on target margin.

Sourcing Trims

- Technical knowledge of requirements and attributes of all trimmings – e.g. zips and buttons etc.
- Colour matching of trimmings to designer's requirements.
- Knowing market price of components and negotiating to satisfy margin requirements.
- Maintaining awareness of lead times of components.

Stock Control

- Recording receipt and usage of all fabric and trimmings.
- Maintaining records of garment deliveries in and out.
- Charging shortages and damages back to factories.

Dispute Management

- Understanding factory procedures in order to facilitate dispute resolution.
- Being able to diplomatically manage technical issues with the in-house team.
- Use own personality and experience to resolve production problems.

Quality Requirements

- Knowledge of garment construction and use of machinery.
- Understanding attributes and technical requirements of different fabrics and trimmings.
- Understanding and applying the company's standards to finished goods.

Logistic Requirements

- Liaising with factories to ensure timely deliveries.
- Booking of transport to effect collections and deliveries.

Customer Deliveries

- Checking and authorising factory invoices.
- Creating customs documents where required.
- Creating sales invoices or passing packing lists to accounts to invoice.

Ascertaining and Maintaining Margins

- Knowing all costs.
- Negotiating purchase prices.
- Updating systems with date/price changes.

Software and Systems

- Using procedures as laid down by the company.
- Creating spreadsheets and Excel systems to monitor and notify production issues.
- Totally responsible for accurate and timely information being recorded.

Critical path management

One of the key principles of best practice in production management is having control and knowledge of the critical path for your orders. A critical path is a timeline that reflects not only the anticipated delivery date of your purchase orders but what each of those orders is made up of, what each needs in order to be completed and for you to fulfil those deliveries.

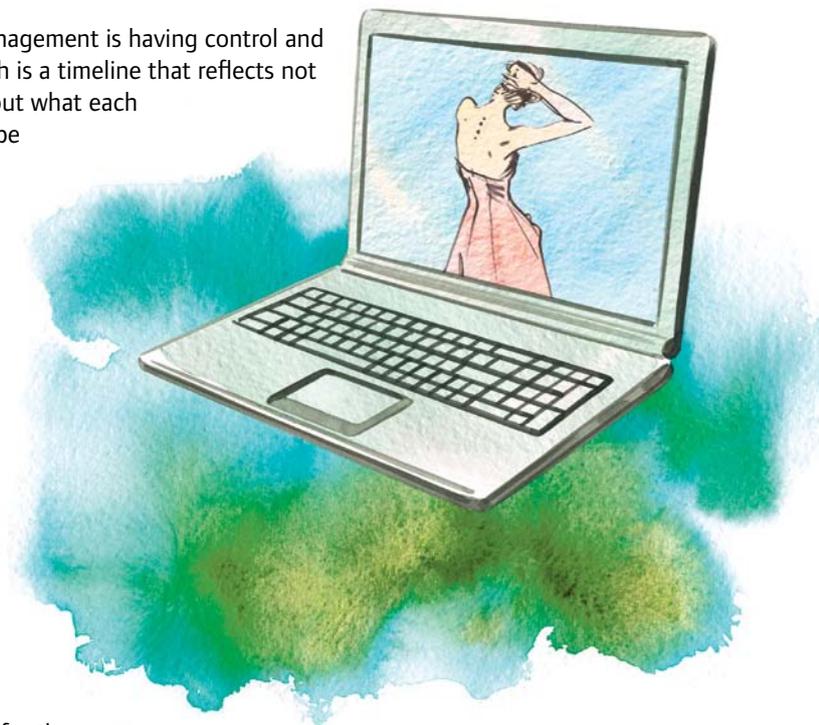
Once you have sold your collection, and calculated the requirements for your purchase orders of fabric and trims, you need to ensure that you keep track of each fabric and trim used in your collection so that they can be monitored. Don't forget that it is not just these physical items that will affect the delivery date of your garments but also the services that are required to bring your orders to fruition, e.g. pattern-cutting, printing, embroidering etc.

It is important to be aware of the impact that late deliveries will have on the final deliveries to your customers. Without a good understanding of the whereabouts of your fabric and trims in the production process, you risk disruption and delay to your production which could cause cancellation of your orders and non-payment from stores.

Many designers use a dedicated computer software system for the management of their critical path process. If you are not ready for a software system, you should create your own method of critical path management – the Best Practice section below outlines how to get started.

The first step is to know where everything for your orders is going to come from and how long it will take for them to be delivered once you have ordered them. You should have a rough idea of the lead times on fabric and trims before you take orders from your customers. It is quite common, and not very professional, for designers to take orders that need a particular fabric only to find that it is unavailable due to long lead times, or that there are large minimums that can't be met by your order. For example, it is no good quoting an end-July delivery to your stockists, if the Italian fabric supplier cannot produce your order until after their August closure.

Another common issue arises when designers assume that once the fabric has been delivered to the factory, the docket will go straight into production. In fact, many



factories will not, or cannot, start the production until all the accompanying trims have been delivered. It is not uncommon to hear of large orders being cancelled because the late delivery of labels meant that the docket 'missed its slot' in the factory's production schedule. A delay with £10 of labels can jeopardise an order worth thousands of pounds.

The biggest influence on the delivery dates to your customers is, however, how the factory performs once they have all the necessary components in their possession. If you visit a factory in March and it quotes you three weeks delivery, don't assume that it will still be three weeks if you only give them the docket in July, when the whole industry is so much busier.

Best practice

Setting up the critical path management:

- Speak to all your suppliers and establish the lead-time for all the fabrics and trims in your collection - do not guess!
- Create an Outlook diary (or similar) in which you can record when all your purchase orders are due.
- Use this diary to check the progress with your suppliers on a weekly basis.
- Keep the factory informed of delays to docket components so that they can juggle their production accordingly - it is in your best interest for the factory to be running efficiently.
- Know which country your component orders are being produced in and the method of shipping.
- Be aware of supplier factory closures in holiday periods - Italy and France in particular.
- Don't assume that the factory knows that vital fabrics and trims have been delivered to them - warn them they are coming and get them to let you know when the items have arrived safely.
- If fabric or components are delivered direct from your suppliers to the factory, it is vital that the goods are checked for correctness and counted before the factory starts to use them.

Garment specification sheet

The Alliance has put together a garment specification sheet that will enable the factory, and the production staff in your studio, to know exactly what is supposed to happen with the construction and trims for each style.

This sheet should be completed and given to the factory whenever:

- A. You are requiring them to make a sample, or
- B. You issue them with a docket.

Best practice

- Create the garment specification sheet before you issue a sample or production docket. Attach a copy to the sample, the docket and keep a copy in your file attached to the costing sheet.
- If requirements or components change, don't forget to issue a new sheet to the factory.

The next page shows the garment specification sheet. It has been designed so that you can use it as many times as you like – simply make a photocopy of the sheet for every garment in your collection.



Garment specification sheet

Designer Name Here		Date	
Garment Description		Style No.	
Fabric 1	e.g. Red Silk Satin		
Fabric 2			
Fabric 3			
Seam Type	e.g. Open - satin bound		
Seam Allowance	e.g. 4mm		
Zip	e.g. 18cm invisible		
Fastenings	e.g. 4 24l buttons		
Stitches per inch	e.g. 15		
Thread Type	e.g. Gutermann 70		
Thread Colour			
Interlining			
Pad			
Shoulder Roll			
Binding			
Key Measurement 1			
Key Measurement 2			
Key Measurement 3			
Key Measurement 4			
Key Measurement 5			
Content Label			
Logo Label			
Swing Ticket			
Hanger			
Bag			
Sketch	Fabric Swatch		

Factory assessment checklist

The Alliance has put together a factory assessment checklist. This checklist should be used when visiting a new production unit to ensure that they meet your requirements in terms of their production ability, physical conditions and working practices.

Best practice

- Fill out the checklist for each production unit before entering into an agreement with them. It will allow you to compare one factory to another and make an informed decision on which one is best to produce your garments.

The next page shows the factory assessment checklist. It has been designed so that you can use it as many times as you like – simply make a photocopy of the checklist for every new factory that you go to visit.



Factory assessment checklist

Designer Name Here		Date	
Factory		Location	
Production Capacity		Lead Time	

Speciality:	Rating out of 10
Cleanliness	
Office	
Cutting	
Machining	
Toilets	
Staff Canteen/Eating Area	
Needle Policy and Records	
General level of clutter	
Physical Security (alarms etc.)	
Fire Extinguishers	
Fire Exits (unlocked etc.)	
Health and Safety (protective clothing etc.)	
Age of Equipment	
Special Equipment	
Pressing Capability	
Technical Ability	
Pattern Knowledge (alterations etc.)	
Ease of Access (loading/unloading)	
Payment Terms	
Pricing	
Working Relationship	
Ability to Communicate	
Willingness to sign Code of Practice	
Other	
Other	
Total Rating	

Workspace checklist

The Alliance has created a workspace checklist. This checklist should be used when looking for new premises as it's sometimes hard to know what you are looking for.

Use it to ensure that you take into consideration the specific requirements that you will need for your new studio.

Best Practice

- Use the checklist to create your own list of requirements that you definitely need and what would be useful when moving into a new location.

The next page shows the workspace checklist. It has been designed so that you can use it as many times as you like – simply make a photocopy of the checklist for every location that you go to view.



Workspace checklist

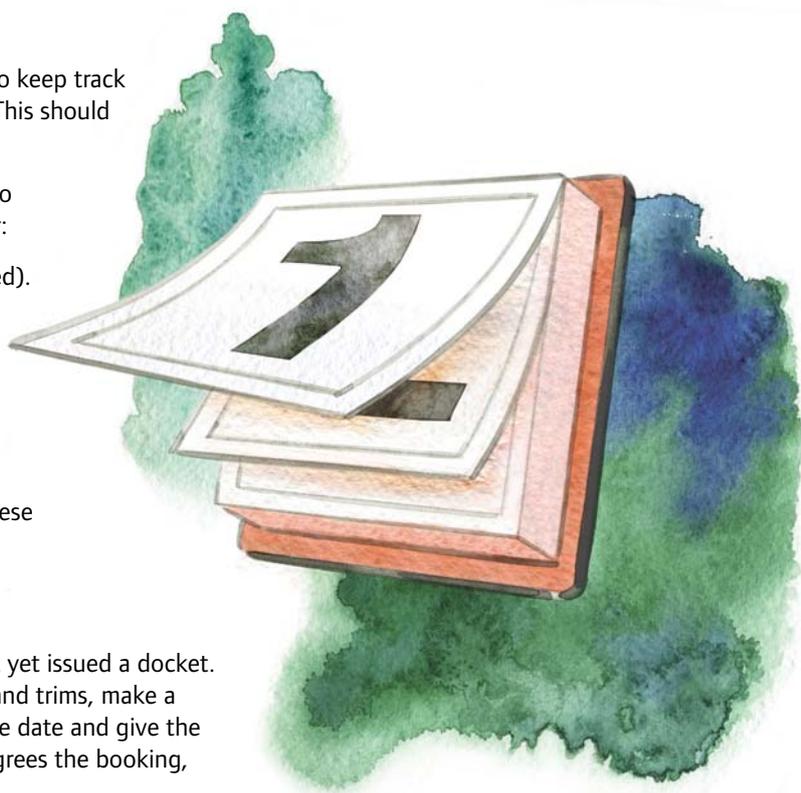
Criteria	Designer	Check
Location	15 minutes walk of tube	
Neighbours	See it as a plus if you're close to other young designers if it's your first or second studio	
Lease	Needs flexibility of a short-term lease because of rapid growth projections and need to expand to larger premises within a couple of years	
Rent	Cheap and fixed	
Environment	A clean shell which you can fit out to your own specification is desirable	
Internal lighting	Natural daylight is ESSENTIAL, plus plenty of ceiling lights for a good working environment	
Height	High ceilings desirable for double garment hanging and other storage	
Secure property	Essential	
Inclusive insurance policy	Useful	
3 phase electricity	Not required	
External lighting	Essential because of young and predominantly female workforce	
Parking space	Useful	
Car/van loading/unloading space	Essential	
Lift if not ground floor	Useful	
Kitchen facilities	Essential	
Ventilation	Useful	
Designer start-up (less than £250,000 p.a.)	400-600 sq.ft (36 to 54 sq.m.)	
Designer start-up (£250k to £1m p.a.)	Up to 1200 sq.ft (up to 108 sq.m.)	
Designer start-up (less than £2m p.a.)	2000 to 3000 sq.ft (180 to 270 sq.m.)	

Production schedule

The Alliance has created an Excel spreadsheet to help you to keep track of your orders and where they are in the production cycle. This should be used as part of your overall production management.

Despite the huge variety of garment types, when it comes to production management there are only three types of order:

- Orders not in work (where the docket has not been raised).
- Orders in work (where the docket has been raised and issued).
- Completed orders.



The Production schedule (Excel spreadsheet) is split into these three sections:

1. Orders not in Work

This section is for those sales orders for which you have not yet issued a docket. Once you have your sales orders and details of your fabric and trims, make a production booking with your factory, get them to agree the date and give the booking a sequential reference number. Once the factory agrees the booking, put it on the schedule under the section 'Not in Work'.

2. Orders in Work

This section is for those sales orders where you have all the fabric, trims, labels, etc. and you have been able to raise a docket. You should have previously given these orders a production booking, so when the docket is ready simply cut and paste the order line from the top section and put it into the bottom 'In Work' section – don't forget to fill in the docket number.

3. Completed Orders

When the order has been delivered by, or collected from the factory, then you must invoice it to your customer (once the quality has been checked, of course).

Take the relevant docket line from the 'In Work' section of the spreadsheet and cut and paste it into the 'Completed Orders' section. It will need editing because you do not need to show the production booking of this completed order. What you can show is the customer invoice number that you create when you send it to your customer. It is a great way of knowing that all your deliveries get invoiced and that no stock is sitting around your business costing you money.

In this way the production schedule allows to you to have one spreadsheet that encapsulates your whole order situation. At a glance you can see what is still to be put into production and what is still in progress. This will enable you to plan and discuss your production needs when you are in the factories.

Best practice

- Make a production booking for every style you intend to give a factory.
- Don't forget to keep the details updated as the situation changes.
- Move the orders from the top section to the bottom 'In Work' section as they become docket.
- Keep the fabric and trim delivery dates under constant monitoring and update the schedule as they get delivered.
- Notify the factory of changes.

Below is a copy of the production schedule. The Excel spreadsheet can be downloaded from: http://www.nesta.org.uk/fashion_toolkit

PRODUCTION SCHEDULE										
Sales Order Details						Factory Details				
Style	Fabric	Description	Customer	Qty	Delivery Date	Factory	Fabric Ready	Trim Ready	Production Booking	Docket Number
Not in Work										
PT2530	Silk Crepe	High Waisted Trs	Blues Ltd	15	20/07/2010	Brill Designs	15/06/2010	22/06/2010	P15	-
PS7523	Wool Gab	Pencil skirt	Grey Ltd	10	25/07/2010	Fab Clothing	14/06/2010	26/06/2010	P16	-
In Work										
PT2485	Silk Satin	Soft Trs	Blues Ltd	12	15/07/2010	Brill Designs	De'd 15/6	De'd 15/6	P10	256
PD1589	Tweed	Shift dress	White Ltd	10	22/07/2010	New Designs Ltd	De'd 18/6	De'd 18/6	P11	257
Completed Orders										
Style	Fabric	Description	Customer	Qty	Delivery Date	Factory	Docket Number	Date Delivered	Quantity	Customer Invoice
P85641	Silk Satin	Fitted Blouse	Green Ltd	12	15/07/2010	Brill Designs	210	01/07/2010	12	Inv 237

Womenswear fashion calendar opportunities

This calendar has emerged as high-end designer fashion has followed the high street in acknowledging that the idea of people renewing their entire wardrobes between seasons is outdated. Much of the high street relies on more than eight drops of new merchandise a year. Larger high-end brands produce at least four collections each year. High-end fashion designers therefore have an opportunity to increase their sales as a result of the continuous loop of the fashion calendar. We have prepared this Toolkit to give you advice and guidance on making the most of this opportunity.



Four-collections per year

Launching four instead of the traditional two collections each year has become core business for many of the designer labels based in the UK. In June 2011, over 30 London based high-end designer companies launched Pre-Collections/Resort Collections in Paris.

The introduction of more collections enables them to provide new, full-price merchandise in store at a time when the 'past season' mainline collection is discounted in the sales, and prior to the new season mainline deliveries which will start again after the sales in August and January.

The four season high-end calendar includes:

- Autumn/Winter Mainline, which continues to be delivered to stores in July to September.
- Spring/Summer Mainline, which continues to be delivered January to March.

- New is Pre-Collection (or Cruise/Resort) delivered in October before the December sales start.
- Also new is Pre-Collection (also called ‘High Summer’ in the US, but is more a Pre-Winter) delivered in May, before the June sales start.

Designer businesses need to have the resources and infrastructure in place to develop and launch these two additional collections each year. Increasingly, the emerging designer labels based in London are looking at this opportunity as they grow their businesses. Typically, they will have exceeded the micro-business threshold for the sector (of £250,000 turnover p.a.). Many will have sales in excess of £1 million p.a. They will have a supportive design and production management team and access to more selling opportunities outside the traditional Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter Fashion Weeks. Marketing costs are fairly modest (compared with catwalk launches of the mainline), and the selling times are when buyers and press are in Milan or Paris to see the Menswear ready-to-wear and before the couture collections.

Why is Pre-Collection important?

Pre-Collections and Resort Collections are the seasons where buyers are now placing the majority of their budget:

- Selfridges place 70 per cent of their budget on Pre-Collection.¹
- Matches place 60 per cent of their budget on Pre-Collection.²

This only leaves 30-40 per cent of the budget available to spend at the traditional twice yearly tradeshows in London, Paris, Milan and New York which are the main routes to market for most London-based high-end fashion design businesses.

What does this mean for your production management team?

The four season calendar provides a continuous loop of year-round opportunity for product development, selling, production and delivery to stores.

Collection title	(1) Design and sampling activity	(2) Selling period	(3) Production activity	(4) Delivery to stores
Autumn/Winter	December to February	February to March	May to August	July to September
Pre-Collection OR Cruise/Resort	April to May	June	August to October	End October to end November
Spring/Summer	July to September	September to October	November to January	January to March
Pre-Collection called ‘High Summer’ in the US, but is more a Pre-Winter	September to November	December to January	February to April	Mid to end May

Your business will need to be well managed, resourced, and financed to launch into these additional seasons.

- **Management** – you will be working to tight critical paths within your team and supply chain to ensure more deadlines are met throughout the year. Any slippage in timings will impact negatively on the next season. It will also impact on your relationship with stores and suppliers/manufacturers. All research and design needs to be completed early in the design and sampling period shown in the table. If it slides too much into this period it will greatly reduce the time available to source the right fabrics.
- **Resources** – you will need staff with clearly defined roles to support each of the design and sampling, sales and delivery, and production function. You will need to develop management systems to track progress on a weekly basis. Leadership and management skills in your business become essential.
- **Finances** – while there are opportunities to increase your sales and cashflow by moving into the four season calendar, it will initially strain your cashflow with the additional requirements for funding sampling, marketing costs and production. So ensure you have additional funding in place to support the first few seasons.

What are the characteristics of Pre-Collection?

- New, fresh merchandise, signalling important trends that will be coming in later in the season.
- Links the look, weight and handle of one mainline collection to the next.
- Usually maintain the quality of the mainline, but are more central pieces, not usually as intricate and therefore slightly easier to manufacture.
- Often bought in higher volumes.
- Should be cohesive with the main collection, so any remaining pieces do not look out of place in the store.
- Fulfil customers' desire to wear clothes the day they buy them, not later in the season when the weather is more extreme.
- More focused on separates and inter-seasonal so they can be worn in different climates.
- Resort collections, which hit stores during the all-important Christmas holiday shopping season, are a growing part of designer businesses as consumers move toward styles they can wear year-round.
- Resort clothes also spend the longest time on the full-price selling floor, typically until mid-winter when Spring merchandise moves in.

Other sources of information and advice

- Centre for Fashion Enterprise are launching a new Leadership and Management training programme in Autumn 2011 www.fashion-enterprise.com

1. Carven release their first ever pre-collection* | Julia Robson | 07 July 2011 | Telegraph.co.uk

2. Drapers | 22 July 2011

Quality control

Achieving a good quality standard is not just about having a good factory – although having good manufacturers is part of the battle. Your sales orders are won through hard work and are much too important to risk by being laissez-faire about quality and timeliness. Retailers frequently cancel orders if they do not meet their quality expectations. It is therefore the responsibility of the designer to take the initiative for the whole quality process. How you work with your factories will ultimately be the deciding factor in satisfying your customers' quality requirements.

In the first place much of the discipline and technique involved in achieving high quality standards stem from the designer – as how the requirements are formulated and communicated to the factory can have a direct impact on the quality of your production garments. The garments must be able to be manufactured and the product and quality requirement must be suitable for the selected factory. It's no good expecting beautiful tailored trousers from a dress factory – no matter how good the factory is.

Selecting the right factory is a crucial part of the quality process – the first step is to think and be very clear about what you want.

To achieve a good quality standard, you need to:

- Choose the right factory for the product.
- Be clear and concise about your expectations.
- Communicate regularly and constructively.
- Develop a good working relationship.

Applying a standard

- Once production starts, visit the factory after cutting and when the first garments have just gone onto the machines. Get the factory to tell you when they are close to finishing the first one so that you can go and check the quality.



- Visit the factory regularly while they are producing for you – even if you only have a cup of tea with the boss. It is so much easier to achieve what you want if you have a good working relationship with the factory.
- If you don't like something the factory is doing, tell them right away and then listen carefully to their response. They may have a really good reason for doing it or they may not even be aware that it is happening. They may also have ideas about how to overcome a difficulty or they may just not 'get it'.
- Nevertheless you need to keep up-to-date with what they are doing so that if necessary you can quickly make changes.
- Use the combined Specification Sheet/Quality Control Checklist to tick off the making features that you specified to the factory earlier at the sample stage. If there are discrepancies, record them in the comments box and get the factory to acknowledge the discrepancy, ideally by initialling the comment, to signify their awareness of the situation.

Troubleshooting

Fabric issues:

If the factory reports fabric issues, it is vital that they are dealt with promptly. If they are laying up the fabric and encounter problems (shading, flaws, shortages etc.) the first thing to do is find out whether the fabric is usable or not.

- The factory may be anxious to continue cutting – they will not want their cutting table blocked while the issue is resolved – but be careful to personally check that the problem is marginal before you let them carry on.
- Don't forget that if the fabric is cut or laid up and then found to be unusable, the fabric supplier is highly unlikely to replace it or compensate you. It is usually too late to claim for fabric problems if the garment is already made.
- There is no better way to see the problem than to visit the factory yourself.
- If the factory is cutting out damages then ensure they keep the cut-out pieces safely, as the fabric producer will want to see them if you are claiming compensation.

Unsatisfactory garments:

- If the garments are not coming up to your expectations then how do you deal with it? If, despite your clear instructions, constant communication and frequent visits, the production is not going to meet the retailer's standards, what do you do?
- The first thing is to get the factory to acknowledge the issue. Unless you can both agree that the problem exists in the first place, you will not be able to solve it.
- Ask the factory how to fix it.
- Get more time from the customer so that you can give the factory a reasonable timeframe to work within. This is particularly important if the garments need major surgery.

- Get the factory to rectify one sample so that there is a standard to work to.
- Again, visit frequently to ensure consistency.

Resolving a dispute

In the eventuality that your troubleshooting efforts have failed then you are in the difficult position of having to resolve a dispute.

You have bought and paid for the fabric and trims. You have incurred expenses producing patterns and visiting the factory and the order is still in danger of being cancelled because even if the issue can be rectified it might be too late for the customer. Obviously you need to avoid getting into this position in the first place, but now you're in it what do you do?

Your options are limited:

1. Negotiate with the factory and customer to achieve a mutually beneficial compromise.
2. Sue the factory for the costs you have incurred and lost gross profit.
3. Write off the garments, the situation and start again.

It may well be a cliché but, when it comes to garment quality, it is definitely true that 'prevention is better than cure'.

The knack of having no, or few, quality issues comes down to the key points outlined below:

- Work hard to build a relationship.
- Be clear about letting the factory know what you expect in the way of quality and logistics.
- Communicate frequently and in person at the factory.
- Be up-front and prompt about voicing any concerns.
- Give the factory feedback.

The next page shows the quality control checklist. It has been designed so that you can use it as many times as you like – simply make a photocopy of the sheet for each time you want to use it.

Quality control and garment specification checklist

Designer Name Here		Date		
Garment Description		Style No.		Check
Fabric	e.g. Red Silk Satin			✓
Seam Type	e.g. Open - satin bound			✓
Seam Allowance	e.g. 4mm			✓
Zip	e.g. 18cm invisible			✓
Fastenings	e.g. 4 24l buttons			✓
Stitches per inch	e.g. 15			✓
Thread Type	e.g. Gutermann 70			✓
Thread Colour				✓
Interlining				✓
Pad				✓
Key Measurement 1				✓
Key Measurement 2				
Key Measurement 3				
Key Measurement 4				
Key Measurement 5				
Content Label				
Logo Label				
Swing Ticket				
Hanger				
Bag				
Other				
Other				
Comments				

Finding a production unit/manufacturer

“I have my sample collection I’ve sold from and I now have orders from 20 stores, some of them high profile – but I just can’t seem to find anywhere who can make these garments to the standard I need them to be who will not charge me a crazy price.”

Designer

For any designer, a key to success is having access to a reliable and professional manufacturer or production unit. But many young or new designers are struggling to find manufacturers who have the skills and facilities to make their product. The high-end designer fashion industry (which includes both designers and manufacturers), is small and specialist. As a result, information tends to be shared in a very informal way, often by word-of-mouth. In fact, some designers are reluctant to share their ‘good’ manufacturers for fear that it might affect their own production. This means that it can be hard to get the right names and contacts for manufacturers unless you are already established. Designers are often forced to draw upon their own informal networks as there is no reliable source of information.

Part of the problem is that manufacturers don’t generally devote time to marketing themselves, due to lack of time, low levels of IT skills and a lack of available finance. Together, these factors make it difficult for emerging designers to find manufacturers, except through referrals. Many manufacturers – particularly those who are older and have been in business for a long time – may lack even basic IT skills, and therefore do not have any online presence. This is problematic for young designers used to using the internet for information who are struggling to find a production unit.

Even when details of manufacturers are available, designers often find it hard to tell what standard of garments the manufacturer can produce; for example, can they deal with a specific fabric type, or do they have the skills or machinery to give a particular finish?



Unfortunately in most cases the manufacturer's skill and proficiency is only really made clear once production has started. This can end in high costs for both the designer and the manufacturer if there are production problems and the garments need to be re-made. In addition there are sometimes discrepancies between designers and manufacturers in terms of what each considers a 'luxury garment', depending on the knowledge and experience of each party.

It's not just emerging designers that struggle with sourcing a manufacturer; many established designers also find it difficult to source a production unit in the UK that can meet an increase in demand or grow with them. For designers who are more established, producing larger order sizes can be a problem, as many of the UK's high-end manufacturers are small operations. Designers don't always know where to go to find a factory that can produce larger orders. Often they will end up continuing to get sampling done in the UK, but will send production overseas.

Currently there is no single directory, either print or web-based, that has a comprehensive list of high-end manufacturers. Likewise, for those manufacturers that are actively seeking new designers, there is no obvious place to go to find them. The situation is made worse by the reluctance of designers to share contacts with each other. In reality the sharing of contacts is mutually beneficial to designers and manufacturers alike. If a manufacturer doesn't have sufficient clients, they might be forced to close, which ultimately doesn't help any of the designers.

Top solutions:

- Database of manufacturers, including details of specialist skills.
- IT training for manufacturers to enable them to use database, search engines etc. and create their own webpages.
- Cross-sector forums/events to bring designers and manufacturers together.
- Cross-Industry Factory Assessment Criteria.
- Cross-Industry Quality Requirement Criteria.

Relevant sections from the Fashion Toolkit:

- Code of Practice.
- Factory Assessment Checklist.

Production volumes and costings

“I have designers sending me their ‘production’ orders which can be as little as 10-12 pieces across five sizes – I have to cut all these individually and the machinists only ever make a couple each so they never get used to the style. They take just as long to make as the sample but the designers still expect me to give them a lower price for production and get upset when I tell them I can’t.”

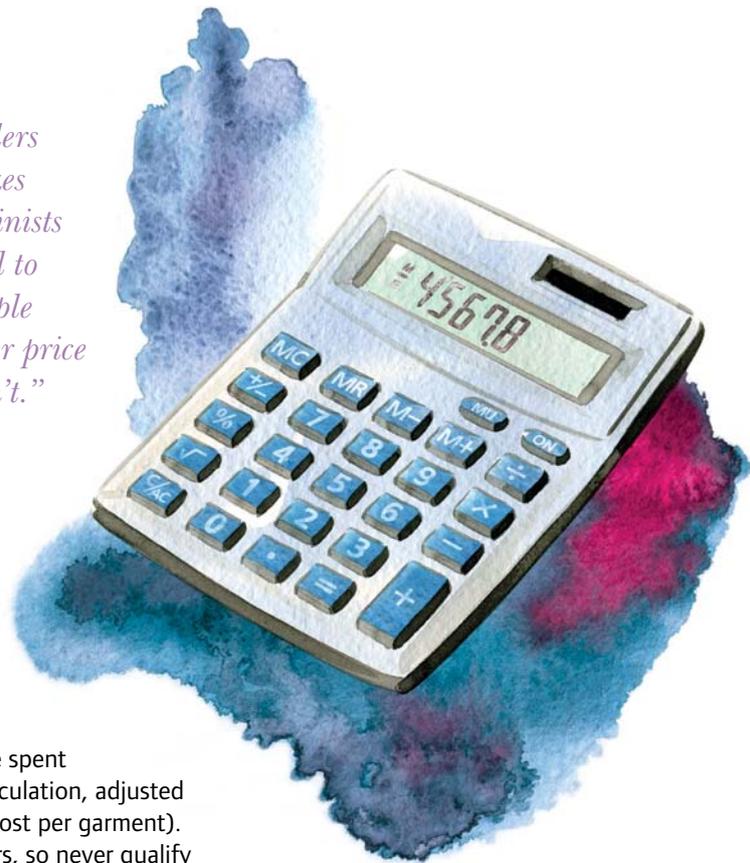
Manufacturer

Manufacturers and designers have very different ideas about ideal order sizes. Most manufacturers would like to be making orders of 50+ pieces, but in reality designers often order much smaller numbers (often fewer than 20 pieces). It’s therefore useful for both manufacturers and designers to understand why order sizes are such an issue for each party.

Generally, manufacturers calculate garment costings on the time spent producing the sample. Production costings are based on this calculation, adjusted on a sliding scale according to volumes (higher volumes, lower cost per garment). But many smaller designer businesses only ever have small orders, so never qualify for the lower production rates, and exclusivity of the product is part of the appeal of high-end clothing. Manufacturers aren’t always aware of the market position of young designers: they are placing small orders because they are just starting out, not because they are giving large orders to overseas manufacturers.

Conversely, it’s helpful for designers to look carefully at their order numbers, and to get these to work with the costing system used by manufacturers. For instance, it could be worth making a few extra garments if that volume would mean they qualify for lower production costs. They also need to be aware that many manufacturers are already forced to produce a wide range of docket sizes and juggle small orders with larger ones just to keep the workflow constant through the unit.

Designers with more industry experience are often able to give a guide price. In some instances, manufacturers will work to that price, adapting the make of the garment



accordingly. Established designers are also more likely to repeat styles (for instance, in a new colourway), which means that both designer and manufacturer know what the costs are likely to be for a given style.

Top solutions:

- Better understanding between designers and manufacturers of their business size, commercial pressures etc.
- Clear price list presented to designer at start of sampling process which outlines production costs on sliding scale.
- Better analysis by designers of styles in their range plans so that they can capitalise on sales on certain styles to achieve higher order numbers.
- Reduction in sizing spread.
- Designers could hold 'friends and family' sales (often known as Private Order events), at reasonable rates, of their collections to boost order numbers.

Additional information can be found in:

- Resource Guide http://www.nesta.org.uk/areas_of_work/creative_industries/fashion/fashion_toolkit/assets/features/resource_guide

Trims – choice, procurement and timely delivery

“We often find that designers send us incomplete docket for a style. They will send us fabric and lining, but no zips – and say that the zips will come later, or all the components and the wrong fusing. Then they expect that because the fabric has arrived we should start the docket – but often we can’t and this jeopardises the agreed production delivery date.”

Manufacturer

Trims can cause problems for both designers and manufacturers if designers plan their production badly and misjudge the lead times for delivery of fabric and all other components (buttons, zips, labels etc.). When placing an order, time also needs to be factored in for additional processes such as sending patterns out for grading. Too often, designers are only thinking about the final delivery date, not the whole critical path for production.

Incomplete or poorly timed delivery of components to factories can cause a lot of production problems. Designers sometimes assume that because factories have the fabric and patterns, they will be able to start work, but factories will not usually start work until all components have been delivered. Trims often have just as long order lead times as fabrics, which many designers who are just starting out don’t seem to be aware of. Sometimes, what seems like the smallest part of the garment – for example the sizing or composition label – can delay the finishing of a garment by weeks.

Designers also need to be sure that they are using the most suitable trims or components for their garments, e.g. using very heavy zips on a light chiffon garment, or ordering the



wrong length of zips and expecting the manufacturer to alter them (which takes time and costs money). Even fusings, interlinings and other internal, structural components can cause production hold-ups, although some manufacturers keep stocks of fusings in order to avoid further delays. Again, care needs to be taken ordering the correct components prior to production starting.

Many designers struggle to find good, reliable trimming suppliers within the UK, particularly if they are only ordering small volumes. Some designers even continue to buy trims from retail outlets (e.g. John Lewis) rather than wholesalers, which means they are buying more expensive and often less technically advanced trim. Likewise, manufacturers are increasingly finding it harder to source trims in the UK, and many end up ordering them from Italy or France.

Top solutions:

- Clear packing lists detailing all components relating to style.
- Effective communication between designers and manufacturers regarding timing of the delivery of components.
- Agreement of when the actual make of the docket will start.
- Better education around suitability of trimmings – involving close discussion with the manufacturer on the best/most product applicable trim.
- Database with details of trimmings/components stockists.
- Familiarise themselves with Seasonal Gantt Charts/Fashion Critical Paths.

Relevant sections from the Fashion Toolkit:

- Production Schedule.
- Critical Path Management.
- Production Management.

Finance

“Buyers demand 30-day payment terms, my fabric mills are pro-forma payment and the manufacturing units are cash on delivery – sometimes I can be months in the red at the bank – I just don’t know how many seasons I have to sustain this for.”

Designer

Many designers find it difficult to obtain any sort of credit agreements with manufacturers, and this puts a massive strain on the financial part of their businesses. Cash-on-delivery is the normal arrangement with UK manufacturers, compared with Italy, for example, where it is usually 30 days, even if it is a new client.

When credit is given in the UK, this is usually limited to 7-10 days and is almost entirely dependent upon an established relationship between the designer and the manufacturer, which usually takes several seasons to develop. But even this is no guarantee of credit – some larger design companies have ongoing relationships with manufacturers, and still don’t get credit. The current unstable economic climate has made many manufacturers very wary of giving credit to any companies. Manufacturers also feel that some young designers mismanage their finances – spending large sums of money on shows, but not paying for goods on time.

For many designers, payment of production costs is way down their list of priorities, so they end up using credit cards, or expensive finance agreements, to pay for production at the last minute. Better planning could help prevent this.

It’s also helpful for designers to understand why UK manufacturers can be reluctant to give credit. They usually pay their staff on a weekly basis, so need constant, steady payments rather than large sums at the end of a season. Manufacturers themselves often find it very hard to get credit from banks, and most have had the experience of getting ‘burned’ by designers who have collected goods and never paid for them as their companies have liquidated. For small manufacturing units, perhaps with fewer than ten machinists, a late payment can mean the difference between paying staff and having to



let staff go. Obviously, this impacts negatively on the whole sector as it means there are even fewer places for designers to get their garments made.

Top solutions:

- Designers need to plan large, regular seasonal payments into their cashflows in order to be prepared for them.
- Designers need to stick to agreed payment terms and if not possible then communicate this as soon as possible to the manufacturer.
- Both Designers and Manufacturers need access to solid financial advice.

Relevant sections from the Fashion Toolkit:

- Code of Practice.
- Factory Assessment Checklist.
- Production Management.

Terms and conditions

“I have placed my production order, sent all my fabric and trims to the factory and haven’t heard anything from the manufacturer for the last week although I have been trying to call them – it’s like radio silence and I’m really worried. This is my whole season at stake and I feel like there is nothing I can do.”

Designer



Contracts are not widely used within the sector. Although many designers and manufacturers don’t feel that they are necessary, a written contract will become invaluable if a dispute does arise. For instance, if issues such as ownership of goods and terms of payment can be set out before the work starts, it is less likely for to be confusion and ill-feeling if a problem subsequently arises. Terms and Conditions can also agree delivery dates and agree discounts for late delivery, which helps ensure late delivery is less of a problem.

Late delivery is a common problem, and this can damage a designer’s relationship with customers. Although there are sometimes clear reasons for a delay (e.g. changes to the pattern, late delivery of fabric or components), designers sometimes are not even sure why the delay has occurred. Many small designer businesses have had their order ‘bumped’ when a manufacturer gives priority to a designer with an order of a higher financial value.

If both parties have already agreed the Terms and Conditions of their working arrangement then dispute resolution can be much more straightforward. However, it can sometimes be difficult for smaller designers to get manufacturers to sign written agreements.

Companies that do make use of contracts say that they have rarely had reason to actually refer to them in a dispute, but it helps to keep the relationship professional and businesslike. If contracts are to be effective, there needs to be mutual agreement

of Terms and Conditions between designers and manufacturers. There should not be documentation that one party 'forces' upon the other.

Top solutions:

- Increased use of contracts throughout the sector.
- Mutually agreed Terms and Conditions.

Relevant sections from the Fashion Toolkit:

- Code of Practice.
- Production Management.

Reserving production space

“A designer came to me six weeks ago and booked space for 200 units for the end of this month, so I hired another machinist to help – then the docket arrived two weeks late, and for 100pcs less, so I ended up over-staffed and still having to pay wages.”

Manufacturer

Production space needs to be carefully planned and booked by designers as the late cancellation of a production slot can cause major problems for manufacturers. If the space hasn't been booked, it is impossible for manufacturers to plan their workflow and ensure that they have the correct number of staff available at the right time. In some instances, factories have had to lay off staff because production space has been cancelled very late on, making it impossible for the slot to be used by another designer.

Often these problems are caused by buyers who place their orders very late, which makes it impossible for designers to confirm their orders with factories. But sometimes it is due to designers not planning effectively.

If any changes are made to docket sizes, they need to be stated clearly and confirmed in writing (for instance, in an email). Similarly, if the docket is increased, any changes to size ratios need to be put into writing and designers need to ensure that additional fabric and components can be delivered in time for the factory to complete the order. Both the designer and the manufacturer need to agree new practicable delivery dates to take into account larger amount of garments to produce.

Manufacturers can be reluctant to take production bookings if they have been let down, but this makes it difficult for larger designers to plan effectively and be assured of make-



time for larger docket. So it is in the interests of both parties to stay professional about booking space and for all designers to keep their factories informed of any changes as it affects the industry as a whole.

Top solutions:

- Better communication between designer and manufacturer on order timelines.
- Buyers to understand importance of placing orders early enough to allow for production.
- Booking/production online reservation system.

Relevant sections from the Fashion Toolkit:

- Code of Practice.
- Production Schedule.
- Critical Path Management.
- Production Management.

Patterns

“... we often get patterns with pieces missing, patterns that don't correspond to the toiles, samples with labels all over them that we then have to amend on the pattern before we can start the production docket...”

Manufacturer

Both designers and manufacturers report that problems concerning patterns frequently disrupt the production process.

One of the most common problems is that patterns sent do not correspond with samples or toiles. This tends to be the case when adjustments have been made to the sample but not carried through to the pattern. Confusion is most likely to arise when there are lots of notes given explaining the amendments, without the sample reflecting those changes. Pattern discrepancies often arise when too many different people work on them (freelance pattern cutters, interns etc.) with no one single person responsible for checking the patterns before they are sent to the factory. Many manufacturers feel that they are simply left to resolve these pattern issues – although most point out that they will charge designers for this additional work. In most instances designers are happy for trusted manufacturers to make these amendments. However, where there is no established working relationship, this can be more problematic.

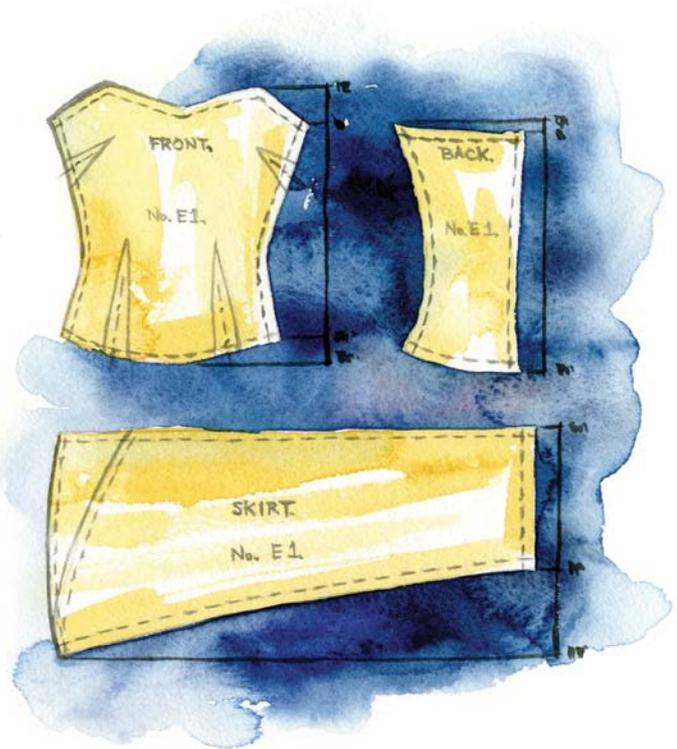
Other common issues with patterns include openings that are not large enough and incorrect patterns being sent for grading, resulting in all grades being incorrect. Problems like this cost time and money to rectify but are easy to avoid.

Top solutions:

- Rigorous checking of patterns prior to them being graded and sent to manufacturers.
- Designer/production manager to look at pattern together with manufacturer prior to the start of production.
- Inclusion of measurement specs for production.

Relevant sections from the Fashion Toolkit:

- Code of Practice.
- Garment Specification.
- Production Schedule.



Fabric and yarn

“I placed my fabric order with a mill over 60 days ago and got a confirmed delivery date from them and it’s now seven days after the delivery date and the mill is telling me that it’s going to be another seven days... my manufacturer has already given my production space to another designer as they can’t hold space for me any longer.”

Designer



Many high-end designers source their fabrics from specialist mills in Italy, but late deliveries from Italy are a very common experience. This has a knock-on effect on the whole production process and in many cases there is pressure from the manufacturer when it is not technically the designer’s fault. Designers need to be aware of working practices in Italy; when mills are closed, when there are public holidays, and so on, as this can have an impact on when orders can be shipped. Mills will tend to prioritise larger orders from international companies, so small orders can then be affected. Knitwear producers have similar experiences as designers often source their yarn from Italy.

Digitally printed fabrics bring with them particular problems. Designers are finding that the first batch is often a write-off as the colours are incorrect. White marks on the fabric and off-register printing are also problems, rendering a fabric unusable. The fabric then has to be reordered, which costs both manufacturer and designer money and time.

Fabric choice needs careful consideration as a fabric that is very delicate or requires a lot of manipulation (i.e. block fusing or sewing with tissue) can make production slow or raise unexpected problems. Manufacturers often misjudge the time it takes to work with more delicate types of fabric such as silk or fine jersey when they are not used to working with it. Designers need to be wary of placing fabrics with units who have little experience or the suitable machinery for producing particular fabrics, but this can be avoided by visiting the factory before placing the order.

Fabrics often arrive direct to manufacturing units where the designer then relies on the manufacturer to check the fabric quality and colour. This can be a problem as designers and manufacturers may have very different tolerances for fabric quality. Designers sometimes return to find that the whole docket has been made in a fabric that is faulty or

the incorrect colour. It is useful for designers to provide swatches of what the production fabric should look like, as well as confirmation of the colour that has been approved. It is also imperative that the designer or production manager visits the unit over this time to approve production fabrics, unless they strongly trust the judgement of their manufacturer.

Production mistakes can also occur when designers fail to take into consideration the behaviour of a fabric when pressed and steamed in the final finishing process. Few manufacturers are given measurement specifications for production, meaning that if there was fabric shrinkage, there is no way of checking the correct size of garments. A simple spec sheet could help prevent this.

Top solutions:

- Better planning of lead times to take fabric delivery into consideration.
- Agreed fabric Quality Control procedures between designer and manufacturer.

Relevant sections from the Fashion Toolkit:

- Production Management.
- Quality Control.

Production samples

“We very rarely get given a pre-production sample that doesn't involve me spending a couple of hours and several phonecalls to the designer trying to make sure we have accounted for all the changes before we start making the docket.”

Manufacturer

Seal samples can be expensive and time-consuming for designers to produce. Designers may need to pass samples on to PR companies for selling or press. In some cases they are sent out while still in development but with lots of notes to explain the changes to be made. Larger companies are more likely to have 'duplicate' samples (for instance, in an alternative colour-way), as they have the budget, but for small companies, producing duplicates is costly and labour-intensive.

However, most manufacturers will stress the importance of having an approved sample before production begins. Many will insist on making a pre-production sample in the correct production fabric if they did not make the original sample, as this allows them to assess exactly how the garment needs to be made.

Ideally, any amendments made to samples that are going to be used as production samples need to be minimal, and the amendments should be clear both in the spec sheet and in the pattern.



Top solutions:

- Designers should try to make PPS samples and cost this into their collection.
- If that is not possible, designers should make any notes clear and concise and should visit the manufacturer to talk through the sample.

Relevant sections from the Fashion Toolkit:

- Production Management.
- Quality Control.

Quality control procedures

“I know that we should be doing Quality Control checks on all the garments that come out of the unit but I don’t really know what I should be looking for... is there anywhere I can get a checklist that I can use together with my manufacturing unit to make sure we are both working to the same standard?”

Designer

Quality Control (QC) is incredibly important, but it needs to be applied rigorously throughout the industry by both designers and manufacturers in order for the standard of products to be maintained.

Buyers are not happy about garments being delivered to stores that are faulty, and the reputation of a designer will be damaged if this happens. To make matters worse, at this point it will usually be too late to return the goods to the manufacturer, so the designer is left with faulty stock and a stockist who is short of garments.

However, if QC checks have been carried out throughout the production process, such problems are usually avoidable. Good QC practice is when a designer or their production manager visits the factory frequently during production. Although some designers may be concerned that this is time-consuming, it means that any QC issues arising can be rectified during the production process rather than at the end when it may be more difficult to resolve.

The question of where garments are QC-ed once they have been completed can also become important. Some manufacturers will take the approach that once the garments have left their premises, they are no longer their ‘problem’ and may be unwilling to do further work. Clarification of this may be necessary for dispute resolution and so it is useful for this to be discussed before production begins.



Top solutions:

- Creation and application of a standard.
- Clear discussion of responsibility for faulty goods if no Terms and Conditions have been signed.

Relevant sections from the Fashion Toolkit:

- Garment Specification.
- Production Management.
- Quality Control.