



10-step
guide

STARTING A CLOTHING BRAND

Bridge & Stitch

2 Foreward

The fashion and textiles industry is a world of creativity, innovation and necessity. It is a fierce, ever changing world of competing brands to find market share and grow brand awareness. For those with aspirations to break into this industry, it is not for the faint hearted. It requires unwavering dedication and a meaty budget to get you through several seasons before you break even and make a profit. This guide covers some of the basic stages of launching a clothing brand into 10 manageable steps.

Clothing brands are popping up in all corners of the world due to the birth of the internet, social media and e-commerce. In this highly saturated market, there is still space for innovation and newness. Having a clear brand story; the why behind your brand and a unique offering aimed at a clear target audience will be key. Creative flair will allow you to make products that interest your market, while business sense will see you through the

early stages. A well thought through marketing strategy will increase your brand recognition and help you to grow.

This guide takes you through the first steps of setting up a business and covers how to develop a clothing collection, from design development to sourcing, sampling and production, ready for retail. See it as a starting point to investigate further. Be inquisitive, use a range of sources and build your knowledge.

For skills you don't possess, it's a good idea to outsource to a company like Bridge & Stitch, here to support and connect you with the skills and knowledge to succeed. For more info, see page 53. Get in touch, we'd love to help.

Stay creative!

Rachael
Hobbs x



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01 Market Research

To give yourself the best opportunity at success, it is important that you immerse yourself with the current market and conduct what is called a Situational Analysis. The following areas should be considered:

01

What are the current mega trends?
E.g. Technological advances, growing demands for sustainability etc.

02

What are the macro trends?
E.g. Drive towards e-commerce, sustainable fabric alternatives, digital innovation e.g. 3D avatars and the metaverse

03

What external factors are impacting your industry and sector? These include Political, Economical, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental factors. This external assessment is known as a PESTLE.

04

What are the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of your business? This is an internal assessment known as a SWOT.

6

05

What are the current market trends within your industry? Is the fashion industry growing or in decline? What about your specific sector?

06

What are the trend and colour forecasts within the industry over the coming years?

07

What is happening within pop and sub-culture? What are your consumers demanding?

08

Where is the unfilled niche in your market? Find the gap that needs filling.

09

Who are your competitors and what is your differentiation? Avoid copying what is already out there.

10

What is the price range of the products you want to produce? How much can your consumers afford?

Once completed, you can then identify what your unique selling point (USP) is and how your product will fill the gap.



8 Consumer Research

Understanding who your consumer is will ensure you gain traction with your brand. This isn't just about identifying the age of your consumer, but instead delving much deeper.



You want to be able to place yourself within the shoes of your consumer and know what they eat for breakfast, what their values are, what magazines they read, where they work, what hobbies and interests they have and where they like to socialise.



The more information you know, the more you understand your consumer and the better you can design for them and market to them.



The four main methods used for customer segmentation are:

Demographic

This is the grouping of individuals based on their age, gender, occupation, income, marital status, ethnic group and / or religion.

Psychographic

The study of consumers based on their activities, interests and opinions. Psychographics seeks to understand the cognitive factors that drive consumer behaviours e.g. political allegiance, views on abortion etc.

Geographic

Location from country, region, city and even post code.

Behavioural

The process of sorting and grouping consumers based on the behaviours they exhibit.

You may also want to merge different methods e.g. geo-demographic to focus on specific demographics within a chosen area. Or there are other considerations that could be valuable when identifying and targeting your consumer, such as:

5. Family life-cycle stages
6. Social grading systems
7. Sustainability drivers
8. Diffusion of innovators
9. Customer loyalty

Your objective is not simply identifying a clothing item that should exist, but also to research the target market of consumers for that product.

Consider the pros and cons of targeting certain demographics, such as expendable income levels and consumer values. Understand the demographic

trends, such as younger people have a lean towards being style and price-conscious and enjoy shopping online, however they are increasingly becoming more aware of the need to be more environmentally friendly. In contrast, older generations value shopping in retail stores, have more expendable income but generally buy less than their younger counterparts. Quality and fit often drive their purchasing habits.

It is important to note that you will often find that you have 2-3 different consumer types. Map these consumer's out into a pen portrait (commonly known as customer personas or consumer profiles). Give the personas names and refer back to them when creating your marketing campaigns, so that you know who you are reaching out to.



02 Business Plan

The relevance of a business plan is debated by many. It is often the case that a business plan is produced at the beginning and then never looked at again. Rachael tends to agree with this. However, going through the process of developing a business plan can be really important as it will force you to consider aspects of your business that you may not otherwise think of. Use this business plan as a foundation upon which you can then build out from it - developing business strategies, marketing strategies, brand guidelines, customer personas, finance etc. See this as a crucial first step that will allow the creation of other important steps which will follow.

To the side is a suggestion of the contents and structure of a business plan, but you can adjust it as necessary to fit the needs of your business.

1. Executive Summary
2. Owner's background / experience
3. The Opportunity
4. The Business Concept
5. Branding
6. Products and services
7. Market Research
8. Consumer Analysis
9. Competitor Analysis
10. Marketing strategy
11. Communication strategy
12. Operations and logistics
13. Costs and pricing strategy
14. Financial Forecasts
15. Risk Assessment

1. Executive Summary

This summarises the most important points of your business plan.

2. Owner's background / experience

Here it is important to identify your strengths and weaknesses so that you can establish what responsibilities you can be accountable for, and what other responsibilities you will need to outsource to either colleagues, contractors, freelancers or suppliers.

3. The Opportunity

Set the scene and let the reader know what the opportunity is. Use facts and figures to add credibility and to highlight the gap in the market.

4. The Business Concept

This section is about summarising the business concept to establish what the business will offer, who it will cater for and what needs it will address.

5. Branding

Here you can include the business mission, values and aim. The brand guidelines including colours, logo and font, as well as imagery and other visual aesthetics.



6. Products and services

List out all the products and services that you will be offering.

7. Market Research

Demonstrate that you understand the external market and different trends impacting your industry. Read industry reports that provide detail about current trends and performance. Provide facts and figures to add validity to your report and highlight where the gaps are.

8. Consumer Analysis

Similar to market research, identify the needs of your consumers and understand their behaviours, their requirements and how their values and demands are changing based on trends.

9. Competitor Analysis

Having a thorough knowledge and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of your competitors will allow you to focus the positioning of your brand and ensure a unique identity which avoids just copying others.

10. Marketing Strategy

Having a clear marketing strategy can

be the success or the failure of the brand. This is often underestimated by start-up businesses. You need a clear plan of how you are going to get brand recognition and need to consider online and offline tactics, paid and organic options and budgets and timelines to execute the strategy. Deciding to use social media only is no longer effective. Partnerships and proactive marketing campaigns is the best way to achieving brand awareness.

11. Communication Strategy

Once a marketing strategy has been developed, this can then be supported with a communication strategy that will reach your consumers, and talk to them in a tone that will inspire engagement and ultimately lead to sales.

12. Operations and logistics

To help with this section, you may want to explore using a Business Model Canvas, which will encourage you to consider all aspects of your business operations such as sales channels, human resources, physical resources, distribution channels etc. Do your research and understand how your business will operate at both sides of

the process from product or service development through to product or service delivery, and everything in between.

13. Costs and pricing strategy

Be clear about what you are going to charge for a product or service and how much it costs you to make that product or deliver a service. If the costings don't add up, you won't have a sustainable business model. Remember though that costs go much further than the direct product or service and you will need to consider other indirect fixed or variable costs such as rent, electricity, duty charges, wages, marketing costs, legal fees, insurance etc.

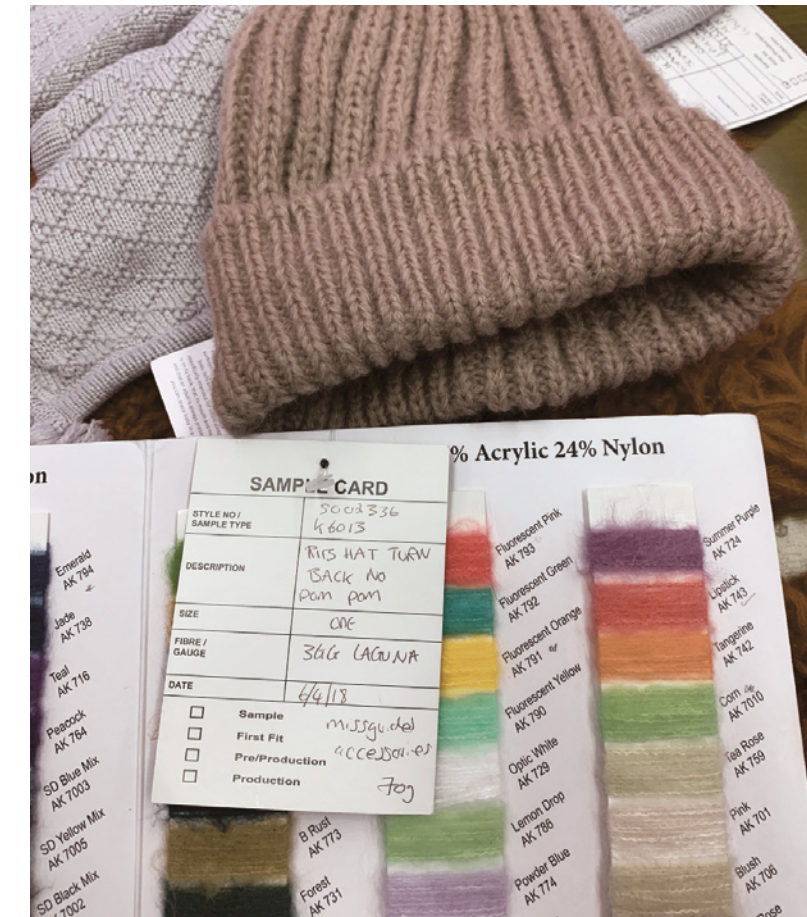
14. Financial Forecasting

This section is about bringing together all your costs and putting these against your sales forecasts so that you can establish when the business is likely to break even, when you might need investment and if so, how much you need. It is good to include sensitivity forecasting too to establish what the forecasts will look like if they are +/- 10% of your predictions. These are also useful for investors so that they can see

the length of time required before you can pay back any loans you may need.

15. Risk Assessment

Consider both internal and external factors that could impact your business. We have all just experienced Covid-19 and the impact that an environmental and social disaster can have on businesses and individuals alike, but what other factors could affect your business?



03

Business Formation

Before you start trading you will need to consider the legal entity of your business. It is recommended to think about this at the start of your journey as once you are established it can be problematic to change from one entity to another e.g. limited to a charity.

It is therefore prudent to consider what your business values are and what the focus of the business is. Is your business about profit, supporting the local community or raising funds for a particular initiative? If you aren't sure, this is a good point to speak with an accountant or other qualified person who can help you to determine the right legal entity for your business.

Although it can be difficult switching from one business entity to another, the exception to this is a sole trader. Many businesses begin as a sole trader or a partnership before moving into a limited company or charity. This is an easy, accessible way to start a business before taking on extra responsibility.

On the next page, pros and cons of a limited and sole trader structure have been listed, to give you an overview and to allow you to start your own exploration into the business entity that might be best suited to your needs.

	Pros	Cons
Sole Trader	> Sole owner > Easy to set up > Inexpensive to start > Minimal bookkeeping and accounting requirements > Self assessment is once a year > All profit after tax belongs to the individual > No personal details on public record	> No legal separation between the individual and the business > Personally reliable for any business debts > All taxable income is liable for tax and National Insurance. > Lenders prefer dealing with limited companies > Perceived small business
Limited	> Separate legal entity to the business owner > Personal assets are safe and act as a safety net for business owners > Shares can be sold to raise capital > Tax efficient ways of paying yourself via salary and dividends > Perceived established	> Requirement to register with Companies House and HMRC for tax > Set-up costs and registration of company name > Accounting and filing requirements > Directors have their personal details on public record

04 Investment

Planning a budget before production and knowing all sources of funds is the best way to avoid failure. When it comes to finances, you need to account for development costs, production expenses, shipping costs, utilities, rent, salaries, marketing including website development, and insurances, to name a few. Allow for contingency funds, as unexpected spend will almost certainly pop up, and set clear price points for your garments that you know are workable.

This step ties into identifying and understanding your target audience. Price points must cover production cost with a reasonable profit margin without alienating customers. For a bespoke collection, £5,000 – £50,000 + is needed to start a clothing brand, depending on collection size and complexity.

Budgeting for a custom clothing collection from scratch leaves you in control of all aspects from design details

and trims to picking fabrics, deciding country of manufacture, sampling and production. This gives you a handle on the costings of each garment.

You can choose to produce in the UK or overseas. Decide what's important to you and your customers.

Development time to produce bespoke clothing collections is approximately 3-9 months depending on the size of your collection and the complexity of each style. Development costs are not cheap and can take up a large amount of your budget. This stage of the process is usually missed or underestimated by start-ups so make sure you consider the time and costs of sampling.

Minimum order quantities start from 50 units in the UK, going up to 150-300 units in Europe and 500-1,000 units in the Far East.

As the process is complex, if you don't have the skills or knowledge it can be

daunting. Management companies who oversee the process end-to-end could remove this stress and offer a one-stop solution, with a database of approved factories and suppliers to develop your brand at hand.

There are plenty of options for getting your clothing line off the ground. To fund your start up, you can consider grants, crowdfunding, angel investment, startup loans and self-funding.

Websites like Kickstarter provide platforms for backers to peruse projects where they purchase goods pre-release for favourable prices. Backers are rewarded by purchasing in advance. Crowdfunding can be a fast way to raise money with no upfront fees. Successfully crowdfunded projects can get huge amounts of media attention.

An angel investor provides capital in exchange for ownership equity which offers low risks with potentially high rewards. A plus point is you're not risking your money, and having invested financially in your brand, your investor will be keen to help get you to market. Angel investors have valuable

knowledge and contacts, sometimes more beneficial to a business owner than the money invested. You give a percentage of your shares to the business though, and this is usually a high amount - think Dragon's Den!

Start-up loans on the other hand are fast, easily accessible and allow you to retain full ownership of your brand, although you must take out the loan and pay it back in an agreed timeframe. Often lenders like to see that you too are making financial contributions and taking on financial risk so that it is a joint effort between individual and lender.

Many individuals fund clothing lines with personal savings, overdrafts, credit cards, assets, or mortgage properties to generate cash. Self-funding means complete control however waiting on your own reserves could stifle growth in the business.

If you are lucky, you may qualify for a local or national grant. Usually this is where your business idea meets certain criteria such as the development of environmentally friendly products.

05 Collection Line-up

Planning your collection line-up correctly can help you to save costs, attract customers and retain customers who come back and purchase again and again. There are some large considerations that should be made when deciding what garments to develop. The main aspects are:

1. What season are you designing for?
Remember, we said a collection usually takes 3-9 months to develop. Make sure you map out the timeframe for developing your collection to establish

when a realistic launch date is likely to be. You want to ensure you allow yourself the whole season to sell your product. This means that a UK summer collection should be ready to start selling in March, where it is possible to see some warmer days. And winter collections need to be ready to sell from September. This provides you with the largest selling window before the seasons change.

2. What fabrics are you using?
Fabrics have their own minimums and

just like many things in life, the more you buy, the less per unit it costs. This is true of fabric too. If you have 12 designs and each design uses a different fabric, it means you are using very small amounts of lots of fabrics. This will leave high wastage and the price of the fabric will be high. Be creative and think about how you can use one fabric across multiple products to reduce your costs down.

3. How many items should be in a collection?
This will largely be determined by your budget. However, it is important to consider how you will sell your products. If you only produce one

product and sell it on a website or social media, your website and social media channels will feel quite empty and repetitive with only one item to sell. This also then restricts what people can buy. If someone buys your one item and loves it, there is nothing else for them to buy and you are therefore preventing repeat purchases and customer loyalty, which is exactly what you want to be aspiring to.

If you do have a limited budget, and a large amount of cost is used up during the development stages, you may be better off to produce 5 styles in 3 colourways each, than 10 styles in 1 colour each. The first option is likely

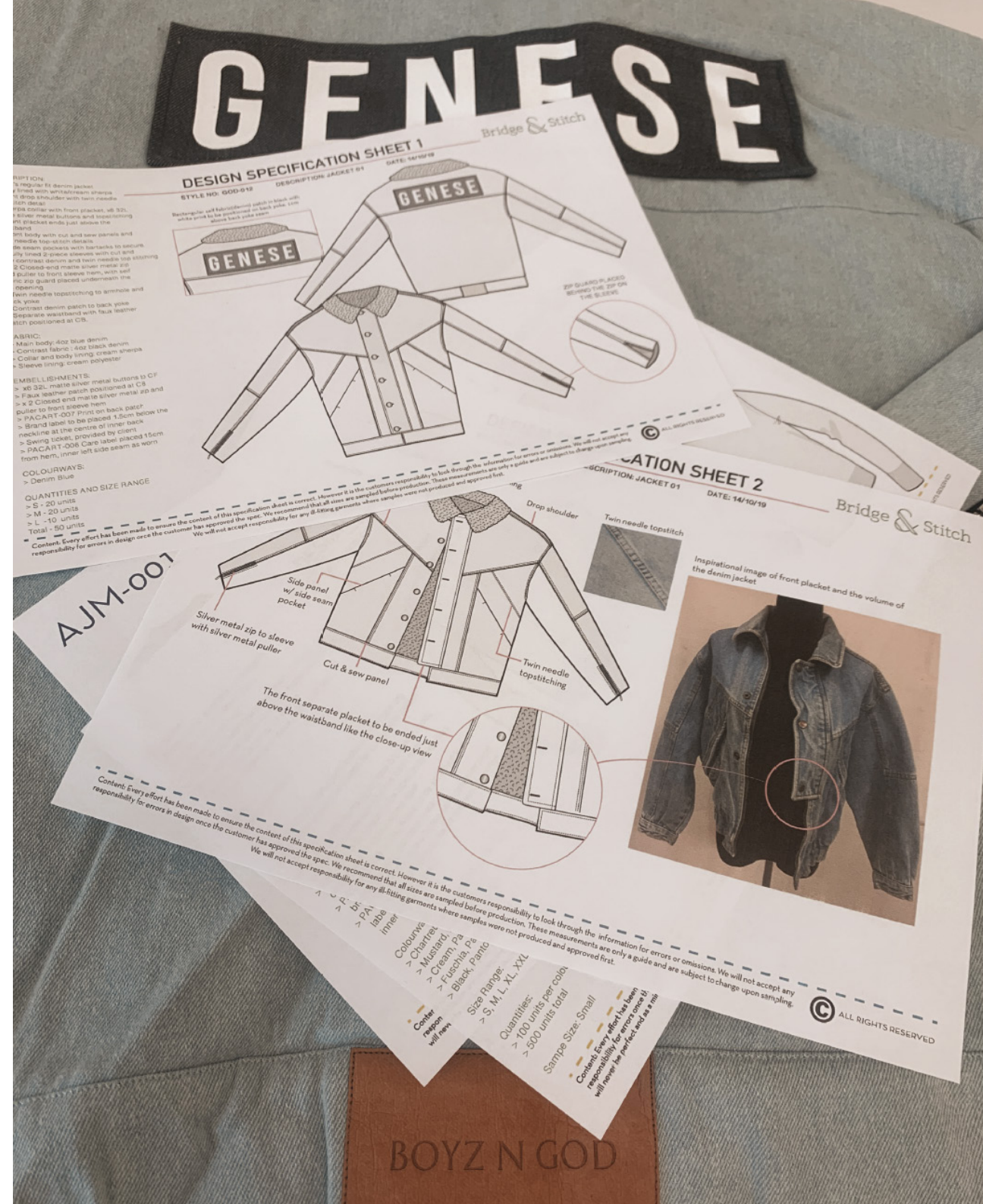


to cost less and the multiple colour offerings help to increase the perceptual size of your collection. If someone loves your garment, they may be happy to buy it again in a different colour.

Even if you are well funded, it is important to test the market before blowing all your budget. 8-12 styles is always a nice starting point to see what sells, see what feedback you get and to establish the direction of the brand. You can always add more styles as you get to know your customer and their demands and expectations.

4. What is the balance of your collection?

It is important to have a range of items within the collection to allow your customers to mix and match items. This balance is usually determined based on standard human behaviours around the number of times clothing items are purchased, worn and washed. For instance, a top is often worn once and then washed. Naturally, tops are therefore usually the item of clothing that an individual owns the most of. In contrast, a pair of trousers may be worn 3 or 4 times before being washed and



we own less of these. A jacket is infrequently washed and often an individual owns less jackets than they do trousers. To reflect these habits, a collection would follow similar principles. You might therefore have 5 tops, 3 trousers, 2 dresses, 1 jumper and perhaps only 1 jacket in a 12-piece summer collection. For winter, this might be 4 tops, 3 jumpers, 2 trousers, 1 dress, 2 jackets.

Another way to look at this spread is that tops normally cost less than trousers or a dress, which usually cost less than a jacket. Having multiple lower priced options allow repeat purchases. Also, by having lower priced items available, this allows your product to reach a wider audience, some of whom may not be able to afford the higher priced items.

Design Development

The design journey often starts with mood boards, colour and trend forecasting, sketches and reference imagery. This process highlights detail, fit, shape, colour and features, communicating the visual aesthetics of the brand. During this stage it is important to not get drawn in to just copying other brands and products that are currently available, but instead to take inspiration and to determine how you can better the current designs or introduce new innovative approaches or cuts that are unique to your brand.

Once you have clarity over the style and vision of your garments, start to map out the collection for your intended audience. Ensure there is a balance between your styles and consideration to the choice of fabrics, prints and / or embellishments that you are using. Think about the detail and spend as much time considering the back of the garment as the front. Remember, the more features and the more complex the product, the higher the cost. Sometimes, less is more.

With the collection line-up confirmed, you are now ready to get technical drawings developed for each style. A tech pack is a blueprint created by a designer, an instruction manual, informing the manufacturer how to construct the garment. Usually a tech pack will include the following elements:

> Design specification sheet.

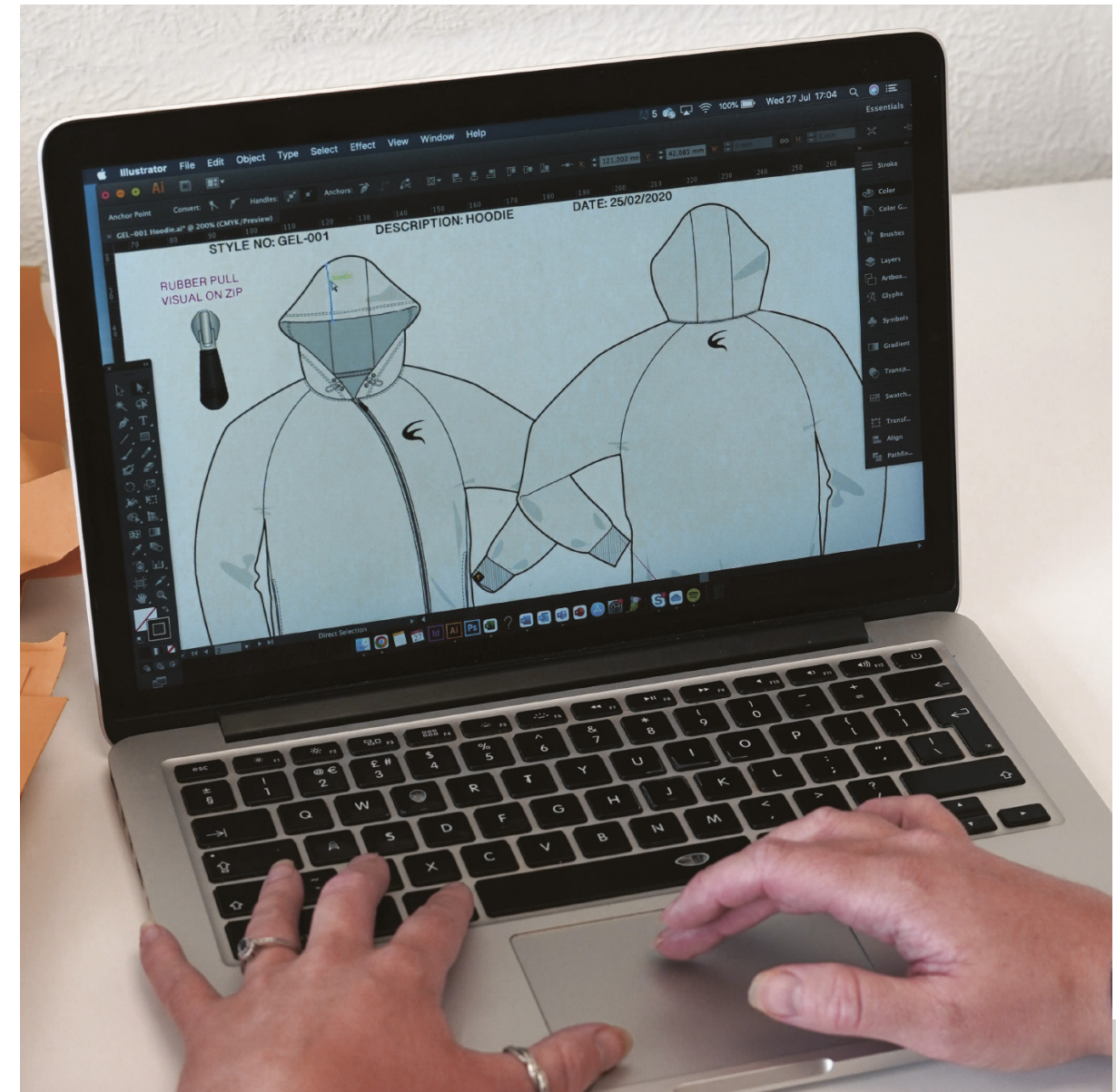
This includes front and back flat drawings of the garment with any close up's of specific features. Information will be included such as construction details, sizes within the range and an overview of trims and embellishments.

> Manufacturing Specification Sheet or Points of Measure (POM)

This is where lines are drawn showing where the points of the garments are that are measured from. These are often labelled alphabetically.

> Sizing charts with Grading Sheets

This is where all the measurements are



listed against each point of measure, along with any grading increments for each of the different sizes within the range.

> Colour Specification Sheet

This is where all the colours of the style are presented. Often pantone colours are provided and this acts as a visual aid for the factory to see the colours within each style.

> PACART Sheets (Picture and Colour Artwork Sheets)

These cover any additional items which may be needed that relate to your garment. Examples of these sheets include:

- > care labels
- > brand labels
- > size labels
- > swing tickets
- > screen print artwork
- > custom branded buttons
- > embroidery artwork
- > garment bags
- > branded delivery boxes

Without a tech pack, it can be difficult for a manufacturer to translate your idea into reality, which can cause

frustration and tension between factory and customer.

A tech pack forms a clear contract as it states expectations and can be used for quality control and for mapping the journey of the garment as it goes through rounds of sampling, fit sessions and adjustments to get it spot on for production. Capturing any changes and ensuring the tech pack remains up to date at all times is crucial.



Fabric Sourcing

For your designs to be a success, sourcing suitable fabrics is paramount. Whether you need technical materials to wick away moisture for sports performance, absorbent fabrics for reusable sanitary products, or stretch durable fabrics for rock climbing, you'll need to decide on fabric for your collection. You may wish to get some guidance from an expert consultant to ensure you pick the right fabric for it's usage. It may also be worth while paying for tests on your fabric if it needs to perform to a certain standard.



When sourcing fabrics there are a range of questions you will need to consider:

1. What are the minimum order quantities (MOQ) of the fabric supplier?

You won't want to order more than you need when you are likely to be on a tight budget.

2. Does the supplier hold stock of the fabric?

Ideally, you should always sample in the chosen fabric before committing to bulk orders. This allows you to check to make sure the fabric is fit for purpose.

3. What is the price per metre and at what point does the price drop?

Usually there are incremental drops in fabric per metre pricing, so it might be more cost effective to order 300 metres at a lower cost per metre than 250 metres at a higher cost.

4. What is the lead time?

How long will it take the fabric supplier to knit, dye and finish your fabric?

5. Are there any duty or shipping charges?

If you are ordering from a fabric supplier

in Europe, now that the UK is out of the EU, all fabric will be subject to duty charges (usually around 8% but check with HMRC). Consider delivery costs which can also be very high when importing from abroad.

6. Can the factory provide a testing report?

This should tell you technical aspects of the fabric such as stretch, spirality, shrinkage, colour fastness, wash temperature, wash care etc. Make sure you do all your own tests as well though as sometimes there can be variations. This is particularly important for shrinkage and colour fastness. You also want to watch out for piling after washing.

If you would like to dye the fabric to a specific colour, the best approach is to provide a pantone reference number. Ideally you want to choose this from a physical book as colours can vary on computer screens and are unlikely to provide a close match. Common pantone references include TCX and C.





Increasingly, brands are seeking good choices for the planet with consumer demand for this on the up. There are many fabrics that can be utilised for a low impact clothing brand. These include recycled polyester, modal, econyl, wool, and regenerative cotton.

Jute crops don't use pesticides or fertilisers to grow and mature in 5 months. Cotton can take up to 20,000 litres of water per kilogram to grow - and substantial chemicals. Organic cotton uses far less water without pesticides, insecticides, or herbicides so are safer for workers and the eco-system.

Hemp fibre is durable, eco-friendly and doesn't require lots of water or pesticides to grow and gets softer over time. Lyocell is cellulose from wood pulp (eucalyptus, oak, birch), biodegradable, and chemicals released on production are non-toxic, it's recyclable, resistant to wrinkles, anti-bacterial, and flexible. bleach, ivory ecru and grey linen don't.

Kapok is a natural cellulose fibre in dried kapok fruit. Silky soft, antimoth, with insulation properties. Kelp,

seaweed, algae and squid genes can be turned into a compostable yarn, an eco-friendly process, low cost and 100% biodegradable and recyclable.

Elephant ear leaves are a natural low impact faux leather alternative and wool is one of the best sustainable natural fabrics in the world, naturally fire and water resistant. Wool, when not mixed with other fibres can also be easily recycled back into yarn, creating a fully circular system.

Low impact options are not always viable for every budget but great to consider at the stage of fabric sourcing, if tailoring your brand towards responsible choices is your vision.

34 Sourcing Factories

Finding a manufacturer is the next step and often the biggest stumbling block for clothing founders. Finding a suitable factory that has the skills, knowledge and machinery to develop and construct your styles is paramount. Some specialise in outdoor technical products, others in jersey, woven or knitwear for example.

For many, visiting a factory in-person as a new designer with limited knowledge of the industry can be a daunting task, even if the factory is UK-based. For overseas factories, there are additional challenges like language barriers and the cost of travel. This is where connecting with trusted advisors with industry knowledge and know-how, and connections throughout the industry can help you to decide who to pick.

The right advisor will help:

- > leverage personal connections
- > project manage a collection through sampling and production
- > offer technical advice on fitting and



quality control

- > assist with costings and pricing structure
- > help with exports and imports.

When sourcing for a factory, there are several considerations that are worth discussing with factories you find. These include:

1. What are their minimum orders?

How many items do you need to purchase per style, per colourway, per size?

2. How much is their sampling process?

What is the approximate cost per unit for each garment, based on the tech packs you supply to them?

3. Do you have to supply all fabric and trims to the factory or will they supply some elements such as elastic and interfacing?

4. What are their lead times?

How long will production take?

5. Do they have any certifications or audits?

Can they prove that their workers are legally working within their factories and are they paying them a fair wage?

6. Are the working conditions of the factory to ethical health and safety standards?

7. What other brands have they previously worked for?

Can you see some garments that they have made?

8. Do they have the correct machines and skills to produce the styles you want?

9. What is their returns policy if there are problems with production?

10. Are there any other ethical or environmental considerations relevant to your brand values?

11. Can you visit the factory?

Asking these questions will give you a good idea about whether the factory is suitable for your requirements.



Sourcing Sustainably

Your approach is not limited to your products, but involves your overall business practices too. A sustainable business manages energy use, carbon footprint, waste generation and more.

A brand that talks about being eco-friendly but then uses a lot of plastic for packaging could reflect badly on brand image and reputation.

The fashion industry is the second largest polluting industry in the world. Many developing countries that manufacture clothing suffer badly from untreated toxic waste which pollutes rivers, oceans, and land. Approximately 20% of the world's industrial water pollution comes from textiles treatment/dyeing, and 90% of wastewaters are discharged without treatment. Although this has a disastrous impact, it takes a lot to build awareness and willingness to change.

However, as a clothing brand, you have the power to reduce your impact

and educate consumers. We all have a responsibility to help minimise global warming to 1.5 degrees and it's been proven that brands can potentially contribute 20% to this global warming reduction in the fashion industry.

So, what does being an eco-friendly apparel business mean? Well, resources are limited, the population is growing. An eco-friendly business not only raises awareness on sustainability but also works towards managing their impact. As a clothing company, it's possible to apply design techniques with zero-fabric waste, and to consider construction for durability so that clothes last longer. Considering the life cycle of a product from the get-go, designing with end-of-life in mind, so that garments can be upcycled or recycled makes the process much simpler.

Partnering with a company that can recycle products prevents clothes from entering landfill and increases the

lifespan of that product.

Choosing natural organic or regenerative fabrics will help with your biodiversity and considering your carbon footprint beyond products, such as electricity, gas, water usage and travel can all contribute towards developing a responsible, sustainable business.

Although the term eco-friendly is being overused, not all companies apply this concept, especially in manufacturing. To be a real eco label, your suppliers should follow rules of ethical work environments and fair wages. This reflects the fact that sustainability can impact all aspects of your business and there are many avenues to take to reduce impact and consider planet and people alongside profit.



Pattern Cutting & Sampling

It's time to turn your clothing designs into reality. You've now sourced the right manufacturer and all your fabrics so now you need to develop master patterns and samples.

'First samples' are rarely perfect and will always require an element of change, whether it be for fit, construction, suitability of fabrics and/or trims, so make sure you don't set your expectations too high.

Producing samples gives your chosen factory a chance to become familiar with your fabric and product, and allows them to identify problems or suggest different construction methods to reduce cost. Your factory will also be able to confirm the production price once they have established how long the garment takes to produce. It's also a chance for you to see the quality of the

factory, determine their communication skills and ensure that you're happy with their service before committing to production.

You usually need, on average, two rounds of sampling, before sample size sets. On receiving samples, it's then your responsibility to fit the garments with required amendments communicated to the pattern cutter. Garments should be measured, tested for shrinkage and any manufacturing issues raised with the factory. Getting all of this information accurate is key as it will determine how many more rounds of sampling are needed until approval. To save money, a clothing consultant can guide you through these steps and offer technical advice in fit sessions, pattern cutting amends, fabric testing and shrinkage allowances for patterns.



When your garment is approved for sample size sets, it is time for you to order all your bulk fabric, trims, and embellishments for production. Size sets should be produced in production fabric and trims, so that they can be checked and tested before production.

The master pattern is graded to all the sizes in your range, ready for sample size sets. Sample size sets are an opportunity to check your garment in all available sizes, so do make sure you fit the full range, to ensure the grading is correct. Childrenswear and babywear in particular are notorious for having complex gradings between sizes, as children have different growth spurts at different ages.

You can expect your size sets to be produced to "gold seal" standard – meaning to the same standard as production. This allows you one final sign-off point before production begins. These samples can then be used for sales and marketing.

08 Pricing

Always go back to the numbers before proceeding with production. This stage can be revisited at multiple times throughout the process. The first stage to consider your costings is after sourcing when you have received initial quotations.

Be clear who your target audience is and what price you want to sell your product for. Based on a retail price, you can then work backwards to establish a target manufacturing price. Usually the mark-up is between 200 - 300%. This means that for a 250% mark-up, if a garment cost you £10 per unit to make, you would sell it for £25. Aim for 200% initially, as it is difficult to get higher margins when production orders are generally smaller.



Working out the usages of all your fabrics and trims per style is vital so that you know your calculations are as accurate as possible. Remember to include costs of labels and packaging, as well as delivery costs if you are not charging this on to the customer. Further considerations need to be made to VAT, duty and any other carriage costs. As well as considering these fixed costs that are directly associated with the product, you may also want to consider wider indirect costs, including development costs, wages, utilities, rent etc.

Knowing your numbers in detail will allow you complete transparency and trust over your decision making, ensuring that proceeding to production is commercially viable. Many businesses fail due to their lack of consideration of all the costs involved.

Once the quotations seem workable, and you are happy to proceed into sampling, you can revisit the costs repeatedly throughout the sampling process. As the factory firm up production costs, this is your opportunity to make sure that they still

work. If they don't, it isn't too late to simplify down the design or substitute elements for cheaper alternatives. The factory can assist with simplifying down the construction elements of a garment, if required.

Once the sample is approved, do final costings before placing bulk order fabrics and trims for sample size sets and production. Keep abreast of changing supplier prices which often vary and ensure your pricing is competitive.

If the pricing doesn't work, after multiple reiterations then it may be time to cut your losses. If the costings don't work on paper, they won't work in reality, so take your time to get this step right.



09 Production

By now, everything should be finalised. Your bulk fabric and trims are all at the factory and you're ready to go to production. In theory, the hard work is done and it's over to the factory to complete the goods.

Ensure you maintain a good level of communication with the factory; you may want to visit them if they're local so you can see your products going through the production line. This is a great opportunity to get some pictures for marketing, but also to ensure the quality of production is maintained throughout.

Clarify with the factory that they're clear on how the garments are being packaged and delivered to you and ensure you organise storage for all the goods. Often this step is overlooked, and businesses underestimate how

much space the garments can take up!

Once you receive your garments from the factory, it's your responsibility to ensure you're happy with the goods. Take out around 5% of the goods (varying depending on order size) and quality check these, checking the construction, finish, sizing, embellishments and fabric, looking for any minor or major faults. Any problems found need to be raised with the factory immediately, so that they're given an opportunity to repair, replace or refund the garments.

There are always likely to be a few errors, but these should be kept to a minimum. It's wise to speak to the factory before production starts, to be clear on their policy for returns, so that you know how things are handled from the offset. This ensures a good

relationship between you and the factory and helps prevent any tensions that may otherwise arise.

Finally, always ensure you take out the relevant insurances to cover the value of the goods as these often become your responsibility from the moment you pay for them and they are released from the factory. If a boat sinks, a lorry is stolen, or a warehouse floods with goods inside it, you want to ensure they're insured and all of your hardwork and money is not lost!



10

Distribution & Sales

While you've made a business plan, it's now time to refine your plan for the last time. You'll have your brand name by now, marketing techniques, and your first batch ready. The only thing left is to launch your brand and start selling your products.

Your launch doesn't have to be a big one. Put marketing tactics into action, for instance, add deals and promotions and use some influencers to market your brand. At this point, your new business needs brand awareness. Instagram has become a popular platform, and many Instagram influencers are happy to promote new fashion brands in exchange for products.

However, Instagram may not always be the right platform for you. Refer to your research on your target consumer

and ensure you target your efforts where you are most likely to find your consumer base. Will you use conventional ways to market your brand or digital? If you're establishing an e-commerce clothing brand, going for social media marketing will be the best option. Marketing decisions will be dependent on budget. Utilise organic options but be mindful that having a marketing budget is wise when competition is fierce.

According to research, 33% choose brands doing social or environmental good and 21% would support brands that made their sustainability credentials clearer during advertisement and marketing.

Use social media, hire influencers, create content, invest in PR. Share your story, values, and authenticity.

You can start locally. Find media channels related to your industry, target audience, and market. Instagram is one of the most used platforms by fashion brands. You can invest time into TikTok, Pinterest, Facebook, and YouTube, if research suggests this is where your target consumer is. Work on a balance of paid and organic content. Engage with others who also want to make the world a better place. Give tips, share resources, and educate those who want to make a change.

Will you need a website which is your 'owned media', to share your products, brand, and values? Don't fall into the trap of tedious tasks and save your productivity. Automate e-mails, social media, and website actions.

Work on your network. Participate in events and engage with others who share your vision from editors and bloggers to writers, and peers.

Consider the consumer journey at touch points from raising awareness of the brand, through to creating interest and desire, This leads to action, with the consumer purchasing your goods.

But the marketing journey doesn't end there. Consider your communication channels with customers who have bought products so that you maintain contact and encourage re-purchasing. It often costs a business less to get current customers to re-purchase, than to always find new customers. Consider how you can re-engage with the audience you do attract.

As a business owner, you might have a lot to handle all at once. Don't hesitate in asking for help. Keep looking for ways to improve knowledge and hire the right people to support your business growth.

Results might not come overnight, but effort and dedication, will lead your brand on a prosperous path. Set realistic sales and distribution goals. If you can hit your sales goals, you can continue to grow.



Round Off

When all is said and done, it's entirely possible to launch your own clothing collection with the right preparation and planning in place.

The most successful are those that recognise a need or gap in the market for a style or approach and execute the vision with business acumen.

The journey to success will be a rollercoaster and it will require a lot of dedication, long days and be a steep learning curve. For those with no industry experience, it's advisable to seek the advice and support of a clothing consultant to help with your needs. This can prevent mistakes and save money in the long term.

At Bridge & Stitch we are here to help you with all or any aspect of your journey launching your own clothing brand. Please get in touch for any help or guidance that you might need.



About Bridge & Stitch

Bridge and Stitch is a clothing creation consultancy who can help you with your needs from design to manufacture. With over a decade of experience in the full range of clothing sectors and with an extensive network of UK and overseas factories specialising in various fabrics, we have helped so many start-ups realise their vision. Why not get in touch with our award-winning founder, Rachael Hobbs, for a no obligation, free discovery meeting? Rachael and her team can help with as little or as much of this journey as you wish and look forward to talking through your ideas.

Contact us today:

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Phone: +44 (0) 115 684 2525

Website: bridgeandstitch.com

At Bridge & Stitch we work with clothing brands to develop ethically conscious collections, from concept to manufacture. We convert ideas into designs and technical packs to realise your visions. Rachael, and her team at

Bridge & Stitch offer an end-to-end project managed one-stop solution including:

- > design development
- > trend and colour forecasting
- > tech packs
- > patterns, grading
- > fabric sourcing
- > trim sourcing
- > embroidery and printing
- > labels and packaging
- > factory sourcing
- > sampling and production
- > quality control
- > project management

Our services suit well-budgeted brands wanting mid- to high-end products that are eco-friendly and made to last. We take pressures away by handling everything from design to production. We're transparent with suppliers so you know where clothes come from and provide sustainable options and expert advice for a positive relationship between people, planet, and profit.

Bridge & Stitch