



How PLM software can support sustainability practices for fashion retailers

As consumer demand for sustainable fashion continues to grow—in Australia, online searches for “ethical” fashion pieces have increased by 67%¹—so too does the need for retailers to consider the impact of their products on people and the planet.

One form of technology that can assist fashion brands in their sustainability efforts is product lifecycle management (PLM) software. By providing a robust view of supply chain practices, vendor and supplier activities, and product development processes, an advanced PLM solution can be a critically important resource in addressing the crucial question of sustainability in the fashion industry.

Here’s how up-to-date PLM software can help fashion retailers take the necessary steps to level up their sustainability practices across the product lifecycle.



1. Improved visibility into the supply chain

Ensuring sustainable and ethical practices are in place across the entire lifecycle of any given product requires the ability to track activities from the very beginning of the process (the raw materials used to create the garment) all the way through to the customer.

By providing comprehensive visibility into the end-to-end product development process, PLM software can help retailers monitor and assess each stage of the cycle—identifying areas where sustainability improvements can be made or maintaining control over current processes.

An advanced PLM platform provides fashion brands with the accurate and up-to-date information they need to make strategic decisions on topics such as sustainability, corporate social responsibility, and environmental impact, as well as facilitating streamlined communication between the various teams involved along the way.

2. A repository of accurate, accessible data

Committing to sustainable fashion practices is one thing—but maintaining a complete and accurate record of these activities across the product lifecycle requires a volume of data that would be practically impossible to manage using traditional methods such as spreadsheets.

Whether it's information relating to ethical sourcing, labour practices, raw materials, or product recyclability, an effective PLM solution can streamline the process of gathering and keeping this data organised and readily available for review when required.

And when a need for this information arises, it's often a sensitive and time-critical issue, such as to prove compliance in the face of a challenge or to demonstrate ethical practices should a dispute occur with any type of stakeholder. With advanced PLM software in place, your sustainability track record will be a breeze to access, promote, and display.

3. Ensuring accountability, maintaining compliance

The global fashion industry operates in an increasingly dynamic regulatory environment. With laws, rules, and consumer expectations frequently and rapidly evolving, retailers require equally adaptable PLM processes that make it simple to remain compliant and accountable at every stage.

Intelligent PLM software can support apparel retailers in tracking and managing aspects such as compliance programs and vendor certification, providing a level of transparency that simplifies the task of addressing sustainability-related considerations and challenges.

From major global issues such as forced labour or human trafficking through to country or region-specific regulation, fashion retailers are increasingly choosing to play a leading role in dealing with these concerns, rather than taking a reactionary approach. And when armed with the right PLM solution, apparel businesses are far better equipped to anticipate and respond to such issues in the most effective way.

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1 <https://www.lyst.com/data/2020-conscious-fashion-report/>