

Toolbox Functionality: How PLM Streamlines Production

JW Yates
New York City, New York
June 14, 2011



Synchronicity

When it comes to manufacturing, timing is everything. Whether it's getting the right raw materials to the factory on time, or making critical alterations to a design before it goes into production, today's manufacturers count on hundreds of synchronized interactions to make things happen. Increasingly, these interactions, which used to occur under a single roof, are now decentralized and often take place via IT networks, over the web, or elsewhere in cyberspace. In past decades, before the rise of the global economy and international free-trade agreements, manufacturers could oversee their operations directly. Now, however, having control over production requires the ability to communicate across multiple data systems, multiple languages, and between continents. The status quo for modern manufacturing requires powerful data management software, and a fully implemented system that allows a company to have transparency across its entire supply chain. Most manufacturers of a certain size and scope rely heavily on a Product Lifecycle Management (PLM) system to coordinate and oversee production.

PLM systems have been in use for decades, starting in the aerospace field and steadily working their way into most other tech-driven sectors. In fact, any manufacturer that deals with multiple parts, pieces, raw materials or processes can make use of a PLM system to ensure the synchronicity of their production cycle. The use of PLM software is now nearly ubiquitous in certain manufacturing sectors, such as sewn goods, electronics, automobiles and other consumer products.

Transparency

But, not all PLM systems are created equal. A worthwhile PLM software application features customizable, industry-specific toolboxes that allow the user to communicate changes in materials, elements, or dimensions throughout the supply chain in real-time. This means that, using a PLM toolbox, a company can analyze the entire production cycle and communicate changes instantly to applicable suppliers, subcontractors, partners and employees whenever necessary. For instance, if a shoe manufacturer discovers that a certain type of leather will be unavailable in time to meet production deadlines, they can use a PLM system to determine what alternatives will be available, then communicate the details of these changes to the applicable members of the supply chain. Likewise, if a subcontractor finds out that there will be a delay on their end of the supply chain, they can communicate the details immediately, before a costly bottleneck occurs.

This kind of real-time transparency is invaluable in an industry like apparel, where getting the exact style on store shelves at the exact right time is imperative. Garment manufacturing requires a complex and interconnected process. Depending on your specific line of garments it may take months to go from the design phase to the store shelves, and most likely it will take the interaction and cooperation of many, many people at every step in between. While clothing

makers are busy with product development, material selection, and ad design, the public is busy changing its tastes and altering its demands. In fashion-related businesses production delays can cause a whole product line to fail. Trends, fads, and fashions change so quickly that it is imperative to bring items to market as fast as possible, and a good PLM has been shown to improve speed-to-market by up to 30%. [Speed to market whitepaper](#)

Let the Managers Manage

According to PLM expert Mark Milyavskiy, (Chief Product Officer at BMS), “It is always the management that is excited about PLM. They want the visibility, they want the control, and they are tired of trying to balance all these different ways of collecting information.” Mr. Milyavsky should know. He has been involved in the fashion industry for decades, and has helped implement dozens of PLM systems over the years.

PLM can be a powerful management tool, creating visibility all along production, facilitating communication between essential personnel, and collating the mountain of data that accumulates during design and manufacturing. When a manager or management team needs data, they have access to it instantly. Rather than having to order a report and wait a few days to receive it, they can access their PLM tools and see instantly what progress is being made by designers, by contractors or by suppliers. PLM synchronizes data in a way that allows disparate workers, those separated by time zones, continents and languages, to work simultaneously as a team. And, by eliminating double entry of vital data, a PLM system saves time and avoids confusion.

Many PLM end-users come to rely on their system almost immediately after implementation. Once the designers, producers, contractors, and other partners are on board, PLM toolboxes become an integral part of how a company maintains its momentum. No longer drowning in a chaotic sea of Excel spreadsheets, mismatched purchase orders, and ambiguously worded compliance reports, managers can get down to the business of management. A well-implemented PLM system allows management to make vital decisions based on solid, up-to-the-minute data, rather than relying on weeks-old reports, and unverifiable assurances from associates half a world away. With complete transparency, a manager can make more confident decisions, knowing that any miscalculation, or misinterpretations will become apparent sooner rather than later.

Design Freedom

A streamlined production and design system will give your staff more freedom to make inspired changes all the way up to the last minute. When it comes to design, more freedom means more creativity. The fewer practical obstacles in the way, the more likely your designers will be to follow their vision.

Simply put, a properly implemented PLM tool, especially one tailored to the needs of the fashion world, can enhance product innovation. The less time your staff spends filling out spreadsheets

and searching for information, the more time they can spend being creative, which is what you hired them for in the first place. And, once implemented, designers can save and reuse data elements from past projects on subsequent jobs, thus reducing their workload.

Mr. Milyavsky, called the “Wizard of PLM” by industry magazine *Fashion Manuscript*, has had hands-on experience implementing PLM systems with major fashion brands. He says there is often skepticism from designers when implementation begins. “They don’t want to learn something new. They have their way of doing things, maybe charcoal sketches, maybe they scan images, whatever they do, they don’t want to change things. But in the end, they become the biggest fans of PLM. Once they see what it can do, how much work it can save them, they are all for it.” He goes on to say that he has seen designers from high-profile fashion houses who were reluctant to utilize PLM initially, then go on to demand a PLM system when they move to a different company. “They say, I can’t work without PLM, I need my tools,” says Milyavsky.

[Fashion Manuscript](#)

Toolboxes

Milyavsky’s prime invention is the VerTex PLM system for fashion, apparel, footwear and accessories. This modular system comes with several built-in toolboxes designed with the needs of the fashion industry in mind, and refined through years of hands-on, real world applications. VerTex offers toolboxes for Design, Development, Sourcing, Tracking, Costing and other jobs.

One such toolbox, which is incredibly important for garment makers, is the Color Toolbox. The Color Toolbox allows users to create color palettes and print palettes. These palettes enable users to standardize color blends for an entire season or line.

The Color Toolbox also lets the user:

- Cost products by color
- Connect colors to color suppliers, documentation and lab-dip information
- Pull RGB values from inspiration images for custom color development
- Create color ways and save them directly to print layouts
- Define color by Season and Division

All color information is stored in a VerTex library which is integrated directly into the template-based PLM process. Streamlining the color process like this has been shown, time and again, to facilitate creativity, save money and improve time-to-market.

Karina Kogan, President of BMS, believes in the benefits of a modular PLM system, not just for its ability to streamline product management, but also for its capacity to enhance product design. She says, "The kind of business we cater to is about so much more than just dollars and cents. We pride ourselves in developing a PLM that fosters creative design."

In the apparel sector, color is not an insignificant factor. For clothing and footwear, color is a primary concern, and it is one that affects every other aspect of the business.

"We felt the need for a PLM product that recognizes the importance of decisions pertaining to color and how they will affect cost, lead-times and ultimately the selling power of a line," says Kogan.

Having powerful, preconfigured toolboxes allows users to have an easier, seamless implementation process. By predicting the needs of a specific industry, PLM software like VerTex makes adopting a new data control system less hectic. New users can see right away how toolboxes refine processes they are already familiar with.

Know Your Business

According to Mr. Milyavsky, it is important that any company considering an investment in PLM software realizes that the system is only as effective as the staff implementing it. "The PLM cannot design clothes for you, it can't decide how many pieces to make in a season, it can't choose the right color or fabric. The users have to put in the talent and the knowledge, but PLM tools create a process where everyone's contribution is orchestrated. You have to know your business, and PLM lets you know everything about your business."

Business Management Systems

330 West 38th Street

Suite 705

New York, NY 10018

(800) 266-4046

info@bmsystems.com

www.bmsystems.com