
The Manufacturing Stage

Now you've planned the product, researched everything and sourced the materials, it's time to put it all together, and actually manufacture the product.

Choosing the right supplier and then committing to them

It's important when you're looking for a supplier that you choose the correct one. It's best to go by the recommendations of others if you can, as verbal testimonial can be a very valuable tool. Once you've been given a good recommendation, it is always advised that you do some investigations of your own, and look into the suppliers as best as you can, making sure that they're definitely the right people for the job. You can also consolidate your choice by asking to take a tour of the factory, to see how they've got things set up, and to make sure there's nothing underhand going on, for example in the hopefully unlikely event that child labourers are being used. Once your tech packs have arrived, it is worth sending them off to multiple suppliers to see what kinds of deals they're prepared to make you. This means you'll have a wide range of offers available, and you can pick the one which is best suited to you. Certain suppliers will offer you what seems

like a good deal to begin with but will then add on extra prices during the course of the partnership, so be careful. You'll also want to remember things like;

- Good communication from both parties is vital
- There should always be a terms and conditions part of the agreement
- If suppliers will arrange shipping for you, how much does this cost?

If you're getting your materials in from outside of the UK, then the company will need to be VAT registered, and have an EORI number as well. You'll also be charged 20% VAT at Customs if you try and import from within the EU without being VAT registered, and you can't claim this money back, so it's worth being careful.

Manufacturing overseas

When you're manufacturing overseas, then you'll usually be given a price which factors in everything, from the fabric to the make up, all the way through to the labels and prints. The terms of payment in these cases usually require a certain percentage of the money upfront, and then the remainder is to be paid at the end of the partnership, and the terms may include FOB, which is basically where the seller is required to pay for the cost of transporting the goods to the port, as well as any loading costs.

If you've agreed a price with a supplier, then you can request samples be sent to you, so you can have a proper look and feel of the materials you're going to be using. It's worth noting that some suppliers will charge new customers for this. These costs will then be credited back to you once you've placed your order with that company.

The promotional sample is sent to you to show;

- The available fabrics
- The workmanship of the material
- To give you an idea of how the clothing will look when it has been created

These samples usually take around 2-3 weeks to produce, so this will need to be included within your timescales. If you're happy with these samples, then you can either request more samples of a fabric or just go ahead and place your order. Once the order has been placed, you should receive revised samples until you are

happy with the product and authorise the full production to begin. The pre-production samples should resemble the finished product as closely as possible, although they often won't have labels and tags on them.

Once you've got hold of a pre-production sample, you can use it for things like;

- Photoshoots
- Press releases
- Lookbooks
- Any PR materials
- Website content

It's advised that you get samples in every size so you can check the quality all the way through, and so you can see what the finished product will look like once it's been sent over via a shipping company. This is because once you've made payment and the product has been shipped over, it is very difficult to send back to the supplier if you have issues, so it is advised that you do this if you plan bigger shipments. In order to make sure this issue doesn't arise, it's worth either going out to the factory in order to check a percentage of the stock or ask someone else to go in your stead. It's also worth considering that some suppliers will charge you an additional amount called an undercharge if the quantity you've asked for is smaller. As well as this, make sure that you have contingencies in place, for example if the shipment is delayed, and how this will affect your timescales if issues arise.

Manufacturing in the UK

Most manufacturers in the UK operate on a CMT basis, which is Cut, Make and Trim, although this way of operating is slowly being phased out of the industry. If you're working in the UK, then you'll need to supply all the materials, from the material to make the clothing, to the buttons and labels. It will also fall to you to make sure that they have a pattern to work with. Some companies do have their own pattern cutters, and will give you a cost for the very first patterns and samples.

When working with a UK supplier, there are certain things you should remember;

- Make sure you work closely with the pattern cutters and sampler machinists, to ensure you get exactly what you need
- Be sure to get a look at some samples of work they've already done, to get a feel for workmanship and quality
- Make sure you are realistic about both the prices and any limitations the factories may have in terms of technology or manpower.

The supplier will then give you a cost which is for the creation of the product only, and not the shipping or transportation. Because of this, you'll need to make sure that you factor in all the other costs and requirements. For example, this will involve things like the shipping of the product, and how much it costs to transport it to distribution sites to be sold. While it is usually more expensive to make products in the UK, you can take advantage of being able to make smaller quantities where possible.

Overall, these are the processes which are involved in the creation of a product, from the research and early planning stages right the way through to the final manufacturing of the product itself. Once this has been done, you'll just need to market and sell your product, but hopefully now you have a good understanding of how to research, design and make a product, whether it is an accessory or clothing.