

WWD WEDNESDAY

WWExecTech

PLM Grows Up With Updates From Lectra, Others

By Cate T. Corcoran

Only five years ago, product life cycle management software designed especially for the apparel industry was in its infancy. Now it's entered the preteen years. Companies such as Freeborders and Business Management Systems have updated their offerings with new features that focus on graphics and ease of use, and industry software leader Lectra and newcomer Fashionware Solutions Inc. have released their first PLM programs.

PLM software helps apparel brands such as Ellen Tracy and J. Jill coordinate the departments and details that go into making any item of clothing. Design, sourcing, sample making, shipping and even overseas factories can view the same electronic files and see the status of any garment and its components at a moment's notice. As a result, companies can decrease their time to market and, in some cases, avoid costly mistakes because of better communication.

Lectra, which, along with Gerber, is one of the leaders in apparel technology, has reorganized its substantial offerings in design, patternmaking and cutting software and hardware around PLM, which started shipping in February. The new suite, known as Lectra Fashion PLM, is not a reworking of older software, but is entirely new and can be used with Lectra's existing programs or software from other companies to manage the overarching details of the apparel development and production process, said David Rode, president of Lectra Americas.

Mango is using the new software, he said. Lectra Fashion PLM's main modules include design management, creative design, technical design, color management, a new product data management module (not the same as the company's existing Gallery PDM software), a product management and workflow engine and a dashboard for reporting the status of tasks and costs.

Lectra Fashion PLM is Web-based and keeps an archive of design changes. The modules are integrated so they work together seamlessly, said Rode.

Pricing depends on configuration, and could range from about \$350,000 to several million dollars.

Future plans include a virtual 3-D prototyping module, due later this year, to help reduce fittings and speed prototyping. The company also plans to introduce a retail marketing module for planning the amount and location of merchandise in store, but

Each sku has its own page in Fashionshare, and information about costing, the status of cutting orders, and planning is just a few clicks away.

has not set a date for its release.

Gerber is working on a PLM product it intends to release later this year, the company said in a prepared statement.

Fashionware Solutions of New York is betting the simplicity and ease of its new hosted solution will win adherents. The service, which became available in June and is called Fashionshare, is accessed via the Internet, so companies can be up and running in minutes rather than months. They populate the empty databases by downloading their company data about items and groups, and Fashionware can integrate its service with a company's legacy systems, such as IBM's AS/400 minicomputer platform, for automatically importing data about cutting orders, billing and invoicing.

The service allows users to collaboratively merchandise and plan product lines, manage colors and source fabrics and trims. It is visual, intuitive and easy to use. "It covers 95 percent of what people will need at the first go-round," said Fashionware president Paul Friedman, a Seventh Avenue veteran.

Friedman holds a doctorate in bio-

chemistry and started out as a patternmaker in his family's outerwear company, S. Rothschild. Eventually he became vice president of manufacturing and helped set up connections between the company's overseas factories and Rothschild's computer systems before leaving to start Fashionware.

Users buy a perpetual license to the service once, then pay a maintenance fee of 18 percent of the license fee every year. The price starts at \$6,000 per user. With 50 users, the cost decreases to about \$4,000 per seat.

The company is adding enterprise resource planning to handle electronic data interchange, shipping and financials. One manufacturer is testing the service, said Friedman.

"People have talked forever about having a single-platform, seamless system that goes from planning to development to the end-of-the-year statement, and this is being built to do that," Friedman said.

Business Management Systems of Fair Lawn, N.J., has updated its Vertex software to show a complete history of design changes and has made its software more visual.

So, for example, the Fitting Module has room for a complete history of issues and their resolution, and the software notifies relevant parties of changes via e-mail.

The tech pack section has room for factories to include comments. The software interfaces with Gerber's pattern-making software and keeps a history of every pattern and its versions in its Pattern Library.

Vertex also works with a variety of drawing applications, so users can see the history of any sketch in Vertex. The company has made the software more visual, with thumbnails of every component appearing in the bill of materials, and it now has the capability to search images.

Users of Vertex include Elie Tahari,

Theory, Donna Karan and Ellen Tracy.

"Our fittings are very chaotic," said Jason Epstein, Elie Tahari chief technology officer, so Vertex's accommodation of extensive fit notes has helped the company, which requested the update. Vertex's interface is stronger, now that it's more graphical, he said.

Over the last three years, Freeborders has added storyboarding, line optimization and sourcing to its PLM software, which started with a fabric and trim module and product management. Its most recent release, 3.6, focused on ease of use, flexibility and configurability. The company has more than 25 customers around the world, and in the first half of next year, Freeborders plans to introduce

a multilanguage version of the software that lets its customers and clients work in a variety of languages. Freeborders also is focusing on custom integration work for its clients to help reduce redundant systems. The company has started work on a quality-control module, due in about a year. The firm also is pushing to get its customers up and running more quickly and, in some cases, has reduced implementation from more than a year to seven months, said Debbie Baldini, Freeborders managing director of retail practice.

"Much of the value [of PDM] that will come in the future is in having truly integrated systems, to have data flowing not only through the PLM suite, but also the rest of a company's systems," Baldini said.