



## Speed and Agility

# The secret behind hot new apparel designs

Innovative technologies help major apparel brands to speed up their time to market. Here are the examples of Chico's, Harold's and Jones Moderate Sportswear, three major American retailers.



The U.S. retail apparel industry totals over \$150 billion in annual revenue. In fact, an American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA) report shows U.S. consumption of over 7 billion garments for the first half of 2002 alone. This highly competitive industry relies on fresh new ideas that appeal to the individual tastes of each consumer, yet en masse. New design technologies allow major retail brands to deliver more one-of-a-kind fashion inspirations with speed and precision.

Nine of the top ten U.S. retailers are using Lectra design technology today to streamline the pro-

duct development process and get their brands to market faster. We spoke to three of the leading brands and retailers to catch a glimpse of how one of Lectra's design solutions, specifically U4ia software, is keeping them competitive. Included are Chico's, a private label retailer of women's fashions; Harold's, retailer of upscale ladies and men's specialty apparel and Jones Moderate Sportswear, designer and marketer of branded apparel, footwear and accessories.

### Staying ahead of trends without falling behind in deliverables

One of the biggest challenges in product development is communicating the more subjective,



With Lectra technology, designers can match colors, fabrics and styles before producing the first prototype.

aesthetic side of designs, including prints and colors. Coupled with the speed at which new collections are brought to market and the globalization of apparel manufacturing, design specification is a pivotal point in product development that can make or break the success of the collection.

*"We have to stay abreast of new trends and techniques,"* remarks Phillip Haines, creative CAD Manager at Chico's. *"U4ia is an important tool in achieving the visual package needed in communicating our design needs."*

Whether produced in house or outsourced, the critical specification phase of product development can be one of the most frustrating – it's where the art of design meets the science of production. And for many companies, this phase often results in numerous, costly strike-offs before finally settling on the right colors, color combos, or patterns and usually with a certain degree of compromise... but that's about to change.

### **If you can dream it, you can achieve it... faster!**

From concept to production, Lectra CAD solutions go beyond design to integration with production processes that precisely match color, texture and pattern before ever creating a single strike-off. These popular apparel brands and retailers are fully leveraging their design assets to innovate exciting new styles.

*"Lectra design technology has allowed us to consistently design in detail with accuracy and speed. So we can create and modify designs and communicate this with our mills and designers in all parts of the world. In other*

*words, we are able to speak the same language,"* explains Yeonah Choi, CAD Director, Jones Moderate Sportswear.

The U4ia system brings more speed to the design process and allows designers to do things that weren't possible before. According to Chico's Haines, *"We're able to provide creative packages faster and with much more detail and accuracy to the requirements requested by our vendors both visually and technically."*

Because they are working with digital information, these designers are no longer limited by time or geographic barriers between their design teams and overseas mills. *"The technology gives us a huge advantage in working with sourcing partners. It's great at streamlining the development process and helping our mills better understand what we want,"* notes Suzanne Sloan, Harold's CAD Manager.

### **Exploiting design potential**

For high-profile brands, designers walk a fine line between delivering a consistent brand image and creating provocative designs – that's where the technology adds real value. These designers have found that the authenticity of sample simulations and flexibility of the design tools offer a great deal of latitude in achieving this balance. Their inspirations can be quickly captured and converted into a simulated collection complete with print, texture and silhouette. Each is easily adapted to fit the brand's, retailer's, or retail partner's unique identity and their customers' tastes.





For Jones Moderate Sportswear customers, that translates to more variety. *"Lectra's U4ia helps us to design and communicate seamlessly, so we are more efficient and productive, which allows us to produce new collections monthly,"* says Jones' Choi.

Keeping up with color forecasts and following consumer acceptance go hand in hand for these high tech design studios. Colorways can be risky and these forward-thinking companies have learned how to apply this technology to quickly capitalize on a trend while it's hot. The ability to develop and specify precise colorways is tantamount to the ease and speed at which they can be changed, based on consumer preference.

*"We're big on color,"* states Harold's Sloan. *"We have nine to ten color palettes each year and over 50 prints each season. With the new colorways technology it's easy to switch colors. So if a color didn't do well, it's simple and convenient to change."*

### Technology that delivers a competitive edge

Staying ahead in the highly competitive retail apparel industry takes more than innovative designs. With the industry operating on slimmer-than-ever margins, squeezing costs from each step in the product development process can have a positive impact on profitability. While overseas manufacturing has helped reduce costs, managing product development on a global scale has interjected

other product development related costs. Lectra technology is helping these brands and retailers better control product development costs particularly in sample management.

Until recently, specifying colorways and prints has been a "hit or miss" iterative process that can cost millions over the course of a year's retail deliveries. Much of that cost is associated with courier expenditures – distributing spec packages and corresponding strike-offs and lab dips back and forth between design teams and overseas mills until agreement is reached on final production samples. What once required a physical sample can now be done with a virtual sample transmitted electronically via the Internet in minutes as opposed to days or weeks. According to Harold's Sloan, *"It [U4ia] speeds up our turnover because we can*



*minimize the number of strike-offs to two or three versus making the mill do five strike-offs."* And with nine to ten palettes per year, that's a significant savings.

Although it hasn't completely eliminated the need for physical samples, these brands and retailers have found significant reductions in the amount of samples required as well as in the time to manage a high volume of samples, most of which are rejected anyway. Says Chico's Haines: *"by upgrading to the Lectra design solution, we are able to cut the development time tremendously, allowing the artist more time to be creative."* As the retail apparel industry continues to meet the challenges of differentiation, clearly, Lectra's U4ia technology will play a key role in helping them meet changing market dynamics with speed and agility ■

