

101: how label digitalisation is helping brands keep up with Fast Fashion

According to Hitwise data, fast fashion retail (compared to mid, premium, and luxury brands) accounted for 66% of all online fashion traffic in the first half of 2019. This demand for fast fashion significantly affects order quantities and lead times. Historically, retailers would book volumes as far as a season in advance and agree intakes well in advance of the deliveries, quite often taking stock from the suppliers local DC's. Today, a larger number of small orders are placed much later that can be delivered direct from point of manufacture. As a result, garment and label manufacturers need to up their game to respond to Fast Fashion. How can this be done?

To the average consumer, a label is something largely taken for granted. Either removed after purchase or cut out before being worn, it's easy to forget that these precious bits of paper or fabric are the first link between a buyer and a brand and the carrier of the very information that is most likely to influence a purchasing decision. However, within the apparel supply

chain, labels are crucial and can be a solution to keeping up with Fast Fashion. Digitalisation already has a profound effect on consumer behaviour so it makes absolute sense for labels to embrace it and ensure they positively impact the supply chain to stay ahead of the game.

Digitalisation through Labels: Digital Printing

A significant breakthrough to manage demand for shorter lead times is the advancement in digital printing platforms. Traditional printing methods essentially worked around a physical ink delivery process which in turn required films and plates. This process adds complexity and ultimately production time as a press requires longer set up time. The new digital printing machines offers various benefits. Firstly, it no longer requires plates resulting in fewer processes and essentially, far less set-up time. Digital printing isn't the perfect solution for all scenarios but in the majority of cases, the same result can be achieved when printing

digitally and therefore reduces lead time to the customer. As the technology continues to evolve, Digital will dominate how product is printed.

Secondly, a major advantage of utilising digital print platforms is the reduction in space required to operate them. This in turn provides more location flexibility. For example, earlier this year ITL – Intelligent Label Solutions opened a fully self-sufficient print shop inside one of their customer's factories, Poppy's Knitwear, in Tirupur, South India. The company were asked by long-term customer Marks & Spencer if they could help support Poppy's need for same day lead times on labels as part Poppy's agreement to undertake a speed manufacturing model for M&S which necessitated same day delivery of their labels. Whilst ITL were able to meet this need from their factory in Bangalore, the distance between them and Tirupur (which is a 2 hour flight away) meant that ITL couldn't physically get the labels there until the next day without huge cost. Thanks to digital print technology, ITL set up a printing facility inside Poppy's factory within 6 weeks. With the printer communicating directly with ITL's cloud-based ERP System where data is input and sent for immediate production and supply, this gave Poppy's full control of their label printing requirements.

Digitalisation through Labels: Virtual Proofing

When a retailer wishes to update its brand identity or introduce a new range, new labels need to be developed. The process can be complex requiring a large amount



ITL in-plant in Poppy's Knitwear



Digitalisation already has a profound effect on consumer behaviour so it makes absolute sense for labels to embrace it and ensure they positively impact the supply chain to stay ahead of the game

of concept and sampling work done before approving and proceeding with bulk volumes. It can also take time and put significant pressure on the supply chain, not to mention a negative environmental impact due to the amount of raw material used in the sampling stage.

By introducing virtual proofing software with the use of computer-aided design (CAD) software can help overcome these issues. Using the example of ITL's patented virtual sampling solution LabelView™, ITL's label designers create virtual labels for customers in as little as 24 hours which dramatically reduces the development lead times by almost 50%. Computer-aided design (CAD) software is a popular tool for designers that is used to generate digital replicas of conceptualised physical products. The software allows for both 2D and 3D simulations and gives designers and their customers the ability to collectively visualise an end product. By digitalising the label sampling process, not only are customer's initial requirements met quickly but more choice and instant changes can be made which is not always possible with physical samples.

Digitalisation through Labels: RFID

Recently, the business case for deploying Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) proves that it can support retailers tackle retail inventory inaccuracies. Utilised among retailers as a way to check stock accuracy, RFID tags can be sewn into garment labels or, more regularly, take the form of stickers. Retailers use special readers to scan the labels and retrieve information about the product, such as stock levels. However, despite the innovative technology at hand, RFID remains considerably dormant until it enters the store. What if RFID were deployed along the entire garment manufacturing supply chain to smoothen communication and build connectivity between the manufacturer, retailer and label-maker?

For example, the RFID tags could be utilised in garment manufacturer warehouses to verify the volume of goods leaving the facility and receive goods in at retailers' delivery centres and more, therefore speeding up the stock count process, reducing miscalculations and delivering the garments faster.

Key Takeaway

Though occasionally labels are the penultimate stop in a garment's production journey, their potential to support the demand for Fast Fashion is incredibly high through the digitalisation of labels.

ITL - Intelligent Label Solutions

Website: itl-group.com

Email: info@itl-group.com

Global contacts: itl-group.com/contacts-at-itl



About ITL

With a 40-year track record, ITL specialises in enhancing your brand image and helping you share essential information about your products. Whether you are a retailer, brand owner or garment manufacturer, our integrated range of products and solutions is designed to support your needs throughout the supply chain and ensure that whatever you need from your labels, you can count on us to make it happen.