6 APPAREL’S TOP INNOVATORS

Apparel Magazine salutes many of the key visionary firms shaping the industry in its 3rd annual special issue. Profiles of our winners highlight their ingenuity in overcoming challenges, their willingness to adapt to change and their flair for tapping into consumer desires in a highly competitive global marketplace.

REPORTING BY CHRISTIAN CHENSVOLD AND JUSTIN FENNER

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TOP INNOVATOR PARTNERS

GERBER TECHNOLOGY

MAERSK LINE

Manhattan Associates

SKY I.T. GROUP
What makes an apparel company truly an innovator?

Many of the answers lie in the pages that follow, which honor our Apparel Innovators.

While the strategies of our recipients are diverse, the vision, the determination and the leadership each demonstrates are not.

To all of our honorees, Apparel Magazine tips its hat to you for your resourcefulness, your creativity and most importantly, your innovation.

By Christian Chensvold and Justin Fenner

In today’s challenging economy, retailers are faced with long product lead times, short product lifecycles, and customers with many more buying options thanks to ecommerce. As a result, retailers must shorten cycles to ensure that products being delivered match current market demands.

With more than 1,000 stores nationwide, Internet and catalog channels, millions of SKUs, and short lifecycle products that are globally sourced, JCPenney executes a complex end-to-end planning, sourcing and flow process. Working as part of a combined team that includes buyers, planners, designers, suppliers, mills and international buying offices, the sourcing managers execute a well-choreographed design and sourcing process that allows JCPenney to make buying decisions much closer to the selling season. This ensures that fashion-right merchandise is always in the stores.

In an effort to reduce its cycle time by more than half, JCPenney worked with JDA Software Group Inc. to create an i2 Technologies’ Cycle Time Optimization (CTO) solution. The simple, easy-to-use solution gives sourcing managers visibility into conceptual plans — from the business and design options to the design team — all in a single view. This allows sourcing managers to make decisions on the pre-positioning of materials and capacity. During production, the sourcing managers have a real-time view of work in process across all their manufacturing partners. The entire process is supported by an exception-based workflow and events engine, which ensures that the rapid cadence for reservation approvals is maintained both within JCPenney and externally with its partners.
With three distribution networks — retail, wholesale and e-commerce — Tommy Bahama’s warehouses were under tremendous strain, especially when you consider that they were being run manually. In order to stay competitive, the company knew that it had to implement a variety of technological solutions.

It decided on Computer Generated Solutions’ BlueCherry Advanced Warehouse Solution, largely for its ability to integrate with other BlueCherry programs already in place at the company.

The benefits were multifold. First is an increased utilization of space within warehouses. “When we started, we were overflowing at the seams with inventory,” says Ryan Olsen, program manager for wholesale. Now with AWS directing the movement of inventory and real-time updates with radio-frequency transactions, inventory accuracy has increased to 99.98 percent. “We’ve done two inventories on the new warehouse management system,” says Olsen, “and on both of them — a million units — we’ve been off by about 500, which is pretty good. Previously, with the manual system, we weren’t nearly that close.”

Cost savings have also been broad. “The bottom line is that inventory is where it’s supposed to be, which reduces cost because people aren’t searching for things. Radio-frequency picking, which is directed by the computer, allows you to choose an optimal picking route, significantly reducing walk distance. Everything that goes out the door is piece picked, which means people were walking all over the place. And especially with the number of SKUs we have, and the number of small orders, it means that optimized picking is critical.”

And lastly, Tommy Bahama has been able to efficiently manage and process orders for its three distribution channels. Tommy Bahama is now able to present a single view of inventory to all three distribution channels, reducing the overhead and inefficiencies of managing separate inventories. In addition, the order fulfillment method can be tailored to the channel, with large waves processed in forward areas for large wholesale orders, and radio-frequency cart/zone picking for small orders. “We now have processes that are optimized for very small orders for e-commerce, wholesale and replenishment to our retail stores, and different ones tailored to high volume orders for customers like Macy’s and Nordstrom” says Olsen. “With accurate inventory and optimized pick processing, we have seen a real reduction in labor costs,” summarized Olsen.
Bulwark Protective Apparel

Nashville, TN | www.bulwark.com

NOMINATED BY: VF Imagewear | www.vfimagewear.com

When electricians have to work in electrically charged environments, for example, changing a fuse or working on a still-energized power line, there’s sometimes a danger from what’s called an electrical arc — a dangerous electrical breakdown of gas that produces a plasma discharge.

“It’s just a hazard of the job,” said Bulwark Protective Apparel’s merchandise manager Allison Bloodworth.

Hazards like that are what drives Bulwark, a brand of VF Imagewear that provides durable flame-resistant protective garments, to create products such as its new base layer, the multi-functional protection undergarment, or MPU 2. It’s a short-sleeved T-shirt made of cotton knitwear that gets a chemical treatment during the manufacturing process. This treatment makes the fabric flame resistant for the life of the garment. It also meets the National Fire Protection Association’s 70E standard for electrical safety in the workplace, and is compliant with OSHA’s Final Rule, 1910.269, on electrical protective equipment.

But in addition to the base layer’s flame-retardant properties, the garment is particularly innovative in its design. Bulwark’s product development team consulted competitors at the International Lineman’s Rodeo, an annual competition of electric linemen that turns safe work practices into sport. The result was a T-shirt with gusseted underarms.

“We did the underarm gussets for ease of mobility, so when the end user is reaching over their head, it allows their arm articulation to be improved so that it doesn’t untuck their shirt,” Bloodworth said. “It also keeps the seam out of their armpit for chafing.”

The base layer is made from 100 percent cotton, and its softness and comfort were high on Bulwark’s list of priorities. The company’s product development team worked with a fabric mill (which, Bloodworth said, requested not to be named), to develop the best blend, weight and construction of the fabric to make sure it was safe and wearable.

“I think the perception is that flame-resistant products are going to be uncomfortable, so Bulwark’s goal was to make this flame-resistant T-shirt as comfortable as non-flame-resistant products,” Bloodworth said. “So that’s why it’s got the soft feel, that’s why it’s 100 percent cotton, just like other T-shirts.”

The garment, which was open to sell this March, was made specifically to wear underneath Bulwark’s woven shirts, and when combined the base layer and another Bulwark garment give the wearer increased protection from dangerous electrical arcs. Bloodworth said Bulwark will look into creating a similar lower body base layer in the future.

Sport Chalet

La Canada, CA | www.sportchalet.com

NOMINATED BY: Epicor | www.epicor.com

Though it was founded in 1959, long before the advent of modern technology, Sport Chalet has prided itself on providing a level of service unparalleled in the retail sporting goods industry, with ease of shopping one of its highest priorities.

To combat lost sales, maintain stellar customer service and drive innovation, Sport Chalet implemented an enterprise selling solution to ensure that shoppers’ needs can be met from every one of its 55 locations. Initially piloted in six stores, the solution was then rolled out to all store locations in time to support the hectic holiday season. Midway through the season, Sport Chalet was averaging more than 200 enterprise selling orders per day. Sport Chalet soon opted to make the distribution center a key fulfillment site and integrated enterprise selling with the distribution center’s warehouse management system to pull inventory from there first.
As the distribution center became the starting point for the enterprise selling process, Sport Chalet experienced a tremendous rise in efficiencies. If orders cannot be fulfilled from there, the request is routed to the store in closest proximity to the customer.

Sport Chalet also recently decided to use Enterprise Selling to optimize its website, which was previously managed by a third party. When Sport Chalet decided to bring the site in-house, it also needed to support inventory and order fulfillment, and so it began to utilize two options: ship-to-home or in-store pickup. Folding e-commerce into the enterprise selling process was a seamless effort, as enterprise selling was already integrated to the warehouse and stores for fulfillment purposes, therefore the process was similar to adding an additional store, albeit one that had many more orders. Online shoppers are utilizing the same applications company personnel were already using for improved in-store customer service.

Currently, a third of web orders are fulfilled from the distribution center and two-thirds directly from stores. And while there are now more channels, products and logistics to manage, the company hasn’t needed to add staff.

Offering an enterprise view of inventory and a unified view of customer orders, the Epicor Retail Enterprise Selling software solution includes Inventory Locator, Order Manager, Customer Service Application and Store System components. Combining a real-time inventory locator and configurable order manager to integrate inventory and transaction processing of multiple sales channels, the cross-channel order management software allows Sport Chalet to sell merchandise and satisfy customer demand from anywhere within the enterprise. Since introducing “save the sale” functionality, Sport Chalet has experienced improved employee productivity and improved margins by addressing demand and maximizing inventory turns. Customer satisfaction levels remain high as needs are quickly met and shoppers are assured with more than a guess when their products will arrive.

The Pashmina Store
Houston, TX | www.thepashminastore.com

NOMINATED BY: Volusion | www.volusion.com

The Pashmina Store may employ Nepalese artisans using centuries-old techniques to create its super-soft cashmere shawls, wraps and blankets, but it needed cutting-edge software to help sell them.

Founded in 2000 as an e-commerce site, The Pashmina Store specializes in affordable pashmina items made from a special goat that lives high in the Himalayas, and which is known for supplying the softest cashmere yarn. Last year, co-owner Blair Rhodes set a goal to surpass $1 million in annual sales, which would give the company more buying power with suppliers, and allow it to take advantage of higher-volume discounts for shipping, inventory and other costs. The Pashmina Store had been using a shopping-cart service for its website, but its technical limitations hindered growth. The site was also performing poorly in search engine results, preventing growth of the customer base.

The Pashmina Store relaunched the site, this time powered by the Volusion e-commerce software platform. As a result, the company has been able to grow business rapidly despite the recession, surpassing $1 million in annual sales, and is poised for future growth without growing pains.

Volusion’s software solution has made a number of key business factors possible for The Pashmina Store’s growth. It has allowed easy expansion into new categories such as sweaters and printed scarves because of built-in merchandising tools that make it easy to add, manage, promote and close sales on new products.

Also, an all-in-one administrative area allows The Pashmina Store to fully manage the customer experience and order processing from a single area of its store. The solution’s inventory management and shipping tools save time and money by allowing the company to quickly gauge
product needs and place orders at the appropriate time, without having to carry too much inventory.

Integrated Search Engine Optimization (SEO) functionality allowed The Pashmina Store to maximize SEO on every page of its website which resulted in top search engine rankings. As new items are added — such as cashmere sweaters, or new patterns such as plaid — they quickly establish high placements in the search results for keywords relevant to any new product category.

Volusion’s software solution also makes it easy to add multiple product shots, important for allowing the company to showcase new designs and products. By having multiple product views, the customer is more confident in her purchasing decision. The ROI tracking feature allows The Pashmina Store to track each new product to advertising sources, allowing the company to determine if a new product will sell at the levels needed to turn a reasonable profit. The speed allows The Pashmina Store to cut losses and also quickly add to gains by expanding on successful products.

The final benefit of updated software was its reliability: After implementation, the Volusion solution went on to process $600,000 in sales without any errors.

Encompass Group
McDonough, GA | www.encompassgroup.net

In one of the Encompass Group’s first training sessions with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, someone said to Jea Gackowski, “Customs thinks that apparel importers are one rung above drug dealers.”

But long before that first meeting (and that biting comment), Gackowski, the company’s corporate compliance officer and vice president of engineering, and the rest of the Encompass team decided to be proactive in their customs compliance strategy.

The Encompass Group specializes in outfitting the healthcare and hospitality industries with apparel, bedding and bandages, among other things. Gackowski said the company had been importing from various countries for more than 25 years.

“One of the things we realized early on is that importing things to the United States is not a right. It’s a privilege,” Gackowski said.

“And most companies don’t realize that.”

In order not to lose the privilege of importing, the Encompass Group launched a massive overhaul of its customs compliance system that included training key members of the company’s staff. Lawyers, customs agents and customs brokers came in and taught everyone from executives to engineers and IT employees customs rules and regulations.

As a result, the company developed a relationship — and a software system — that can change and adapt to Custom’s requests for information as the agency grows, and as Encompass grows as a business. Gackowski said that, from 2001 onward, her company has been asking, “What do we need to do to be world class?” in terms of compliance.

The core of the strategy is the ability to “produce data in a way that works for Customs,” Gackowski said.

“The problem is knowing the information you need. Because what you’re doing is translating it into many languages,” Gackowski said. “Customs has its own language, and you’re required to learn to speak it.”

She added that Customs was always and has always been very receptive to requests for help and guidance.

Customs “would tell you, look, here’s what you need, here’s how we need to see it, and here’s the information you really need from vendors,” Gackowski said.

The Encompass Group can now easily produce the information Customs needs, and its system recently helped the company get through a focused assessment, which Gackowski said is “one of the most thorough audits you’ll ever get through Customs.”

The strategy has benefited the company in manifold ways. The Encompass Group is now third-tier Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT) certified, which gives its imports benefits at the border. Staying compliant keeps the company’s supply chain open and flowing. And when something goes wrong, Encompass has “a one-on-one relationship with someone at the port,” that Gackowski said can help speed the importing process along.

And without roadblocks such as having to find and translate all of the necessary information every time Customs has a request, Encompass also enjoys a much faster speed to market now than it had before the compliance strategy was put in place, which makes for very happy customers who know their products are safe.

“One of the core beliefs that we have in our company is the safety, security and comfort of our customers,” Gackowski said.

“Being in the health care field, that’s very important.”

Last year, co-owner of The Pashmina Store Blair Rhodes set a goal to surpass $1 million in annual sales, which would give the company more buying power with suppliers, and allow it to take advantage of higher-volume discounts for shipping, inventory and other costs.
Nowadays, being green is considered a social responsibility. But commercial interest in the environmentally conscious movement can often overshadow a company’s responsibility to the people who work for it.

For Green3, a company that makes a variety of clothes and accessories out of organic and recycled cotton and wool, it’s not enough just to be good to the planet. Last summer, the Oshkosh, WI-based company partnered with ASPIRO, a Green Bay, WI-based company that works to create employment opportunities for people with cognitive disabilities. The partnership has ASPIRO’s contract sewers performing cutting, sewing and packaging services for Green3.

Green3’s owners, husband-and-wife team Jim and Sandy Martin, first learned about ASPIRO through news of one of its government contracts. ASPIRO did the cutting and sewing of over 4,000 black scarves for the people in the viewing stand at the inauguration of Barack Obama. ASPIRO also makes Tyvek coveralls and quilted flight jacket liners for the government.

Over 30 sewing specialists at two lay tables work to make these products and components. The firms’ proximity (Oshkosh is less than an hour away from Green Bay), and ASPIRO’s production capabilities made for an appealing local partnership, eliminating the waste that would come from contracting manufacturing services from across the globe.

Between Green3 and ASPIRO, the design and manufacturing processes find other creative ways to eliminate waste. For example, ASPIRO employees are working on T-shirt scarves for Green3, which consist of the sleeves of long-sleeved T-shirts made into scarves about 60 inches long. ASPIRO’s initial project for Green3 involved turning recycled men’s suit jackets into tote bags.

The relationship the two companies have developed goes beyond business symbiosis. While Green3 does what it can to conserve, preserve and protect the Earth, it’s also promoting the idea that with the right training, people with cognitive disabilities can contribute just as much to the workplace as anyone else.

“Overall, our partnership with Green3 has been a win-win situation in that Green3 is able to decrease the amount of materials being deposited into landfills by designing and marketing unique and fashionable apparel,” said Paul Cantwell, ASPIRO’s director of production. “On the other hand, ASPIRO Inc. has provided resources to assist with a cut and sew process to support the growing need for their products, but it also has provided employment opportunities and job skill training for our team associates.”

Green3, a company that makes a variety of clothes and accessories out of organic and recycled cotton and wool, has partnered with ASPIRO, a company that employs people with cognitive disabilities. Now, with help from ASPIRO’s employees, Green3 is producing scarves made from the sleeves of long-sleeved T-shirts, and bags made from recycled men’s suit jackets.

Wet Seal
Foothill Ranch, CA | www.wetseal.com

S
ocial networking and sales strategy both can be tough nuts to crack on their own — but when they’re combined, as they are in Wet Seal’s approach to electronic sales and marketing, the result can be a beautiful thing.

The company, which sells clothes and accessories to young women, has brought together a number of social media approaches, turning the online attention of fashion loving, tech-savvy young girls into a bigger bottom line.
The company posts photos and sales alerts to the nearly 250,000 people who follow Wet Seal on Facebook. Its YouTube uploads, including behind-the-scenes clips from photo shoots and contest instructions, have over 200,000 views collectively. Wet Seal also has more than 2,000 followers on Twitter. Through their virtual interactions with Wet Seal, these followers and friends are primed to take advantage of the company’s Fashion Community, a social media platform launched in May 2008 that allows users to create outfits online, rate the ensembles other users come up with, and purchase outfits from a personalized virtual boutique. In the two years it’s been live, users have generated nearly 400,000 outfits, and another 20,000 outfits go up every month.

And as proud as Wet Seal is of having built this community, it’s even happier that they’ve been able to turn clicks into dollars. “The true measure of these tools’ usefulness is whether sales increase. And they have,” Wet Seal CEO Ed Thomas told Apparel for the magazine’s April cover story. “Our conversion rates [from browsing to buying] are over 40 percent higher for customers who have viewed a user-generated outfit, and the average dollar sale is over 20 percent higher.”

Wet Seal’s website also allows users to shop together, and to chat with each other about what they plan to buy. They can also start a direct chat with a Wet Seal employee to ask for advice.

Its iPhone application, iRunway, launched last September and makes it easier to buy and browse products on the go. It can even be helpful in store — users can scan a product’s barcode or type in its product number and instantly scan outfits created by the Fashion Community that feature that garment.

Wet Seal’s mobile site is optimized to make shopping on the go easy, too, with mobile storefronts powered by a mobile commerce engine from Digby. Shoppers can browse from mobile phones and see what products are available in local Wet Seal stores. Though only 25 percent of Wet Seal’s customers have a Web-enabled phone, the company sees a strong future in the growing mobile market.

“Mobile is the next step in the e-commerce process and it offers us a very powerful platform to communicate with our customer regardless of which channel she is using to shop,” Thomas said.

But the facility of these apps and tools isn’t the only thing driving sales — with every click, chat and tweet, Wet Seal gets more information about what its customers are wearing, and what they want from the company. “I can’t think of a better tool to get immediate feedback from a customer on how she is dressing,” Thomas said. “Before, we had to wait to see what customers purchased to know what was going to sell well. Now we know instantly. It is a great tool for us to develop our own business internally.”

Bon-Ton Stores
Milwaukee, WI | www.bonton.com

NOMINATED BY: Gerber Technology | www.gerbertechnology.com

The problem with implementing any new business solution, ERP, ILS or otherwise, is that it’s likely going to change the way a company goes about its day-to-day operations.

So it was fortunate that when Bon-Ton Stores (the operator of department stores and furniture galleries across the Northeast and Midwest), was looking for a new product lifecycle management system, it found a solution that did exactly what the company needed and didn’t require a major change in its business processes to accommodate the system.

“The system was preconfigured to do a lot of the things we wanted to do,” said Chuck Gilreath, Bon-Ton’s vice president of sourcing for private brand. “It was a good fit with our business process.”

The company needed a PLM system to do two things: to update an older spec sheet program and to “go upstream,” as Gilreath put it.

“If you think about the lifecycle of product development, you start with ideas. You’ve got people who’ve gone shopping, they’ve got something in mind they want to make for a season, and they start to coordinate photographs and notes and so on,” he said. “And at some point, you start asking for samples from vendors. Then you make the decision to buy something, and you start filling out detailed specifications. So if you think of that as a continuum, the first part of that often is not covered by any system.”

Bon-Ton’s new PLM system has improved the efficiency of the company’s private-brand development process, as well as fit approval, image and color management, and vendor collaboration. Plus, designers can now start to organize their notes, and thoughts, from the very first spark of development.
Fashion consumers are always influenced by what their peers are wearing, making social shopping a powerful way to build brand awareness and loyalty, more so than traditional advertising. The development of a community atmosphere around a brand is a valuable tool that creates an emotional connection, promoting repeat visits and a more likely transition from browsing to checkout.

With all this in mind, Juicy Couture launched a complete social shopping experience on its website utilizing CREATE THE GROUP’s social shopping platform, CTS/SOCIAL. It has helped foster a unique online community, strengthening the brand’s relationship with consumers and generating measurable engagement results. Juicy Couture has been able to leverage unique online community features, along with powerful e-commerce delivery, to create a branded social shopping experience.

Since implementing CTS/SOCIAL, Juicy Couture has experienced dramatic site results, including a 162 percent increase in conversion rates, a 141 percent increase in page views per visit, and a 150 percent increase in the average time spent on the website. One of the ways a sense of community is created is by directing shoppers to Club Couture, an exclusive online portal that contains social shopping elements such as “Create a Look.” Shoppers can mix and match outfits and accessories in a virtual dressing room, and browse through “looks” created by other members. With “Rate My Juicy,” shoppers are encouraged to upload photos of themselves in their favorite Juicy looks, sharing how they wear the brand with the rest of the online community.

Juicy Couture was very careful to select a PLM system that its creative people would use.

But the Yunique PLM solution (recently purchased by Gerber Technology) does cover that first part, and in doing so the 100 percent Web-based system gives Bon-Ton a little more insight into where a product developer is in his or her process. Instead of using endless emails or spreadsheets to catalog possible buys, developers “start to organize their lines as they do development,” Gilreath said. It’s improved the efficiency of the company’s private-brand process, as well as fit approval, image and color management, and vendor collaboration.

Bon-Ton evaluated 19 different PLM systems before choosing Yunique, based on out-of-box functionality and an appealing graphical interface.

“We were very careful to try to find one that our creative people would use,” Gilreath said. “A lot of PLM systems are databases, basically, and if they’re not real friendly on the interface side, someone who is creative may fall back into using email or using spreadsheets.”

He added that it was a big vote of confidence in Yunique when Gerber Technology bought the system a year after Bon-Ton signed on.

While Bon-Ton is still working out the system’s kinks — Gilreath said the company has periodic roundtables with 20 or 30 key users to discuss any headaches or suggestions — largely, the company is pleased with the solution and plans to expand the PLM to soft home, hard home, jewelry and the other areas of its private brand department.

“It was the best of breed for what we wanted to accomplish, and we’re happy with it,” Gilreath said.

Bon-Ton was very careful to select a PLM system that its creative people would use.

Juicy Couture was very careful to select a PLM system that its creative people would use.
When you admire someone well dressed walking down the street, chances are that under their stylish clothes is something by Hanes. After all, by sales volume, Hanesbrands Inc. is the largest seller of apparel essentials in the United States, as well as a global consumer goods company with more than a century of history and a portfolio of leading apparel essentials, including T-shirts, bras, panties, men’s underwear, kids’ underwear, socks, hosiery, casualwear and activewear. Spun off from Sara Lee Corporation in 2006, Hanesbrands employs a workforce of approximately 50,000.

Hanesbrands is one of the apparel industry’s leading innovators in the field of environmental responsibility. Its Perris, CA, distribution center was built to stringent standards set by the U.S. Green Building Council. The center’s design focused on innovative ways to operate sustainably through the conservation of water, energy and materials. The company will seek certification for the building from the Green Building Council for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, which would make it the largest LEED-certified warehouse in Southern California and one of the biggest in the world.

Also, in October 2009, Hanesbrands began production at a new textile manufacturing plant in Nanjing, China that it built to Green Building Council standards. It is expected to be the first textile plant in the world to achieve Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification.

Hanesbrands’ environmental achievements extend to its retail and office spaces as well. Both its Winston-Salem, NC, retail store and Bentonville, AK, commercial office were built to Green Building Council standards. The company also has innovative alternative energy programs in place, including biomass in the Dominican Republic and geothermal in El Salvador.

When it comes to giving back, Hanesbrands has taken a lead in supporting school arts programs, believing the arts nurture community spirit, are integral to educating children, build social connections and engage individuals in collaborative efforts throughout the community. Over the past 10 years, Hanesbrands and its employees have given more than $5.6 million to the Arts Council of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County, making the company the Arts Council’s largest corporate supporter. It has also been a major supporter of local theater as well as the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.
With more than 1,600 retail locations, Destination Maternity Corporation recently embarked on the daunting task of creating sales reporting analytics that can quickly summarize the millions of item-level detail records contained within its data warehouse.

In tandem, the company has been expanding point-of-sale promotional offerings and needed to develop reporting metrics. When the project was complete, the company was anxious to begin using the information gathered to gain a better understanding of its retail operations, and to implement some innovative store-level programs to drive sales improvements.

The challenge lay in efficiently meeting the demand for information and also being able to deliver metrics that measure success and failure. Destination Maternity was faced with the prospect of having to prioritize the information requests. To solve this problem, CIO Bill Schroeder decided to find a delivery solution that would simultaneously and rapidly make the information available to the various communities of users.

After contacting various software and services companies, Destination Maternity engaged Sky IT Group to deliver a single application that provided both detailed retail analytics and CRM-type analysis. The software tool chosen for the application was QlikView. The selection of the tool reflected Destination Maternity’s desire to deliver the completed project in weeks, not months or years.

The challenge lay in efficiently meeting the demand for information and also being able to deliver metrics that measure success and failure. Destination Maternity was faced with the prospect of having to prioritize the information requests. To solve this problem, CIO Bill Schroeder decided to find a delivery solution that would simultaneously and rapidly make the information available to the various communities of users.

After contacting various software and services companies, Destination Maternity engaged Sky IT Group to deliver a single application that provided both detailed retail analytics and CRM-type analysis. The software tool chosen for the application was QlikView. The selection of the tool reflected Destination Maternity’s desire to deliver the completed project in weeks, not months or years.

Karmaloop

Boston, MA | www.karmaloop.com

NOMINATED BY: ChannelAdvisor | www.channeladvisor.com

Targeting the influencer underground youth market requires savvy marketing, and Karmaloop has found a way. Its unusual paid-search campaigns have helped it achieve more than 100 percent year-over-year growth.

Karmaloop recently created a campaign specifically targeting web users who searched for “Karmaloop coupon.” Shoppers were then directed to a customized landing page with a special SEM (search engine marketing) promo code; it ended up being one of the company’s most successful campaigns.

Karmaloop’s paid-search campaigns are powered by software from ChannelAdvisor, whose Keyword Term Generator quickly expanded Karmaloop’s descriptive terms to give its paid-search campaigns better results. ChannelAdvisor was also able to add long-tail search terms, including hundreds of keywords and phrases that deliver a consistent presence across all search engines. ChannelAdvisor’s Search Marketing Analytics also allowed Karmaloop to pinpoint the precise terms that were driving profits, resulting in an increase in both web traffic and sales volume.

Karmaloop’s website engages customers with daily video broadcasts that significantly extend visitors’ time spent on the site. The site receives 100,000 visitors weekly, who can click on clothing worn by advocates of their brand in the videos and purchase it on the spot.

With 50,000 Facebook fans and nearly 20,000 followers on Twitter, Karmaloop is also a deft pioneer of social media, an ideal way of keeping in touch with the younger demographic of its customer base and keeping it informed of new inventory and promotions. Karmaloop has also tapped into the power of its audience by creating a widget that can be uploaded to Facebook that allows fans to join its street team and get free products based on a point system.

And finally, Karmaloop used mobile technology to create a relief-for-Haiti program, another example of how the company is creatively using technology to create brand awareness and a sense of community.

Its unusual paid-search campaigns have helped Karmaloop achieve more than 100 percent year-over-year growth, and also allowed the company to pinpoint the precise terms that were driving its profits. Pictured here is apparel from the Karmaloop collection, which targets the influencer underground youth market.
Within a very short timeframe Destination Maternity was running a Retail Analytics application that measured the specific success and failure of promotional offerings. Some of the more complex analytics included:

- A scorecard for measuring average transactions in units and dollars over time, enabling management decisions for future promotions.
- Daily refreshes updated with prior-day sales.
- Ability to drill into results at Brand and Store Chain.

There are also several business key performance index reports that have been delivered that are just starting to be used such as:

- Identifying cross brand selling within identified customers.

- Market Basket analysis to provide a better understanding of what products had a tendency to sell well together.

The implementation has been a success, and the fact that it was completed in such a short time helped keep costs well under control.

Next up, Destination Maternity is looking to expand the analytics to as many users as possible, and to take advantage of the speed and accuracy of the data analytics presented. They are also looking to expand the solution to other business functions within the enterprise, and thereby become more efficient in planning, merchandising and basing decisions on marketplace trends.

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**M.J. Soffe**

Fayetteville, NC | [www.mjsoffe.com](http://www.mjsoffe.com)

**NOMINATED BY:** Computer Generated Solutions | [www.cgsinc.com](http://www.cgsinc.com)

When taking on the monumental challenge of a companywide ERP overhaul, sometimes you have to create your own solutions. In order to better service customers throughout the sales process as well as improve internal efficiencies, M.J. Soffe chose a range of systems, then set about making them work together.

“What we really saw was that there was no one package out there that could give us everything that we needed,” says vice president and CIO Connell Price, “and we knew that we would need a blended approach when it came to systems.”

The resulting blend integrated the company from the manufacturing stage all the way to the warehouse, and included BlueCherry’s PLM, Order to Cash and Web Order Entry/Configurator and Microsoft Dynamics SL for financials.

M.J. Soffe’s use of VMWare virtualization technology is another big part of the way in which M.J. Soffe will leverage its blend of solutions. Virtualization technology, which lets you run multiple virtual machines on a single physical machine, sharing the resources of that single computer across multiple environments, opens up multiple possibilities for the company: “Virtualization will allow us to do a lot of things more easily with BlueCherry and other ancillary systems,” Price says.

Its introduction of Terminal Emulation (2x), for example, which allows for the deployment of systems to all employee desktops, will allow for significant consolidation of its entire back- and front-office systems. Price expects benefits of this roll-out to include lower support costs, remote access across all platforms to critical business data and customer access to data over the Internet.

Citing an example of technology at its best, Price says that a recent data restoration test at a disaster-recovery facility — the first it performed using VMWare — was the “smoothest restoration I’ve ever seen,” and that the company was able to restore its entire core critical systems from tape in fewer than 16 hours, which is less than half the time it expected the process to take.

Speaking to the expected benefits of its new solutions, Price says they will be twofold: “Service to the customer, and total cost of ownership. It will allow us to utilize fewer resources to do the same amount of work, so we’ll become more efficient. It will allow us to train better faster, and respond better, faster.” Acknowledging the pain of change when you “completely gut” your systems, Price emphasizes that the key to successful use of technology is how you implement it for business. “It’s your people and business model that gives your company an advantage.”

Founded in 1946, M.J. Soffe offers a wide range of activewear for retail, colleges and high schools, and the military.

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**M.J. Soffe, which offers a wide range of activewear for retail, colleges and high schools, and the military, is expecting to reap the benefits of a monumental ERP overhaul.**
Aldo

Headquarters: St. Laurent, Quebec, Canada | www.aldoshoes.com

**NOMINATED BY:** Vertex | www.vertexinc.com

Sales taxes are something every business begrudgingly wrestles with, which is all the more reason to innovate. With that goal in mind, ALDO has improved efficiencies and expanded operating advantages by phasing in enterprise transaction tax technology to reduce costs and risk associated with manual processes and less comprehensive sales-tax solutions.

Driven by retail growth and the success of its ecommerce channels, ALDO launched this initiative to support the requirement for consistent, accurate tracking and maintenance of sales tax rates, rules and schedules in the United States and Canada. This innovative approach to managing the complexities of sales tax compliance has helped reduce audit costs, while also improving the customer experience.

Aided by a tax technology provider, the project included several key goals. First was defining merchandise to allow any SKU to inherit the proper sales tax rules and rates for all sales transactions. Second was to integrate the system with its ecommerce transaction and fulfillment applications, while last was to integrate the system with ALDO’s POS system for retail transactions.

To achieve these goals, ALDO implemented a solution that grouped its extensive merchandise catalogue into Sales Tax Groups. ALDO was then able to automatically generate the taxability, rules, rates and rate charts necessary to properly estimate and calculate sales tax for its product catalogue.

The next step was to integrate Vertex Indirect Tax for Retail as its tax engine within its ecommerce infrastructure. The successful integration allows ALDO to sell merchandise anywhere, assured that its sales tax engine will properly determine how the product and service is taxed, regardless of the destination of the goods; generate the appropriate tax finance reports; and automate the process of filing and paying taxes due.

Defining Sales Tax Group IDs as part of the merchandise hierarchy has also enabled ALDO to experiment with brand extensions and new product categories without needing system redesigns or intense manual efforts. As a result of this initiative, ALDO no longer relies on manual processes to move tax changes between the corporate and ecommerce systems, allowing the business to steer funds toward more strategic aspects of the business.

Bluefly.com

New York, NY | www.bluefly.com

**NOMINATED BY:** Nominated by: Tealeaf | www.tealeaf.com

Founded in 1998, Bluefly.com was one of the first online retailers to feature on-trend and in-season clothing and accessories from more than 350 top designers at a steep discount. As a solely ecommerce business, technology is at the forefront of Bluefly.com’s operations, and providing a seamless online experience is an ongoing challenge.

Bluefly’s business hinges on operating a low-cost, self-service web application that customers can access 24/7. Couple this with fierce competition from similar sites, and throw compressed fashion cycles into the mix, and you have an urgent need for innovation on your hands. Bluefly.com knew it couldn’t afford to lose a single customer because of a bad online experience.

Bluefly.com also faced inherent obstacles with site visibility. With a wide but shallow inventory, the site is set up to remove a product from inventory when the customer adds it to the shopping cart, rather than at checkout. This means that when someone adds an item to the cart, no one else can buy that item. This business process actually limits the company’s ability to write test scenarios for the site because the company can’t risk taking products off the shelf that a real customer may want to buy at the same time.
To counter these issues, Bluefly.com’s vice president of technology, Matt Raines, turned to customer experience management software provider Tealeaf to help improve the online experience. Tealeaf captures and records what each customer is doing and seeing in real-time, on each page and across all site visits: by replaying web sessions to figure out when and why customers abandoned transactions, Bluefly is able to correct problems and improve site usability.

For example, recently Bluefly noticed that some international shoppers were unable to check out, but the company at first didn’t know why. Using Tealeaf’s software, Bluefly discovered that a technological glitch had been there for more than a year. Instead of reporting the problem, customers had simply abandoned the site without completing the transaction.

After Bluefly fixed the problem, revenue from international shoppers increased 10 percent within a month, and the company estimates that the fix will result in $1.1 million in additional revenue this year.

Through collaborating with Tealeaf and turning to a CEM solution, Bluefly.com improved conversion rates and eliminated site obstacles that previously prohibited successful online purchases. Overall, Tealeaf enabled Bluefly to reduce the stabilization period for its website by 50 percent, and has dramatically reduced the time required to diagnose and resolve the problems that lose sales.

Smart is Cool

New York, NY | www.sicmovement.com

NOMINATED BY: Kazu Apparel Group

The beauty of New York City’s people and places has been immortalized in song and on the silver screen. And what New Yorkers put on their backs has often gotten the same media treatment.

But when the fashion choices of young women in the city that never sleeps caught Erin Darby’s attention, she wasn’t inspired to write any love songs.

The young women who stuck out to Darby wore tongue-in-cheek T-shirts that she said sported messages such as, “Beat me, slap me, but don’t touch my hair,” or “skinny bitch marries rich.”

“And I thought, ‘wow,’” Darby said. “You’re so beautiful and you have the whole world in front of you, and you’re choosing to wear this? This is your billboard? This is your statement?”

Darby set out to redefine what messages fashion could send to young women when she started Smart is Cool (SIC) in 2006. She partnered with Ana Maria Henao, a graduate of the London College of Fashion, to create a line of T-shirts and accessories that would counteract the derogatory messages other companies were sending.

So, instead of shirts that trade on sparkly negativity, Darby and Henao sell shirts, hats and tote bags that are all made in Brooklyn and that all say “Smart is Cool.”

“It’s all about sending this positive message through clothing, but also becoming active in the community,” Darby said. “What started out as clothing has now become this movement.”

Darby and Henao became motivational speakers to high school-aged girls and started a leadership club called Girls Take Charge at Binghamton University in New York, which Darby says focuses on “redefining smart and setting new standards for cool.”

“So many young people think that smart is getting straight As,” Darby said. “And what we’re trying to say is sure, education is important, absolutely. But being smart is also knowing your unique talents and living a full life with the gifts that you have.”

To highlight those concepts — unique talent and living a full life — Darby is working on a book thatprofiles exceptionally successful women from all walks of life. It started with an interview with Geraldine Laybourne, who created the Oxygen television network with Oprah Winfrey. Darby said Laybourne also was instrumental in the success of Nickelodeon.

“She’s the most talented businesswoman I’ve ever met,” Darby said. “And the book will include women as diverse as filmmakers and royalty — Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York, has agreed to an interview.

And though the company is small, Darby looks forward to expanding her brand commercially so that she can communicate her message to a wider group of young women.

“There’s a lot of opportunity for us in the garment district here in New York. People like our message and our community,” Darby said. “We just haven’t found the right fit with who we want to partner up with yet.”

But one thing Smart is Cool has found is a true understanding of exactly who its customer is. And it’s that customer who is behind what Darby calls a movement bigger than her shirts.

“We’re really honored to be a part of it. We only feel like we’re a part of it,” Darby said. “We know that it’s about the girl. When you define a SIC girl, it’s the girl who is creative, who takes chances, who believes in herself and in her community, who’s involved.”
**Topo Ranch**

Headquarters: Marina Del Rey, CA | www.toporanch.com

**NOMINATED BY:** Self

When innovation is taken its farthest, the innovator is poised to be a true pioneer. That’s how Eric Hartnack, president of Topo Ranch, sees himself. “I think what we are attempting to accomplish, to be the nation’s first sustainable lifestyle brand/vertical retailer, is unique in the marketplace.”

Rather than emphasizing wholesale accounts, which according to Hartnack is a focus of many sustainable apparel companies, Topo Ranch is zeroing in on the retail space. Though it currently operates only two stores — in Venice, CA and Boulder, CO — the company will open a third later this year and at least two next year. “We’ve had strong comps and have grown surprisingly well over the past year and a half,” says Hartnack.

Even more interesting is where the stores will be: In A-list shopping malls and retail centers. “There are 180 A-level malls and shopping centers in the U.S.,” says Hartnack, “and we feel there is huge growth potential there for us. We’re trying to make it so that when people go to a premium shopping district, they have the opportunity to buy sustainable clothes without sacrificing fashion.”

Founded in 2005, Topo Ranch offers men’s and women’s trend-driven tops and bottoms made of organic cotton and recycled polyester. Prices range from $36 for t-shirts to $118 for fleece tops. The collection also includes knits and “a very aggressively growing wovens business,” says Hartnack.

Topo Ranch represents a new generation of green business, Hartnack says, and one where the environmental message doesn’t need to be shouted. That’s because it’s just a part of everyday business. “When you visit our stores, they don’t scream the green message. It’s simply a part of our DNA.”

**Charles River Apparel**

Sharon, MA | www.charlesriverapparel.com

**NOMINATED BY:** Self

In 2009, Charles River Apparel decided that the process of handling customers, customer orders and service needed a major boost. Always known for its customer service, Charles River, after what it says was a lengthy evaluation process, purchased the Goldmine Contact Management system to handle customer relationship management (CRM) and to unify customer contact across the company.

The new CRM system automates customer interaction and ensures that customers are tracked in every stage of the pipeline, from a lead, to a sales rep visit, to a post-order satisfaction survey. The system also lets Charles River micro-analyze the markets their customers sell to in order to customize the purchasing experience and target the customers with specific styles most applicable to their business.

The company’s 13,000-plus customer base includes such diverse markets as college bookstores, industrial workwear distributors, and even dance/cheer dealers, to name a few. The new CRM system also allows Charles River to more effectively target its customers through automated methods, such as pulling nightly feeds from its main order entry system (designed by Apparel Business Solutions (ABS)), allowing sales and customer service representatives to spend more time with customers via telephone and in-person visits.

Charles River moved to a new facility in the summer of 2009, increasing its office and warehouse space. The company took the opportunity to also implement a state-
of-the-art automated warehouse system, including Radio Frequency (RF) guns to completely automate the receiving, inventory, picking and shipping functions. The scanning guns, which are from AcceleratedTek and also integrate with its ABS warehousing module, not only show the warehouse the most efficient methods to locate the product, but also contain the order on the guns, allowing workers to scan and pack the order right at the production location. The result has been a drastic reduction in shipping errors.

Charles River Apparel is a 27-year-old family owned and operated business with family members committed to seeing the company progress forward both for future generations of the family and company employees. The company believes that its success is closely tied to being a leader in its industry, and that continually developing new colors, fabrics and styles is key to that leadership.

Charles River president and CEO Barry Lipsett involved in one of his favorite pastimes, cycling. Lipsett rides for fun, but also for many cancer-related charities.

The company has been a proud recipient of a variety of design innovation awards, including the 2009 Wearables Design Award for the best performance polo in the industry, and the 2009 Bronze Medal in the Apparel/Outerwear Excellence category by Promotional Marketing Magazine for overall excellence in apparel.

In 2008 Kellwood began a two-year project to redefine how it operates as a company. The results have been nothing short of extraordinary: not just improved efficiencies, but an annual savings of $3.5 million.

Kellwood had outsourced nearly all infrastructure and applications services to a major U.S.-based IT services provider. But in 2008, when Sun Capital Partners purchased Kellwood, which designs and manufactures such brands as Vince, Baby Phat, Sag Harbor and XOXO, it launched an initiative to establish a new and consolidated platform to enable future growth.

The initiative was led by COO Michael Saunders and CIO Linda Kinder, and included solutions provider Alsbridge, which worked in three phases to help Kellwood assess its options for consolidation.

Phase one was a six-week assessment of IT services and organizational readiness for change, with Alsbridge helping Kellwood understand the full breadth of opportunity through a market-based assessment. Phase two was an eight-week, in-depth analysis of the top two consolidation scenarios. The first scenario involved a renegotiation of services and service delivery levels with the existing service provider. Alsbridge facilitated discussions with the outsourcer on restructuring the agreement, based on Kellwood’s new business model and the identified market pricing opportunities.

The second scenario was to analyze an insourced IT delivery platform. This included creating the business case to restructure services, developing preliminary transition plans, and providing risk analysis. After completing the analysis, Kellwood concluded the new IT platform would be delivered using an insourced IT team. This would not only streamline IT services, but also generate dramatic cost savings. Finally, phase three was a four-month insourcing transition and transformation project.

Kellwood immediately saved over $3.5 million in less than eight months, three times what it had projected and in half the time. “The initiative fit strategically,” says Saunders. “We used to be a very decentralized organization with multiple brands operating mostly independently, and we’ve now consolidated into a single operating company. Secondly, we found synergy by doing things internally and more efficiently, and that drove the savings.”

The transition was smoothed even further by hiring many of the employees who had worked on the outsourced team. Saunders says: “One hundred percent of the people we offered jobs to accepted, and I think that speaks highly to the culture we’ve built and the team that’s in place. I was really pleased to retain a lot of talent we already had through our outsourcing partner.”
Like many large retailers, Saks Fifth Avenue asks vendors to obtain GS1 UPC codes in order to participate with Saks’s EDI initiative. Because of the high cost of assigning UPCs, the unwillingness of some vendors became a barrier of entry preventing Saks from achieving maximum EDI participation. In order to bring these vendors on board, Saks Fifth Avenue implemented a separate EDI initiative geared toward helping them overcome this obstacle.

In November 2008, Saks launched its Lead 4 Program, which is based on sharing internal UPCs that start with the number 4. This format is an acceptable GS1 practice that allows retailers to assign UPCs that are only used with their specific trading relationships.

Because of its cost effectiveness, ease and speed to get up and running (two days maximum), Saks has found strong support for the program. Many vendors will eventually transition to regular EDI once their businesses grow and they can justify the cost of obtaining UPCs. Fourteen months into the program, Saks has more than 200 Lead 4 vendors in the program.

“Saks has never turned a vendor away for lack of EDI,” says Sarah Polworth, director, vendor relations & EDI, Saks Fifth Avenue. “But now we can offer Lead 4 EDI, an alternative that makes sense for many business models. Lead 4 is an all-inclusive application. It enables the vendors to easily receive purchase orders, order price tickets, make GS1-128 labels and transmit ASNs and invoices.

“And within Saks Fifth Avenue,” Polworth continues, “the program has improved efficiencies, reduced operating costs and eliminated errors. An all-around win.”

When Saks came up with the idea of the Lead 4 Program, it selected eZCom Software, a leading Software-as-a-Service B2B integration provider. eZCom understood what Saks was trying to accomplish, and quickly defined the parameters, standards and rules that were pivotal to rolling out the new initiative. The end result is an automated system from registration to production that eases the burden for smaller vendors, while helping Saks achieve full compliancy from each vendor as they manage their relationship with Saks going forward. 
That selfishness is still very much a part of the company’s practices — as it continues to make high-quality gear for rock climbing, hiking, fly fishing and snow sports, Patagonia constantly strives to reduce the waste it generates and the impact it has on the environment; its use of the OptiTex CAD system fits squarely into this goal.

In general, CAD programs offer faster speed and accuracy, better communication worldwide and faster time to market.

By communicating with its vendors through CAD, Patagonia has been able to save on shipping — and to reduce the amount of fuel usage and greenhouse gasses emitted during the shipping process.

This environmentally friendly solution is accompanied by a team of technical advisers and trainers from OptiTex who help Patagonia get the most out of the software. The support team learns the work flow of each user to be able to make suggestions and help foster innovation.

Kena Gonzalez, fit specialist at Patagonia, says the company is also considering the use of the OptiTex 3D solution, which integrates fully with its 2D solution and allows designers to create and virtually see entire product lines on a computer screen before a bolt of fabric (or even a yard of muslin) is brought into the equation. This would allow users to have a hyper-detailed view of the way a certain kind of fabric falls off a model, or the way it moves with a person’s body, right on a designer’s screen as soon as the design is complete, instead of after the cloth slides onto a fit model.
Ivory International

Miami, FL | www.ivoryint.com


Aft37 years in business, Ivory International — whose private-label business caters to many mid-level department stores, and which operates the brand Caribbean Joe — is experiencing strong growth and is increasingly moving activities overseas. Its rise to the challenge warranted a profile in the November issue of Apparel (see “Ivory International Builds Team Spirit with PLM” in print or online at apparelmag.com).

To handle its growth, scattered locations and different work cultures, Ivory International chose to implement NGC’s e-PLM and e-SPS software for product lifecycle management and global sourcing to help manage its increasingly complex business and improve speed to market.

As Apparel reported, adopting PLM required cultural changes on the part of Ivory International and its suppliers. The primary change was living by the calendar: Divisions and suppliers became judged, as never before, on their ability to meet deadlines. Some countries work at a more relaxed pace, but PLM makes public all the dates that must be met to ensure timely delivery.

Also, as part of the transition to NGC’s PLM software, Ivory replaced functional “silos” in its business with team-based development and production. Each team includes representatives of functions from development through delivery for a single retailer. Although every activity is assigned to a particular person or group using workflow calendars, the team as a whole takes responsibility for meeting deadlines. NGC’s PLM and global sourcing software reinforces collaboration by making status updates and communications visible to everyone in the team. “My experience is that it’s a more enjoyable and positive experience to work as a team,” says Roger Mayerson, executive vice president of product development and global sourcing. “NGC’s PLM software facilitates that. Without PLM, it would be very difficult.”

As a result of these technological innovations, Mayerson expects to reduce time to market by 20 percent to 30 percent, telling Apparel, “PLM allows us to be transparent, to see work in progress at the factory level, and to manage by exception rather than trying to manage it all. That’s the exciting potential of PLM.”

TOP INNOVATORS

Brooks Brothers

New York, NY | www.brooksbrothers.com

NOMINATED BY: JDA | www.jda.com

As the country’s oldest clothing retailer and the first to offer ready-to-wear apparel, Brooks Brothers has become an institution that has helped to define American style through quality and value. Brooks Brothers operates more than 200 retail and outlet locations throughout the United States, plus 100 stores in 11 countries.

A driving force behind the company’s success is offering continuity of products that customers want in readily available sizes. To ensure this, Brooks Brothers recently sought a new technology solution that would enable it to reduce its inventory investment while keeping its shelves and distribution centers stocked with the right merchandise. Critical was the ability to improve size selling and more efficient fill-in to stores. “Our legacy system was limited to producing store-specific allocations at the size level,” says Linda Rooney, vice president of planning and allocation. “When we started to investigate new technology, we knew we wanted a solution that would allow us to generate allocations at store-specific size levels, as well as leverage sales history for the total business.”
Brooks Brothers installed JDA Software Group’s Allocation system as part of a multi-year IT project to upgrade the company’s demand planning solution. With the support of JDA Allocation, Brooks Brothers has been able to generate allocations based on advanced shipping notices and predetermined assortment plans, as well as respond to current demand. The solution enhances and translates consumer insights into the right mix of product for each store, allowing the retailer to better meet customer expectations and drive brand loyalty and sales. “We’ve achieved a significant increase in efficiency and our size-level allocations have improved greatly,” says Jon Westergreen, director of store planning. “We are able to allocate ship-backs to the size level within a day’s time, compared to taking several days previously at the style level. That’s a significant improvement in turnaround time for the stores and a huge benefit for Brooks Brothers.”

JDA Consulting collaborated with Brooks Brothers in integrating JDA Allocation with the company’s existing channel planning and warehouse management systems without any interruption to the business. “We experienced a smooth transition with the installation of JDA Allocation,” says Rooney. “As a result, we’ve improved allocation workflow, user efficiency, and created visibility throughout the organization in the areas of distribution center and logistics. The consultants did an excellent job of transferring their knowledge to our users, who were able to continue to achieve additional business benefits over time.”

Brooks Brothers also uses JDA’s Advanced Warehouse Replenishment (AWR) and Advanced Store Replenishment (ASR) solutions for their forecasting and inventory optimization capabilities. The solutions have created a robust supply chain for Brooks Brothers by enabling collaboration with vendors to achieve synchronization of store demand and manufacturing planning. With better product flow into its distribution centers and improved replenishment to stores, Brooks Brothers has reported a 20 percent reduction in weeks of supply, an improvement in service levels of 10 percentage points, and an increase in forecast accuracy at both the store and warehouse levels.

Its implementation of a new allocation plan from JDA helps Brooks Brothers enhance and translate consumer insights into the right mix of product for each store, allowing the retailer to better meet customer expectations and drive brand loyalty and sales.

At Work Uniforms

Orange Beach, AL | www.atworkuniforms.com

Work uniforms are an often uncomfortable and resented part of getting and keeping a job. There are the constricting white shirts of the fancy restaurant waiter, the stodgy blue suits and polyester scarves of airline flight attendants, or the garish hats of the fast food chain clerk.

But the difference in a hated uniform and a comfortable, appropriate and fun one is often the designer. COO Chuck Campbell says one of the keys to the company’s success is Marcia Hischke, who designs custom work wear for At Work Uniforms, striving to strike a balance between what an employee has to wear and what an employee wants to wear.

“Theoretically, most people don’t like to be forced or told to wear anything,” Hischke said. “So what makes me happy is when the people who are wearing [my uniforms] really like them, and they feel comfortable in them. They feel like it’s something they would possibly purchase themselves.”

And though Hischke has done a lot of work in the way of outfitting casino employees — At Work just rolled out the entire Creek Nation casino in Oklahoma, from front of house to back

At Work Uniforms has a secret weapon of innovation: designer Marcia Hischke, who has a knack for ferreting out the right information from customers and then designing custom uniforms that employees actually want to wear. Seen here are some of her sketches for casino table games uniforms.
of house — the likelihood is that most people have unwittingly encountered her work.

At Work uniforms she’s designed are “worn in casinos, they’re worn in hospitality, restaurants. They’re chains or boutique or standalone,” Hischke said. “Everything from Indian reservation-based casinos to Las Vegas, Atlantic City, Biloxi, Oklahoma — we’ve been doing a lot in Oklahoma lately.”

Illinois bred and Parsons trained, Hischke started working in retail soon after she graduated college. And soon after she started working in retail, she knew she needed a change. Hischke answered an ad in Women’s Wear Daily that said “something about men’s wear and women’s wear,” Hischke said.

“I was like, oh, what the heck,” she said. Hischke ended up as the design director at Uniforms to You for 18 years. Before the company was sold, Hischke said, it was the leading maker of uniforms.

Her experience carried her to At Work, where she now designs custom apparel programs. The company sells an interesting mix of uniforms and work wear, some of which it has in stock — everything from lab coats to chef’s aprons to an entire new catalog of Carhartt jackets. But Hischke focuses on the custom accounts.

Custom customers “tell us their interior colors, they show us their exterior. We get a feeling for a theme or the look of the facility. Then they tell us the job functions, they give us the design function that they’re selling into, if it’s male or female, how many people there are,” Hischke says. “And then I take that information and I put together a proposed program of apparel that will work in their environment and also help service their account.”

Those accounts include Burger King — she’s developed two programs for the restaurant, including its current one, over the past 15 years — tailcoats for waiters at the Bellagio in Las Vegas, and workers at the Hard Rock Café. And soon, witches and wizards in Florida will don Hischke’s designs.

“I just finished Harry Potter,” the new Universal Studios theme park in Orlando, Hischke said.

Her work will go on display when the park opens June 18.

TOP INNOVATORS

Gerry Weber
Westfalen, Germany | www.gerryweber.com

NOMINATED BY: Avery Dennison | www.ibmd.averydennison.com

Radio frequency identification has seemingly limitless applications for manufacturers and retailers alike. There’s the improved inventory accuracy, for one. And the loss prevention capabilities can be implemented in store and throughout the supply chain. RFID can even reduce man-hours needed for restocking and free up time for employees in the back room to interact with customers in the front of a store.

For Gerry Weber International AG, the German fashion and lifestyle company behind successful brands such as its eponymous label Gerry Weber and Taifun and Samoon, item-level garment tagging is a multi-pronged way to solve various problems and make improvements across the board. The company plans to put RFID tags in some 25 million garments, using the technology to optimize its logistics processes, increase speed to market and improve loss prevention.

Avery Dennison, the corporation known for developing products as diverse as pressure-sensitive adhesives, office products and fasteners, developed the RFID tags Gerry Weber will use. The tags will feature RFID chips embedded in care labels, and should be able to resist two domestic washes and one dry cleaning cycle and still preserve their effectiveness.

The tags can trace Gerry Weber’s garments from production to retail. And while the RFID tags are primed to work as a loss-prevention solution in Gerry Weber branded stores, they won’t interfere with the effectiveness of traditional security measures in other retail stores that sell Gerry Weber brands.

Customers concerned that the tags might infringe on their privacy need not stop buying Gerry Weber’s clothes, shoes and accessories. Gerry Weber does not store any personal data on the RFID chip. They are neither processed nor collected or utilized, and in any event the tags can be removed easily after purchase.

An added benefit of RFID tags is more space in retail stores. Deutsche Telekom, the telecommunications company that operates, among other services, T-Mobile, has been charged with integrating the tags into Gerry Weber’s security system. The company developed new reader technology for the tags that uses antennae on the ceiling to keep track of the garments in Gerry Weber stores. This eliminates the need for conventional security towers at store entrances and provides a more open feeling in addition to the space gained.
The Internet isn’t exactly brand new, but there are still plenty of ways for it to enhance a business. Premium jeans maker Agave Denim — which weaves its denim by hand on small, vintage, American shuttlelooms — recently found new and creative business solutions using the web.

The company now operates three websites that serve different functions. The main site, agavedenim.com, was relaunched in December 2009. Its websites were previously outsourced to a third party, but president and founder Jeff Shafer decided Agave could do it better and more efficiently in-house.

And earlier in the year, facing the excess inventory that many apparel companies struggled with in 2009, Shafer came up with a web solution to unload stock from previous seasons. Agavedenimoutlet.com, launched in March 2010, gives consumers direct access to excess inventory at a 40 percent discount. Shafer considers this better for Agave, which operates in the premium category, with jeans selling in the $200 range, since selling to off-price discounters “is not good for brands.”

The company’s third site, agavereplenishment.com, is a B2B site that allows Agave’s 500 wholesale accounts to place weekly or biweekly replenishment orders for the items in the collection that don’t change.

“Across the three websites and our brick-and-mortar outlet store, we have four successful proven ways to move merchandise outside of our wholesale business,” says Shafer. “We wholeheartedly believe in the power of the web to conduct commerce.”

Agave Denim is operating three web sites that serve different functions for its premium jeans business.
College sweatshirts may be ubiquitous, but this fall select campuses will have one that is truly unique. That’s when LimbGear will introduce its interactive sweatshirt at colleges such as Virginia Tech, University of Virginia and Washington & Lee, where students on the go will be able to control their iPhones and iPods by simply touching their sleeves.

The youth market is ideal for the blending of fashion and technology, and LimbGear hopes to have a hit with its interactive sweatshirt, which will retail in the $75 range. Consumers will need a $25 Apple Computer-licensed adaptor as well. LimbGear’s smart-fabric interfaces are provided by Qio Systems under its PANiQ brand.

Incorporated in 2009 but in development since 2007, LimbGear currently offers other interactive apparel and accessories, such as arm bands, skull caps, ear warmers and scarves. But it expects the college hoodie to become its flagship product. “Instead of just slapping on a college logo, we’re taking the hoodie itself to a new level,” says founder Tyson Daniel.

LimbGear is also having to innovate in the challenging field of sports and college licenses by trying to argue that as interactive apparel, it belongs in a new category. A new category, of course, where contracts with entities like the NFL aren’t as locked up. “It’s worked in some places better than others,” says Daniel. “It’s quite difficult to get the college licenses.” Field research has shown that college kids “are wild about it,” says Daniel, but that at $100, “price point is an issue.”

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LimbGear offers a host of ways to port your accessories, such as in a skull cap, pictured here.

The Apparel Group (TAGUSA)
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True innovation is identifying a need no one else has thought of tapping. That’s exactly what The Apparel Group has done with its offering of third-party services to others, including its own customers, in the industry.

Headquartered in Lewisville, TX, The Apparel Group (TAG) Ltd. specializes in the design, sourcing, merchandising and distribution of both branded and private label apparel, including shirts, blouses, pants, shorts and sweaters. TAG’s customers include major department store chains, as well as over 1,500 specialty stores.

In order to continue its success, TAG is committed to finding unique niches, creating original solutions, and concentrating on challenging customer issues. This commitment led TAG to create a new division: The Apparel Logistics Group Inc. (TALG). The strategy for The Apparel Logistics Group is to leverage its current apparel expertise in importing, distribution, information technology, accounting, customer service, and merchandising, and offer these services as Third Party Services (3PS) to others in the fashion industry.

3PS gives TALG’s customers the ability to focus on what they do best, whether it’s design, retail, or manufacturing. 3PS includes apparel processes such as receipt and storage of goods after proper verification; returns processing including sorting by style, size, and color; apparel refurbishment; attachment of tags including security, pricing, and hang tags; change packaging, re-ticketing; and of course, complete customer vendor requirements. 3PS allows for a one-stop shop of total apparel logistics support. The services include the ability to source, track imports, clear customs, track...
TOP INNOVATORS

and store inventory, electronically connect customers to the major retailers to comply with the vigorous vendor compliance programs, perform quality audits, customer order entries, order tracking, invoicing and collection, and more.

By cutting costs, consolidating customers’ inbound shipments and goods into its warehouse, negotiating better packaging rates, negotiating better outbound rates, and offering 3PS services, the end result is greater efficiencies in the supply chain for customers. TALG’s goal is to develop a sustainable business strategy built on the premise that supply chains of its customers can and must become more efficient.

In addition to its expansion into 3PS, The Apparel Group continues to demonstrate innovation in its designs, most recently with Paperwhite, a new shirt collection meant to meet the consumer’s desire for the “perfect white shirt” with a modern fit. With versatile styling, the shirts can be used for career, day-to-evening, and casual outfits, and are made from a variety of European stretch cottons and beautiful silks. The Apparel Group in the United States uses Lawson Fashion PLM to develop fabric and garment specifications with its parent company, the garment manufacturer TAL, and other suppliers.

According to The Apparel Group, with a retail price range of $128-$228, the collection fills the market’s need for entry-level bridge price points, where competitive quality shirts sell for $198-$378. Paperwhite is currently sold at Nordstrom, Bloomingdale’s and at more than 250 specialty stores in the United States and Canada.

Sometimes innovation comes not from things like cutting-edge technology, but from restrengthening a company’s sense of unity. It’s the difference between high-tech and high-touch.

A family-run business since 1897, Glik’s has recently reiterated the sense of family that pervades the company by launching a good old-fashioned in-house company magazine. The goal of the new publication was to change the way the corporate office communicates with its 425 employees spread across 50 retail locations. Printed monthly, Glik’s Clothesline includes stories submitted from regional managers, buyers and stores, new store openings, hot products, top sales associates and even employee engagements and marriages.

The benefits have been huge, according to company president Jeff Glik. “It’s doing its job as far as connecting us all as one,” he says, “and we have a huge backlog of stories from people who want to be in it.”

Glik’s Clothesline helps keep morale high and turnover at its already very low rate, Glik says.

The change in store communication for Glik’s, which sells contemporary youth apparel in eight Midwestern states, could not have been accomplished without great imagery from core vendors, Glik adds, such as Silver Jeans, Volcom, DC, Hurley, Fox, Roxy, Billabong and more.

Glik’s began 113 years ago working out of a horse-drawn carriage. It is poised for continued growth, with plans for an increase in its online presence, the addition of social networking, and later this year a complete change to its point-of-sale register system that will result in fewer mistakes with customer information.
Every company wants to grow and become more profitable. And while rapid expansion and growing popularity are both things to envy, they come with their own unique set of challenges.

Those were the challenges facing Vera Bradley, the accessories company known for its colorful prints and quilted purses, when it decided to take on the big four challenge: automating ordering processes, implementing ERP and supply chain solutions, and moving into a much larger 200,000-square-foot facility. At the time, the company’s operations couldn’t sustain the double-digit growth it was experiencing.

“We really didn’t have a choice,” said Matt Wojewuczki, the company’s vice president of operations. We had an outdated ERP system, we didn’t have any automation, we didn’t have a WMS. We didn’t have the facility.”

“If anything, we should have done it a year earlier,” he added.

It’s better to be late than never, so Vera Bradley started looking for ways to make its operations more efficient and flexible. After evaluating a number of companies, Vera Bradley enlisted the help of New York-based Manhattan Associates, which specializes in supply chain optimization. Vera Bradley planned to implement Manhattan Associates’ Integrated Logistics Solutions when it moved to its new, larger facility.

But, there were problems at first. For workers who had been doing picking by hand and who’d never used an RF gun, there was a little bit of a learning curve when they first started at the new facility.

Manhattan Associates came in two days after it heard about the problems to help with inventory and weighing, and showing employees around the new system. It’s exactly that kind of attention and teamwork that made Manhattan Associates such an appealing choice, Wojewuczki said.

“They were really there with us every step of the way,” he said.

Since the new system launched in February 2007, Vera Bradley has been able to make its operations run faster and cost less. Order fulfillment times have gone down, and peak order processing increased from 1,500 a day to 6,000 a day. And though the company has grown substantially, it’s much nimbler for the move.

“It really has helped us become much more flexible,” Wojewuczki said. “Our SKU count, our product offering has changed. The tempo has changed — we release more often than we did before.”

If that weren’t enough, Vera Bradley was also able to bring its ecommerce back in house from an outside provider. In addition to saving the company money, having ecommerce in house is a way for the company to control that much more of its brand.

“If our marketing group wants to change something about the packaging, or they want to put a different card in, or they want to do a promotion, it allows us to be flexible.”

That flexibility came in handy during the past holiday season. Over Thanksgiving, Wojewuczki estimates, demand significantly exceeded the forecast.

“If we were using an outsourced company, I don’t know how motivated they would be to hit that,” Wojewuczki said.