

Fit for Profit

Consumers Fit Problems - Why?

Possible Solutions

By Anastasia Vouyouka, Telestia

The Cool Zone exhibit of [TC]² at SPESA Expo in Miami brought forward the need to plan for good fitting garments. Apart from the cool technologies one needs the appropriately trained staff to sustain such a supply chain in the long term. This is affecting design, manufacturing and marketing decisions on a strategic level.

We, at Telestia, had started being troubled by the growing need for well-trained and skilled personnel to support the industry in matters of fit many years ago. A number of research surveys and articles were published where it was acknowledged that the lack of skilled people was becoming significantly more apparent. Designers are willing to water-down their designs if they proved to be too complex or time-consuming during the development of the sample. In other words, they would modify their initial design ideas to less creative or innovative designs when they had difficulty obtaining a good fit for the original concept. This approach to style interpretation has been going on for years, with the result of downgrading garment fit together with the consumers' taste and demand.

Research on sizing and 3D presentation and a lot of research money was expended to find answers and develop solutions for these issues. These solutions presented new challenges but the total solution was not apparent and the problem still persists.

In my view the arguments against placing all our bets only on the above solutions are that:

1. Changing of Sizing Tables in the pattern process, doesn't mean good fit per se. The geometry rules that govern good pattern making and good fit do not change with sizes. The important thing, as common sense suggests, when interpreting a design into a well fitting garment are the skills of drafting and grading a pattern to any given size making good use of the available measurements.

The task of the designer is not just to address any 3-Dimensional details, which result from a body scanning process or from taking measurements with a tape measure. The task of the designer is to produce a design that will enhance the figure and not project any disproportionate measurements. The interpretation of a style in specific measurements or sizes must be the result of a balanced pattern, of proportionate grading and of a highly crafted making-up process. This means highly refined skills.

2. 3D presentation of styles can possibly help to visualise a style in a special fabric or cut, but how can it help to transfer that into good fitting patterns? How can the skills of a good pattern maker be sidetracked? I wonder how seeing a garment on a person, who actually is a virtual 3D figure, helps us make a better pattern for the style or for her, if we do not possess the necessary skills?

3. Copying of existing pattern blocks with small adaptations into new styles, is another practice that has been going on for years. The industry has come to believe that this is a safe bet. Schools and Academia have succumbed to this trend, because it reduces staff costs so they follow the industry's false steps as well. This practice drives new or younger pattern makers and technologists into making the classic mistakes of bad fit. Most of the time the result is a garment that is completely unbalanced. This happens because the copied block has been adapted and re-adapted, styled and re-styled, so many times that the pattern makers have lost track of the original balance lines of the block. Also, you cannot produce every design always from the same blocks. When you want to innovate and produce new lines, shapes and forms you have to change the block forms too.

My point, which I believe is shared by many people in the industry, is that companies need to spend money and time to retrain their best people. The problem is if companies can avoid training their staff to do a job and instead find a machine that will do that job automatically, they usually go for the machine. However, there are still a lot of jobs that

people have to do. They still need staff to create and design and to make informed decisions about fit quality as well as perform quality control tasks at various stages of design and production.

What is needed is to enable the designer's skills with Pattern Drafting skills, and the pattern maker with Fashion Design skills. It is worth the time and money to create a road of communication between these two, as well as the marketing and other people in the design and production cycle.

It seems that although the rewards for renouncing the status quo and advancing a new and different view can be great, an intellectual revolution rarely happens overnight and I am sure the industry needs that urgently. Because a change of strategy needs a change of mindset, it is critical that senior management understand the processes and implications so that they can drive the change. It is apparent that those who make the decisions in industry do not really understand these technicalities and so it is important to get them involved in raising awareness and fighting ignorance.

Training programs should address the real issues and not the temporary solutions and the industry should change their ways in their design, pattern drafting, grading and making up approach. Implementing these changes through skills training often seems like a hard step to make, but the solutions can be very simple and inexpensive and the rewards for everybody can be immense.

The new era has dramatically changed for the young. Teachers and designers need new techniques to teach and develop skills rapidly. These techniques are not the same as the traditional methods, as the time taken would be too long – but the end result is knowledge and skills which are well proven and shown to be effective and as equally valuable as the traditional methods.

These demands, which in the industry may change quickly, cannot be comprehended and included in a new academic curriculum with the same quick response.

In my view the answer is, to enable your staff with better and reliable skills. Provide them training and tools that will allow them to really understand clothes and bodies.

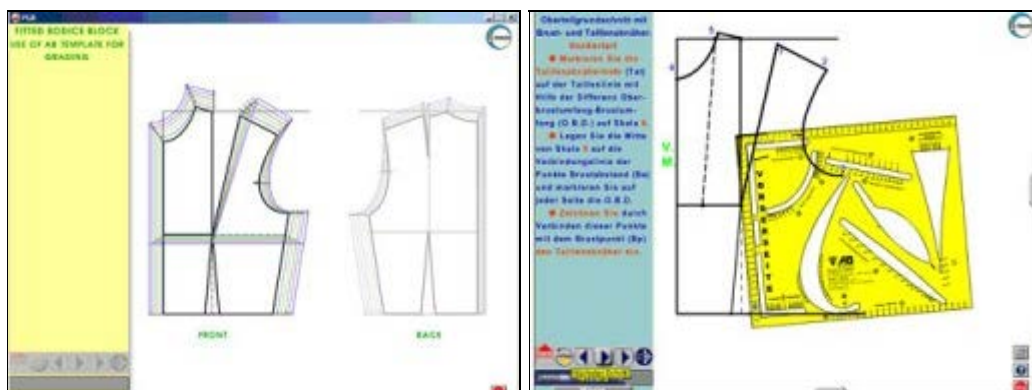
The Telestia Trainer and the Telestia Creator – CAD – sets of software have been designed with these problems in mind, and they offer a comprehensive solution to both training problems and computer pattern making from scratch, both in a hands-on approach and in an automatic way.

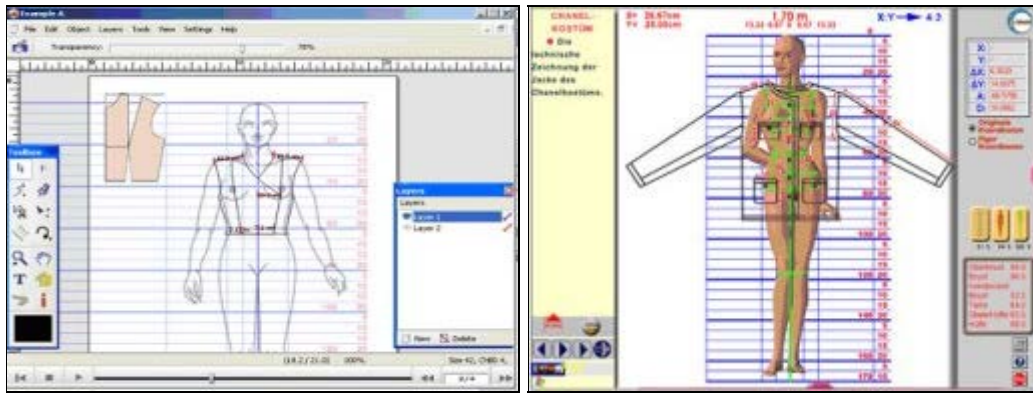
Empower your teams by encouraging the communication between designers and technical staff so that design and innovation can be understood and realised in your production up till the final product.

It seems that this is a human process and investment and not a capital investment.

Let technology aid you in your efforts not be a goal in itself, as is very often the case, to the detriment of the industry and everyone involved in it.

These decisions of course have to be taken at a higher management level by people who have the responsibility and take the risks and the profits. So will it be 'Fit for Profit' or continue with more struggle for Profit despite the Fit?





For more information on Telestia's pattern making solutions, visit www.telestia.com.

Anastasia Vouyouka,
Telestia CEO,
Anastasia@etelestia.com

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