

## Production – finding and selecting your manufacturer.

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We will soon be at the time in the fashion season when designers are ready to place production orders. Soon afterwards thoughts turn to the next season's designs and getting samples made all over again.

So while the focus has been on design, marketing, showing and selling, a designer cannot ignore production.

The lucky ones will already have excellent relationships with tried and tested manufacturers (whether they be sampling units, short-run production units or larger volume manufacturers). Others, however, will be looking for a manufacturer that gives them the delivery, quality and price they need. And, of course, new designers will be looking for their first manufacturer.

### Finding a Manufacturer

For a new designer finding a manufacturer can be a daunting task. Indeed, for the more established designer, finding an alternative manufacturer can also be pretty difficult. Many fashion manufacturers in the UK have tended not to be too good at promoting themselves. So how are you supposed to find them?

Well it must be possible, otherwise how would the big design names of today have got started? And how could the UK fashion industry be lauded as 'the bright new hope of British manufacturing' in the business pages of the Sunday Times?

UK manufacturers are out there. They may not be the big factories, employing hundreds of people that were around years ago, but they are there. There are enormous benefits to be gained from using a manufacturer close to your base: being able to go to the factory to discuss changes or clarify technical points; seeing what's going on for yourself to make sure you are getting what you asked for; checking samples, toiles, sealing samples, first runs; checking quality before it's too late; avoiding unnecessary delays. There can also be significant cost & time savings for delivery. Imagine needing a sample for a show when it is stuck at the airport!

### How to find them

The three main places to look are:

- a) Your friends, colleagues and acquaintances – word-of-mouth;
- b) The internet;
- c) Trade Associations.

Of course, by far the best way to find a suitable manufacturer is by **word-of-mouth**. So don't be afraid to ask everyone you know if they can suggest someone. You don't have to give away your trade secrets to do this.

Unfortunately word-of-mouth doesn't always work, and might even limit your search somewhat. So there may be no alternative but to trawl **the internet**.

The main problem with a web search is that you find a lot of retailers, wholesalers and importers that are difficult to separate from the manufacturers. So here are my suggestions of websites that are worth looking at as a starting point:

1. The '**Manufacturers Online Showroom**' on the 'Industry' tab on [www.fashioncapital.co.uk](http://www.fashioncapital.co.uk) is by far the most comprehensive list of London manufacturers.
2. [www.fashionalliance.co.uk](http://www.fashionalliance.co.uk) has a long list of UK manufacturers, searchable by specialisation.
3. The longest list of fashion companies that I have found is on [www.Yell.com](http://www.Yell.com) – enter 'clothing manufacturer' in the search criteria. If you ask for the whole of the UK you get over 70000 names. If you ask for London you get over 7000. Unfortunately not all of them have details about what they do. And there are wholesalers among them as well. So there is a lot more digging to do.
4. There are short lists on a few other websites but the ones above are a good starting point.

There are several **Trade Associations** that will have manufacturers as members and that should be only too willing to help put you in touch with them. There are regional associations, such as the East Midlands Textile Association (EMTEK), and trade specialist associations, such as The Silk Association of Great Britain and the Knitting Industries Federation. EMTEK, for example, list 32 manufacturers among their membership on their website, [www.emtek.org.uk](http://www.emtek.org.uk). Others associations may make such information available on request rather than on their websites.

Finally, of course, don't forget you have Fashion Capital's expertise at **The Workshop, The Factory and The Fashion Studio**.

### **Selecting a manufacturer**

So once you have used the above tips to draw up your short list, you have now reached a critical point in your search – the selection phase.

Selecting the right company is not easy. But there are processes that can help you get it right – starting with deciding which services you need (pattern cutting, toiles, sampling/development, grading, short-run production, long-run production, specialised skills).

Unfortunately this article is not the place to go into detail on this topic. But if you would like to know more why not sign up for Fashion Capital's 'The Business of Fashion' workshops - Workshop 1 'Getting the most from your manufacturer' covers: finding; selecting; and managing your manufacturer ([www.fashioncapital.co.uk](http://www.fashioncapital.co.uk) – learning/seminars). This workshop is on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2012.

If you would like to book on the workshop or are looking for more detailed one-to-one help then please contact me ([nigel@fashioncapital.co.uk](mailto:nigel@fashioncapital.co.uk)).

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