Delivering on PLM's PROMISE

Breaking down silos and opening more efficient communication, the fashion industry finds many benefits from cross-functional use of product lifecycle management (PLM) technology.

PRESENTED BY

Yunique Solutions
A Gerber Technology Company

When PLM technology first arrived on the apparel scene, it often was perceived as a solution specifically for product development. Today's most successful implementations prove PLM is capable of delivering a much greater value proposition across the fashion enterprise.

This report focuses on three realms where PLM is having a positive impact, including design/development, sourcing and the executive suite.

PLM in Design: Greater Functionality for Creative Teams

PLM got its start within design and development departments and continues to win favor with creative teams, especially as the technology evolves to appeal to their visually driven work methods. PLM software now delivers richer graphic capabilities, giving designers and developers intuitive ways to capture and organize pictures, fabrics and other market research that serves as the source of their inspiration.

The latest generation of PLM also features stronger integration to 2-D and 3-D functionality of CAD software, including texture mapping and 3-D draping. "Now PLM really pulls in all of that integration from the very beginning of the design process into a technology that's visual," said Enrico Lara, president and CEO of Hokura, a consultancy specializing in product design, development and the global supply chain.

Lara said PLM is connecting the dots between "conceptualization to visualization and ultimately to technical specifications, tech packs and then production."

Tighter integration between PLM solutions and the widely used Adobe Illustrator design software also appeals to creative departments. Rick Ludolph, founder and president of the management consulting firm Productive Solutions LLC, said PLM software vendors have devoted considerable resources to building this connection between their tools and Illustrator, with strong results.

"The bi-directional flow of information between Illustrator and PLM enables designers to work in Illustrator where they're very comfortable but at the same time con-

tribute images and information to the product record that is part of the PLM solution," he said. "That has been a big breakthrough in terms of visibility."

Designers also value PLM's reduction of redundant data entry. Specialty retailer Aeropostale, for example, is using PLM to communicate the design team's pre-positioning fabric needs to production counterparts. Sharing this information within PLM not only gives vendors an opportunity to start researching fabrics options but also eliminates the need for Aeropostale's designers to re-enter the fabric specifications into another system or via e-mail at a later date.

"The information we are sharing with production can be pulled as a report with a higher level of accuracy, while contributing to design's final tech pack completion," said Jessica McDermott, design director, men's knits, Aeropostale. "It's in a system so we're one step closer to the final result, which is a tech pack, and we're streamlining our workload rather than adding extra duplicative work."

PLM in Sourcing: More Efficient, Consistent Communication

Aeropostale, which implemented Gerber Technology's YuniquePLM company-wide in June 2013, is reducing the margin for error in the data flowing within its four walls, and between its headquarters and global suppliers.

"Before, incorrect information, including fabric specifications, was often put into our Excel tech packs, causing a series of back-and-forth e-mails between design and production to clarify the situation," McDermott said. "PLM helps streamline that process because designers can use drop-down menus from the materials libraries we create."

By working from the same library of information and referring to the same specifications within the PLM system, Aeropostale's designers, sourcing team and international vendors are speaking a much more consistent language. "Because PLM is an organized, structured system, it allows us to be consistent with how we're communicating," said Gillian Maser, senior product manager for corporate initiatives at Aeropostale. "All of the information is in one place within the tech packs we're passing to vendors, so our pro-

"PLM is a combination of people, process and technology. You have 100 percent transparency and visibility at any time into where the product is in its lifecycle — at the sales level, the line manager level and the executive level. Having that visibility allows us to make better, smarter, informed decisions on a timely basis to react to the current market trends and economic variables," says Enrico Lara, President & CEO, Hokura.

duction partners know where to look for certain types of data. It's always going to be in the same place."

The retailer's use of pre-set materials libraries also has enabled internal departments to cross-leverage raw materials more easily, Maser said. "Having a unified library that is easy to search reduces needless re-development of materials that might already exist," she said.

PLM also is helping fashion firms communicate with global vendors about creative direction much sooner in the product lifecycle. Aeropostale, for instance, uses the technology to share information as early as the pre-positioning phase, when designers start fleshing out plans for the colors and patterns they want to feature in buy samples. This early data-sharing gives sourcing teams and global producers precious time to perform preliminary costing and to start searching for the right textiles — in essence, to start turning the design vision into practical reality.

"If the fabric sourcing teams and garment sourcing teams have a better idea of what the designer is trying to make or what's in the designer's mind, they have a better idea of where to source the fabric, how it needs to be constructed and potentially the initial cost of the finished garment," said Lara. "It all plays an integral part of the overall product lifecycle."

Likewise, Ludolph observed: "There are no barriers between development and sourcing now because by using PLM, sourcing has early access to what's coming down the pike. Often they not only have access but it's a very collaborative process. This interaction between design, development, sourcing and the supply chain opens the opportunity to drive unnecessary cost out of the process and to streamline the process, from concept to consumer."

For example, the sourcing team might identify a potential production bottleneck associated with a style's specified construction or trim and be able to recommend alternatives. "That early action is really important because it gives companies the speed, the accuracy and the on-time deliveries everyone requires today," he said.

PLM in Executive Leadership: Enhanced Visibility

Finally, there is the growing role for PLM as a critical tool for the executive suite. Company leaders are turning to PLM for real-time status of products in the pipeline. This intelligence is instrumental for informed decision-making, facilitating executives in:

- marketing products effectively
- making the right allocations
- driving optimal revenue
- delivering profits

"The bi-directional flow of information between Illustrator and PLM enables designers to work in Illustrator where they're very comfortable but at the same time contribute images and information to the product record that is part of the PLM solution. That has been a big breakthrough in terms of visibility," says **Rick Ludolph, President, Productive Solutions LLC**

"The primary concerns at the executive level are profitability, market strategy, market share and penetration, and control of operational expenses. Executives also must protect their brand's integrity and value proposition with consumers," said Lara. "PLM is a combination of people, process and technology. You have 100 percent transparency and visibility at any time into where the product is in its lifecycle — at the sales level, the line manager level and the executive level. Having that visibility allows us to make better, smarter, informed decisions on a timely basis to react to the current market trends and economic variables."

PLM delivers this visibility to executives in the form of dashboard tools as well as alerts when there are issues brewing. "The industry today is very competitive, very fast-paced, and there's very little margin for error," Ludolph said. "Executives cannot afford to be surprised by something falling behind, not getting done or not showing up on time. The fact that PLM can give all of the stakeholders accurate and up-to-date information is crucial. It's one of the things PLM has promised and one of the things PLM delivers: making sure everyone is working off the same page."

Aeropostale is among retailers planning to make the most of this new level of performance. "We have a very positive viewpoint of PLM, and our implementation has gone really well," concluded Maser. "We're looking forward to what the future brings."

Today's PLM technology is built for fashion retailers and brands to leverage across their organizations, from design and sourcing to the top levels of leadership. Among the many rewards are: improved accuracy and consistency of communication; faster speed to market due to early collaboration between design and production; and dashboard-style visibility into product information for executives. ■