



FASHIONED FOR THE FUTURE
THE EVOLUTION OF PLM AND OTHER TECHNOLOGY
IN APPAREL, FOOTWEAR, LUXURY, OUTDOOR, AND
CONSUMER GOODS



From the day Paleolithic men and women first whittled sewing needles out of bone and experimented with stitching hides together, the garments we wear and how we make them have both reflected and shaped the world. While clothing was born out of necessity it didn't take long for aesthetics to enter the game: a new toga colored in the latest dyes shipped from the fringes of the empire was clearly a hotter ticket than a hand-me-down in drab domestic cotton. And from these humble beginnings, our trillion-dollar industry was born.

Now, countless millennia and more than a few enterprising magnates later, textile and apparel production have evolved from cottage (or cave) industries into industrialized powerhouses that employ 57.8 million people worldwide.¹

Not all of that change took place over centuries; our lifespans have seen fashion, footwear and fast-moving consumer goods transformed by advances in technology and changes in our own shopping behavior. In the last ten years alone, the seasonal model (2 - 4 collections per calendar year) has been disrupted by super-fast fashion, with new stock gracing hangers daily at some brands. A more discerning consumer has forced us to confront the realities of fit, with non-linear grading and all sorts of special sizing for different morphologies. Internationalization is making us think about things like local assortments, languages, regulations and currency fluctuations. Mounting production costs and the rise of the ethical consumer are impacting sourcing choices and, when coupled with the time crunch, bringing manufacturing closer to home. Products today are sold through more channels than anyone could have imagined a decade ago: physical stores, print catalogues, web stores, mobile apps, social media, in-store digital experiences, pop-up shops, private parties and TV. The list goes on.

At the same time, the brand or retailer's relationship with the consumer has changed: shoppers have the tools in their pockets (or usually the palm of their hands) to research alternative products and competitors from in-store and our new Generation Z friends are always on the lookout for the best deals.

All of this means that fashion, footwear and fast-moving consumer goods are among the most competitive markets in the world. The market demands catwalk-level styles faster than ever, at more competitive prices across more geographies and channels without compromising on quality, fit or brand heritage. And if a brand or retailer falls short, consumers will simply go elsewhere. So, in an age of voice assistants and AI in every pocket, the way those brands and retailers develop and bring products to market has had to change – far more rapidly than at any point in the fashion industry's long relationship with technology.

Today, businesses must be reactive, agile, innovative and, above all, keep their best creatives and their best teams happy.



CROSSING THE CHASM²

Following a millennia of manual labor, the industry has seen its fair share of change. The spinning wheel, power loom and cotton gin each lead to major boosts in productivity. The introduction of the sewing machine helped sow the seeds of fashion. Prior to this invention, making clothing was extremely laborious and the concept of fashion was still unheard of. Interchangeable pattern pieces helped popularize the idea that a ‘designer’ could choose fabrics and create silhouettes based on his or her own vision – the roots of the designer-led culture that is still very present today. And then came along trade legislation in the 1980’s and 1990’s that, when coupled with budding technologies like the fax machine, led to the production outsourcing model that we know today. Trade legislation lifted the barriers to accessing cheap labor elsewhere while the invention of the fax machine, the computer, and the subsequent inception of the internet meant that communicating halfway around the world was no longer a huge headache.

Although computer aided design (CAD) had become commonplace by the 1990s, the technical specifications assembled for designs were still being produced in unsuitable, off-the-shelf tools, even paper and glue at times. And because the factory making those garments was likely situated half a world away, time-zone and language difficulties made communicating those specifications pretty painful. CAD, while a transformative technology and a clear improvement over a pencil and paper, was not enough to bridge oceans.

To compensate, garment specifications would be printed out and sent to suppliers via fax – a time-consuming and error-prone process. Anyone who has received a twenty-page fax and tried to decipher images and small numbers in smudgy ink can attest to that fact. Even after the advent of PDM (Product Data Management) and the arrival of the internet, communication with suppliers and satellite offices was conducted via email. While smudging was not a factor in electronic communications, exporting these files from PDM and attaching them to email (without an audit trail) amounted to placing vital design and development activities outside the retailer or brand’s management systems.

From here, more complex modules like line planning, collection development, sourcing, bills of material and labor, intelligence dashboards and reporting, and supplier management were added, and PLM became the collaborative environment of choice for brands, retailers, and manufacturers of all shapes and sizes.

2. *Crossing the Chasm*, by Geoffrey A. Moore. This is an awesome book that contains a widely used graph that illustrates the difficult transition disruptive technologies like PLM must make in order to move beyond innovators to general acceptance.

A NEW GENERATION OF PLM CUSTOMER

The functional scope of PLM has long since evolved to impact every stage of the product lifecycle – from concept to consumer – and PLM has very much evolved from a purely IT initiative to a business transformation driver in which the very core of the organization has an important stake. Mobility has extended PLM's reach to include even more stakeholders.

The benefits of PLM today are measurable; reduced costs, improved efficiencies, faster time to market. What's more, there are strategic advantages like increased agility and fast insights into new initiatives to not just save money, but to grow the business. Ultimately, people look to PLM to facilitate a better way of working, to get closer to the consumer, to bring better products to market and be more profitable.

Although a number solutions are sold to the fashion industry, the bulk of these are multi-vertical portfolios whose solutions were not built specifically for the soft goods industry. Many technology vendors moved into fashion thinking that it was an easy industry or that PLM was easy or both. This is not at all the case!

A truly modern fashion PLM must be agile, fast to deploy, beautiful, mobile and powerful. A technology partner must have both deep domain and technology expertise in order to innovate for the future. And that partner must always listen to the market for ideas for innovations; the importance of being market driven cannot be underestimated.





LET'S GET IN TOUCH

Centric Software was founded on 3 pillars with a clear mission; hire the best team, build the best product, get the best customers and keep them happy.

From its headquarters in Silicon Valley, home to the best tech minds in the world, and offices in trend capitals across the globe, Centric staff, mainly comprised of industry and IT experts, builds technologies for the most prestigious names in fashion, retail, footwear, luxury and consumer goods.

Along with the best team, we are on a mission to build the best product and work with the best customers. Our focus is based on mobility, innovation and extending the value proposition beyond traditional PLM. All of Centric's innovations are highly market driven. Our products are inspired by the best brands and road-tested around the world. We work hand in hand with our customers and our product roadmap is driven entirely by them. Centric was the first to offer mobile apps for PLM, issuing over 500 new features in the past 3 years. Our adaptable, agile methods prioritize the things that matter, creating a sensitive, sustainable approach to software deployment, with the industry's fastest time to value. Recently, Centric launched Centric SMB, which packages extended PLM functionality inspired by best-in-class technologies. Flexible, mobile and fast to deploy Centric SMB makes innovation inclusive, giving businesses the key to improving product design & development, merchandising, cost control, quality and compliance.

The benefits? Centric customers report an increase in sales from 5 – 10%, a reduction in stock by 20-40% and a decrease in logistics costs of 10-15%.

Enthusiasm from the market has driven Centric's massive growth and worldwide leadership position. Over the past year, approximately 35% of Centric customers have spoken publically in support of their solutions and approximately 95% have done so privately.

We are very proud of our customers and look forward to continuing to innovate the PLM solutions of the future. More than 400 fashion, retail, luxury, footwear, outdoor and consumer goods brands around the world already trust Centric.

Want to learn more or see a demo?

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