



PROJECT MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

From new collections to new markets, store openings to distribution networks; whether you are a designer, design manager, marketer, or form part of the supply chain, if you work in fashion, much of your time will be focused on project work. Success within the industry is measured by your ability to differentiate and build your brand but also on your ability to own the development process and ensure a robust sales and distribution system for your brand

In an interview with APM last year, Kim Winder, CEO of fashion brand Winder London and former CEO of Aquascutum, noted that there were “plenty of opportunities for strong project managers to work with brands and businesses to develop more appropriate business models for the future.

Fashion, like other industries, is evolving, the 1990’s saw a wave of disruptor’s to this model, such as the Spanish multi-national Zara, which pioneered the ‘just in time approach’. More recently, the growth of fast fashion retailers such as ASOS, Boohoo, and Shein, has accelerated the move away from traditional seasons to a series of micro seasons, that refresh constantly

Market disruptor’s continue to use project management methodologies, such as lean, to maximise customer value and minimies waste, by optimising the flow of materials or tasks through the system.

The disruptive change brought about by the pandemic, the closure of physical stores, and the growth in online purchase, required significant investment in project management skills to support areas such as warehousing and product data. Fashion retailers worked hard to understand shopping habits in this new world, and how to improve delivery times to their customers.





The pandemic also highlighted the need to manage risk; supply chain issues, negative media coverage, even changes to the weather, can influence the ability to produce and sell goods and during the pandemic we saw how clothing designers and manufacturers pivoted to meet the demand for PPE. Response to calls for PPE production was shaped by the control fashion retailers had over their supply chains but manufacturing PPE locally offered greater control, shorter turnarounds and more sustainable alternatives to single-use items. In the Spring of 2020, high end Fashion company Prada, produced an astonishing 80,000 medical overalls and 110,000 masks at the firm's Montone factory in Perugia (Vogue Business 2020).

Ask an Expert

LMC recently interviewed Trudy Doneley, a freelance designer, and lecturer with over 18 years experience within the fashion industry. Trudy provided insights into her approach to projects and how her industry continues to evolve.

How do you currently approach project work?

It varies, depending on who I'm working with. Some of the larger companies will have a clear idea of what they want; I will usually meet up with the design manager, either in person or via Zoom, and they will send through a trend package, and I will deliver to that specific brief. This work can be quite prescriptive, so not great if you like being really creative, but it ensures the design manager has some control over the design process and essentially de-risks the process, by creating a set of parameters in which you can work. In other projects I have had a lot more freedom and worked a lot more closely with the design team to influence the designs for the next season.

What are the biggest barriers to project delivery in your industry?

For me, at the design stage, the hardest part of any project is engaging stakeholders and understanding what they want. Often people will come with a preconceived idea of how they will approach a project. To support communication, they will often use design or trend boards, from which you then interpret and build ideas





How important are our project timelines when working in fashion?

They are really important, like in any industry, time is money, and we are also dictated by the seasons. Fashion design today is so fast paced, especially when you look at retailers like Primark. They have micro collections that they literally churn out all the time, a series of mini projects running 52 weeks of the year. Their clothing silhouettes are quite simple, making them easier and quicker to produce, but the logistics of it is still staggering, from concept to production and delivery. My typical turnaround is anything from a few days to a few weeks.

What are your thoughts on sustainable fashion?

I think there could be a move away from seasons and a continuing trend towards more responsible fashion. Today people are also more concerned about sustainability. We use Primark as an example of fast, disposable fashion, but fast fashion can also be used in a responsible way. There are alternative visions of fast fashion that are built around lean project methodologies, including short lead times, (typically 2–3-weeks), and the production of small batch products (400 units not 4,000) that maximise customer value and minimise waste.

What project management skills are likely needed to support the fashion industry in the future?

The customer and environment will continue to shape the industry, if we are to survive, we need to continue to adapt and be mindful of the world in which we are operating. If we are to look at the UK fashion industry's response to COVID as an example, we see an industry open to adapting to meet the needs of a nation. Key project management skills needed in the future will continue to include stakeholder management, communication, planning, and controls, but risk and our ability to adapt to change are likely to become important too.

If you would like more information on how a project management can support your business, contact: admin@londonmetropolitan.college

If you would like to contact Trudy about her thoughts or the designs featured in this article, please email: trudywilloughby@hotmail.com

