



# The Design Process

## Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Understand how the elements of fashion appeal to and influence the consumer
- ✓ Identify the classifications of clothing in relation to their uses and types
- ✓ Understand which elements affect the decision to buy fashion
- ✓ Explain the process of product development in the fashion industry

## The Design Process

Clothing has long been used as more than just a way to cover people's bodies. Different types of clothing can reveal status, especially in the past but also today, and also the wearer's personality. This need to cover up and also to reveal who we are relies on a range of different clothing types, which will often be chosen by wearers to do both. But one of the most puzzling aspects of clothing is fashion.

As mentioned above, clothing often clearly reveals status and social class. This can be seen in the boss of a company wearing a business suit, while workers perhaps wear jeans or a uniform. This difference, however, may completely disappear outside the office. Clothing changes throughout life. People wear different clothes as babies, in school, at university, starting work, on special occasions (weddings and funerals), for job interviews etc. Death also has a particular type of clothing, both for the deceased and for those mourning, and this can also be different according to culture. For example, in some places people wear black at funerals, whereas in others the colour to wear is white.

Clothing is also a signal of personal identity. It can be a reflection of the person's goals, their moral principles, and can also show self-assurance or lack thereof. Clothing is often a clear indication of an activity that people are about to engage in. On the flip-side, clothing can be used to indicate something a person is not. In this case, the clothes are worn more as a costume - a cover, if you will. Specific types of clothing also reveal people who belong to a particular group.

When used in its most basic form, fashion simply means changing shapes or types of clothing. People have in the past, and often today, felt the need to adorn themselves. This has led to opportunities for people to develop their own sense of style and/or reveal their place in society. Fashion is only one of many factors to consider when creating a garment for the market. The general appearance as well as the way it can be used (i.e., for fitness purposes or for work) must also be considered.

When creating a particular style for a certain individual, which includes not only clothing but also accessories or beauty products consistent with the personality, this is called *fashion design*.

### Key Terms of Fashion Design

- **A fashion designer** visualises and forms garments using combinations of line, proportion, colour, and texture. The designer may not necessarily know how to sew or make patterns, however. Formal training is essential for fashion designing and most fashion designers are formally trained (apprenticed) and schooled.
- **A pattern maker** is the individual who drafts the shapes and sizes of a garment's pieces with paper and measuring tools, or an AutoCAD computer software programme. Sometimes they do it the original way, which is to drape muslin on a dress form. The pattern pieces from the intended

design of the garment must also fit the intended wearer. Pattern makers must have formal training.

- **A tailor** makes custom-designed garments which are made to measure for a client. These can be clothing pieces such as suits, coats, trousers, jackets and skirts.
- **A textile designer** designs fabric weaves and prints for clothes and furnishings. Textile designers are usually formally trained as apprentices and are schooled in the trade.
- **A stylist** is one who co-ordinates the clothing, jewellery and accessories used in fashion photography and catwalk presentations of clothes collections. A stylist is also a designer whose designs are based on trends, and the collections of other designers.
- **A buyer** orders stocks of clothes for shops, chain stores etc. Most fashion buyers are trained in business studies.
- **A teacher of fashion design** teaches the art and craft of fashion in both art schools and in fashion design schools.
- **A custom clothier** makes custom-made garments to order, for a given customer.
- **A dressmaker** specialises in custom-made women's clothes. These include daywear, cocktail, and evening dresses, business clothes and suits, trousers, sports clothes and lingerie.
- **An illustrator** is someone who draws and paints clothes for commercial use.
- **A model** wears clothes at fashion shows and in photographs in order to display them.
- **A fashion journalist** writes fashion articles describing the garments presented for magazines or newspapers.
- **An alterations specialist** (known as an alterationist) adjusts completed garments so that they fit well, usually ready-to-wear, and sometimes re-styles them. NOTE: Not all alterationists are tailors, even though tailors do the altering of the garments to fit the client.
- **A wardrobe consultant**, also known as a **fashion advisor**, gives clients advice on styles and colours that are flattering to said clients.
- **A photographer** take pictures of the clothes on fashion models for use in magazines, newspapers and adverts.

## Chic

Chic comes from French meaning smart or stylish. It has been used in English since at least the 1870s. Over time, "chic" has been used to refer to, among other things, social events, situations, individuals and modes or styles of dress. Generic terms frequently used include designer chic (associated with styles of particular couturiers - the 1980s became known as the "designer decade"), and retro-chic (adopting elements of fashion from the past: e.g. "Victorian chic", "sixties chic", "Georgian chic", or "1920s Riviera chic")

## Collection

New lines are created each season by design and merchandising departments in every division. These new lines are the seasonal collections that will be sold to retail store buyers.

Each season, the design and merchandising departments of each division are responsible for creating a new line - the seasonal collection that the manufacturer will sell to retail store buyers. The words **collection** and **line** mean the same thing. 'Collection' is mainly used in Europe and for high-priced apparel. 'Line' is more often used in the United States for moderately and popularly priced fashion.

## Fashion shows

A fashion show is considered a special event. Fashion shows are used to tell a fashion story. The fashion office usually does all the selections and organisation of the fashions and the required model bookings. Invitations and other arrangements are usually handled by special events departments. These presentations can be organised in four different ways, these being formal shows, designer trunk shows, department shows and informal modelling.

### a) Formal Fashion Shows

Formal fashion shows need a huge amount of advance planning, which includes booking models and fittings, arranging for a runway, scenery, lighting, microphones, music, seating and also assistants. The clothes will usually be grouped on the basis of styling, colour and other visual criteria. In order to set a particular mood and to complement the clothes, models and music are chosen very carefully.

### b) Designer Trunk Shows

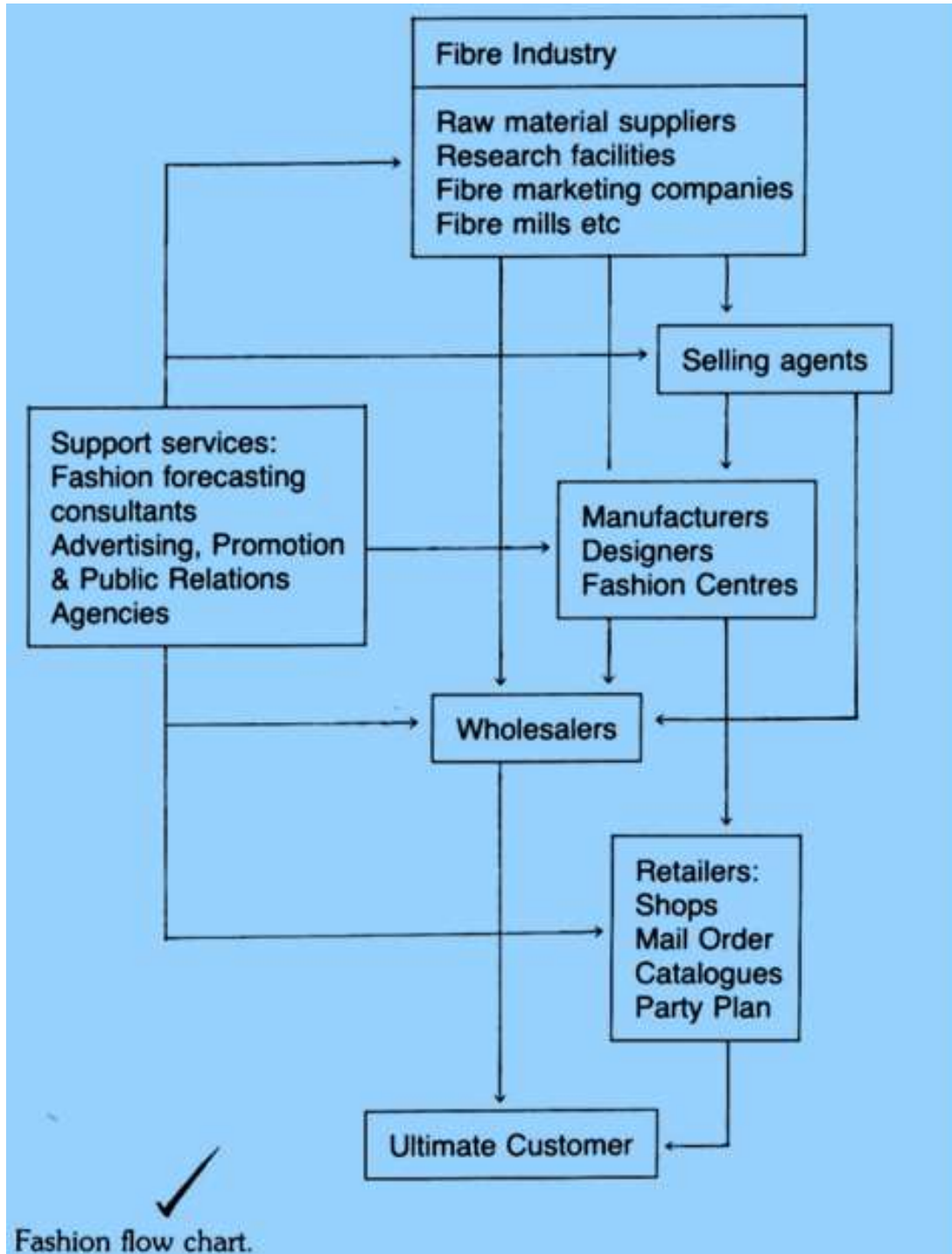
Designer trunk shows are done in collaboration with a single vendor. They are a very popular way of selling expensive collections. Careful record-keeping by sales associates is important here as it will be from these that the best customers are chosen and sent invitations. The representative or the designer him/herself will visit stores with the collection and usually show it in the designer collections department using carefully chosen models. This way, customers are able to see the entire collection unedited by a buyer. They can then order samples in their own sizes. Around fifty percent of designers' and retailers' total business often comes through trunk shows. They are also considered very time-consuming and exhausting work, which is why a lot of designers and retailers have now actually stopped doing this type of show.

### c) Department Fashion Shows

Department fashion shows are produced in-store on a much smaller scale to generate immediate sales. A platform is usually set up right in the department itself that carries the clothes.

**d) Informal Fashion Shows**

The easiest shows to produce are the informal fashion shows. Models walk through the store wearing the fashions and showing them to customers. Usually, customers like to ask questions and there is no hurry for the models who can take their time. The usual procedure for this is that it is done in conjunction with a special promotion or trunk show.



## Classification of Fashion

Designers and manufacturers are particularly concerned with the duration of a fashion collection's importance/relevance. Some fashion collections have a longer duration than others, though some can be very brief. A designer needs to identify which duration it is likely to be and only then can he/she evaluate the fashion's importance to the retail inventory.

Fashion is classified into different types.

These are:

- Style
- Basic or Classic
- Fad
- Trends
- Fashion Forecasting

### a) Style

Here is where the difference between style and fashion becomes clear. Style is constant and does not change, but fashion always changes. Fashion is the modification of a particular style. Style is considered to be the basic outline of any garment. Changing the sleeves or neckline, for example, and tweaking a few things here and there on a basic garment piece, changes it and makes it look different. This change is what becomes fashion - when it is accepted by people.

The word 'style' is popular in fashion and refers to a sub-division within fashion. By definition, *it is that which has certain characteristics that distinguish it from other designs*. An example of this could be that the fashion is the pleated skirt, but the style is a box pleat. A common misconception that people have is the belief that famous designers actually create fashions. Famous designers aim to create styles they hope will be accepted. If the style then gets consumer support it needs, it becomes fashion. We have mentioned this before but it bears repeating: fashion is synonymous with acceptance.

### b) Basic or Classic

A long-lasting or constant garment type such as a T-shirt or skirt is called a Basic or Classic. The T-shirt and skirt are part of the fashion scene. People will usually have one or more basics in their wardrobes and they will be worn to suit different occasions. During particular times, the basic will become the most important promotable fashion. But whether in or out, they will always be a part of the fashion scene. Many outfits can be placed in this classification - shirts and trousers, plain or pleated skirts and denims, etc. These are general fashions that last for years, decades or even generations.

Basics or Classics are outfits that remain in the fashion scene for long periods of time - from past to present and even into the future.

It is easy to see this concept in movies, for example. Both in old and modern movies, we can see the same skirts, or denims, which when worn at different times will have a slight change or modification accordingly.

### c) **Fad**

A fad in fashion is something that will appear on the scene and will capture people's imaginations. Unfortunately, a fad will fade out just as quickly as it arrived. It is for this reason that fads either make designers lives more interesting or even more difficult.

Generally, a fad is defined as a short-lived fashion which lasts for a very short or limited time, and is accepted only by a particular group of people. An example of this could be what is termed 'hippy' clothing. They have/had a particular style of clothing, hairstyles, way of life, etc. It's a fad that comes and goes, but rarely stays around for long. Another reason why fads are usually short-lived is because not everyone can afford them.

### d) **Trends**

The things that major collections have in common are the fashion trends and the styling creations and concepts. Fashion forecasters look for where the fashion direction is going and which styles they feel will be successful, then attempt to create new fashion trends and capture the mood of the time.

Sometimes, common sources inspire different designers and therefore, these designers may come up with similar fashion ideas. The similarity in trends may come from the shape, fabric or other design component. Oftentimes, a new trend emerges slowly and then expands to other collections. The media (particularly the fashion media) will see similarities in collections and emphasise them and in this way, the media exposure facilitates the establishment of these new trends.

Assessing fashion collections is one way that designers who work for mainstream manufacturers can examine the directions in fashion. Shopping in major fashion capitals and using design services or magazines is another way of assessing the fashion trends, especially since designers are not invited to the shows.

Then there are the buyers, who often have a difficult time deciding which trends in fashion will actually become fashion basics. Capris, for example, became one such fashion item. Pony prints, on the other hand, were indeed just a fad. Becoming more flexible in buying patterns and careful about stock management is what today's buyers must do. Consumers may react in a negative way if the market is flooded with a new trend, as this would create overexposure and therefore become too common.

Global fashion trends are now moving at a very fast pace, spurred by the Internet and television. Five months is now the average timespan for a fashion trend, not a year. For the junior market, the timespan is even shorter, standing at three months.

### e) Fashion Forecasting

Fashion forecasting centres on upcoming trends and is a global career. Fashion forecasting will predict many important elements of the upcoming trends, such as the type of fabrics, the styles and the colours that will show up both on runways *and* in stores in the next seasons. This concerns all levels of the fashion industry and includes everything from ready-to-wear to haute-couture, mass market to street wear. Trend forecasting is not limited to the fashion industry, of course. Nearly all industries use it and need it to keep ahead of the game. It is the fashion forecasters who know how to appeal to customers, bringing them to the stores and assisting designers and retailers sell their brands. The Internet is one of the best things that has ever happened to the fashion industry (among other industries). Those who work in the fashion industry depend on the Internet to show them what's hot and what's not in terms of this season's colours, designer collections and influential celebrity wardrobes.

Various communication media tools are used in fashion forecasting. These include magazines, press, newspapers, fashion shows, movies and window displays.

It also includes things like:

- Market research
- Consumer focus groups
- Consumer research
- Fashion trends
- Surveys
- Shopping
- Sales records
- In-store informal interviews
- Evaluating collections
- Target market trends

The responsibilities of fashion forecasters include all of the following: -

- Identifying prophetic fashion trends.
- Making assessments on which segments of the market will accept a particular fashion.
- Establishing for how long and at which particular times these fashions will be acceptable to target customers.

### **Identifying Prophetic Styles**

Fashion forecasters examine designer collections for something called prophetic styles. These include new ideas that capture the mood of the times. If many designers shift to similar fashion directions, which would mean they are using similar fashion components like colour or silhouette, it is because of common sources of inspiration founded on current interests or certain current events. Those designers react with similar ideas at the same time, to the same stimuli. When this happens, it may indicate a fashion trend.

### **Adapting a Trend to a Target Market**

Adapting a trend will depend on potential consumers. It is important to know the particular group of people who make up those consumers. Everything must be taken into consideration. One of the first things is the age group that is being targeted. Then, income levels, lifestyle and preferences. Fashion trends differ from continent to continent. American designers, for example, tend to soften silhouettes and adapt a more casual look as the American lifestyle is generally more casual than in some European countries. The French lean more to the extreme side, showing creativity and attempting to draw attention to their individual collections.

### **How Location Affects Timing**

Geographical locations of potential consumers play a big part in the timing of fashion trend adoption and adaptation. It is usually the case that European fashion trends, especially from France or Italy, are more quickly accepted globally - especially for those who can afford European fashion. In the case of the U.S., it generally takes one or even two years for European fashion ideas to be adopted globally. New York designer fashion is accepted faster and easier in the U.S. This is because this type of fashion suits this particular country's needs. Regardless of the continent, it is the case that those who live in sophisticated, urban cities with high-level, high-paying jobs tend to accept fashion faster than others. This being the case, retailers and manufacturers adjust their trend predictions accordingly. Determining the approximate time it will take their potential customers to accept a new fashion trend is something they both must do. The time between when a fashion originated, or was first designed, and when it was bought by the target consumers must be measured, so that they have a good idea of whether consumers will accept the fashion released immediately, months from now, or a year from

the time of origin. Almost all sectors now see fashion as a continuous source of inspiration, from the cosmetics industry, to cars, to politics, to sport and so on.

An important aspect of the fashion industry is forecasting future demand for specific fabrics, styles and/or colours. It ensures the process of observation related to both short and long-term planning is based on comprehensive decision-making. This way, time and effort are not wasted on hype or something that will not yield results. Textile specialists will work for around two years ahead to establish the general guidelines for every fashion season. Therefore, accurate forecasting is essential.

Long-term forecasting is often used by executives for planning corporate strategies. Marketing managers who position products in the marketplace do so by carefully considering the competition.

Product developers, production managers and merchandisers use more short-term forecasting, in order to direct the style and shape of collections. Short-term forecasting involves apparel companies using services which assist them in scanning the marketplace and reporting on fashion developments, which include styles, colours and types of textiles.

About a year and a half before the start of the new season, forecasters will get indications as to the first views of the trends. It is at this time that colour becomes a vital consideration of yarn mills and becomes the centre of attention in discussions with those interested in early trend decisions. From the early fashion trade and yarn shows, the forecasters combine their opinions about colour and fabric with their socio-economic and cultural analysis. There are certain areas used to predict changing consumer demand and these include music, cinema, television, sport and general trends in lifestyles.

Fashion forecasting includes activities such as analysis of the market conditions and lifestyles of the consumers, study of sales statistics, assessing popular designer collections, observing street fashion and examining fashion publications.

### **The Direction of Fashion Change**

Certain trend-watchers view fashion currents as a hierarchical status level. One theory suggests that fashion flows down from the well-known and highly-visible fashion elite. Another theory goes along the lines of fashion flowing upstream *from* the street level, after it is discovered by the fashion elite and then launched (in an adapted version) to mainstream audiences. If a particular look is endorsed and supported by the fashion media and is manufactured quickly enough, it can flow across to all levels of the market. Take denim, for example. It can be used as-is or be presented in different and unusual colours, different silhouette styles, with added details or used to create accessories. It can also be introduced in a way that expresses a particular mood or unique style. Whether it is accepted or rejected can be time-mapped.

This joint-selection creates a feedback circle between the consumer and the fashion industry. This cycle is regulated by visual aesthetic trends and socio-psychological processes.



## Key Areas in Fashion Forecasting

### Colour Forecasts

Colours determine the moods and the attitudes of a particular season. Colour trends are immediately connected to consumer moods and goals. Ensuring the chosen shade of colour is perfect can lead to an increase in sales. Clients who are trend-savvy want the fashion products they buy to become the latest fashion trends. For these reasons, designers must be well aware of the latest trends.

Materials trend forecasts for knits, denim, leather, woven and non-woven fabrics allow designers to get an idea of which materials will be 'in' for the next season.

When it comes to key trends in denim, woven patterns and other weaves, it is generally predicted about 18 months before the season starts. Fibre analysis is shown in close detail as well as visual textures. The direction the product will take through the relevant mills and resources is important to know and understand.

### Lifestyle Materials Forecasts

Inspiration for interiors, homewares and certain other areas of product design require a lifestyle materials forecast.

### Knits & Jerseys

Knit and jersey forecasts foresee new ideas and key trends that are having an influence on street style, runways, knitted materials, trade shows, retail and vintage. All areas are covered and these would include things like texture and stitch visuals, yarn, knit patterns and how to apply silhouettes.

### Non-woven and Leather

Early trends and predictions for animal skins and non-woven fabrics is what the forecasts aim for in this area. Key looks are covered such as surface treatments, and knowledge is provided on which non-woven fabrics are emerging as the most influential for fashion and lifestyle.

### Prints and Graphics

Graphic and print research forecasts predict the most up-to-date concepts for patterns, prints, graphics and embellishments.

### Women's Apparel

The essential women's wear product forecasts must encompass all seasonal key trend looks for all women's wear. Blouses, skirts, pants and trousers, jackets and coats, denim, etc., are all included.

Designers must keep up with the latest innovations regarding detailing, which includes any embellishments to collars, fastenings, pockets, sleeves and so on.

### **Women's wear Accessories**

Trend forecasts for bags, belts, jewellery, eyewear, headwear and soft accessories provide the on-trend knowledge required to attract today's trend-savvy consumers.

### **Women's Footwear**

Enabling designers to create footwear that is trendy and desirable is what footwear forecasting is all about. Footwear will include anything from shoes to boots to sandals, and details like whether or not the footwear will be heeled or flat. With this, the intention is to generate enthusiasm among trend-savvy consumers. Footwear forecasting is also about knowing which materials, colours, textures, shapes and any other novelty ideas to use when creating a new product. These will also include any leading street styles and, on the other end of the spectrum, any vintage looks.

### **Men's Fashion**

Men's fashion has come a long way in the last few decades especially, and a savvy designer has done his/her homework regarding the most up-to-date men's fashion trends. Again, as with women's wear, colours, styles and patterns are important to think about for the upcoming collections for Autumn/Winter and Spring/Summer seasons.

### **Children's Fashion**

The forecasting in this area helps designers and companies determine the colours of the moment and the right colours/themes for girls' and boys' fashions. It is necessary to capture a certain mood for the upcoming season - the theme descriptions and visuals will help to do this.

## **The Fashion Forecasting Process**

### **Trend Forecasting Companies**

French companies based in Paris have traditionally dominated fashion forecasting. Although a number of larger ones are still based in Paris, a number of new niche forecasters have emerged around the world offering their own specialty products and services. Some better-known trend forecasters include: WGSN, Style Sight and Trendstop.com.

### **Consumer Research**

Manufacturers and retailers may ask consumers directly about their buying preferences. Consumer reactions are compiled and tabulated to pinpoint preferences for certain garments or accessories, colours or sizes and so on, or products to fit specific consumer tastes.

Surveys by telephone or email are conducted by publications and market research companies for manufacturers and retailers. These surveys include questions about income, lifestyle, fashion preference and shopping habits. Customers are usually selected by the market research firm to meet with manufacturers or retailers. In-store informal interviews can help researchers obtain information, by simply asking customers what they would like to buy, what styles they like that are currently available and what merchandise they want but cannot find. Because of their close contact with customers, owners of small stores can often do this most effectively.

Consumer research figures are important when making decisions about product development, brand marketing and retailing.

### **Colour Forecasting**

Stimulating sales is the driving force behind colour forecasting. Colour grabs the customers' attention, makes an emotional connection and leads them to the product. Even when the basic product stays the same, changing the colour creates a sense of something new. Colour consultants help companies decide on the right colour story to sell the product. Some consultants specialise in advising on colour. Others develop colour forecasts as part of their overall product development function. Some large companies have departments dedicated to setting colour directions for multiple lines. Professional colour organisations bring together experts to collaborate on forecasts for industries like women's wear, menswear, children's wear and both residential and non-residential interiors.

### **Sales Forecasting**

Forecasting is relatively easy, straightforward and generally accurate for products with long lifespans and steady sales. However, the fashion apparel business is one of the most volatile, because it creates products that are new, highly seasonal or have short lifespans. In such situations, forecasts become increasingly inaccurate. Errors in sales forecasting result in two kinds of losses:

**Markdowns:** When retailers have unwanted goods remaining at the end of a selling, the goods must then be sold, even at a loss.

**Cultural Indicators:** In the apparel field, companies need an early warning system so that specific product categories can be fine-tuned to trends within a market segment. While timing is important, an agile and responsive company will be able to capitalise on trends whenever they are spotted. Sometimes just as a glimmer far in the future and sometimes as a phenomenon in the building stage. Waning trends are another signal. When some avocation, interest or lifestyle loses cultural power, it is a good time to survey the information landscape for the next big thing.

### **The Final Stage of Forecasting**

Designers and companies are out to determine the 'fashion look' for the season and to get this, there is a process of development which merges the experienced views of textile and product trade shows,

designers and buyers, forecasters and ready-to-wear shows. All of these together should lead to 'the look' as all the layers are placed properly together. These shows have a major impact on trends close to the season, but they can also have a last-minute influence on high street fashion products.

Media coverage for fashion shows is a vital aspect of the trend development process. This is where trends thought to be influential in the upcoming season will be highlighted. Consumers are influenced by strong media coverage, which focuses attention on the hottest trends of the season.

### **The Future of Forecasting**

Apparel executives are under constant pressure to hit the bulls-eye mark with regards to fashion trends. This involves a delicate balancing act, anticipating any future developments and being able to quickly improvise when faced with change.

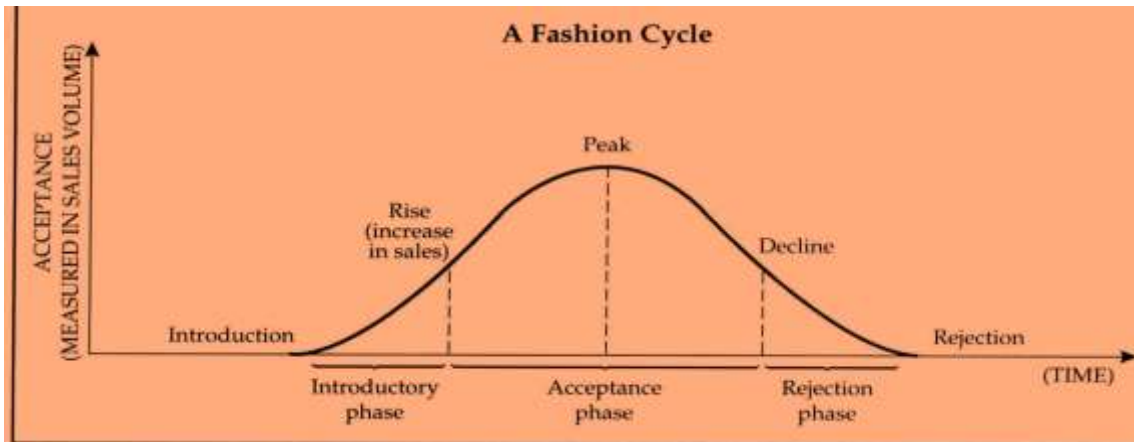
In the marketplace, those changes may be associated with:

- Lifestyles changes
- Immigration
- Development of new technology
- Changes in raw material prices

Fashion forecasting is therefore employed within the fashion industry as a way of leading companies towards new ideas for fabrics, themes, moods and colours for varying product types and levels. Identification and understanding of future market requirements is a necessity. Even though there is no ultimate fashion story, it is important to access the right colour palettes, and research style and fabric trends to suit a specific niche. Customer profiles are important, too. Whatever information and interpretation of information designers can get will enable an effective marketing strategy to be designed, and in turn, lead to greater success.

### **Fashion Cycles**

An assortment of new styles created by designers are revealed and displayed to consumers every season. In some cases, the product design is rejected immediately, usually by the retail buyers. Others, however, can be accepted for a while - this is shown by customers buying and wearing them. The changes in fashion are described as 'fashion cycles.' Below, is a picture description of a fashion cycle. It is generally shown as a bell-shaped curve moving through five stages, these being: introduction, popularity rising, popularity peak, popularity decline and finally, rejection. It is possible for the cycle to depict a single style for only one designer, or a more general style which would be something like the miniskirt as an example.



### Introduction

Designers read the times from a creative point of view. The manufacturer then offers this new style to the public. When referring to, for example, the 'latest fashions' from France; we are not referring to the acceptance of the styles, only that there is a new style that has emerged. In most cases, new styles are introduced at very expensive prices. Those designers, who are known and respected for their unique creativity and sense of timing, usually have financial support. They can design on their own terms and have no limits (or very few) imposed on their creativity, what raw materials they use or how much workmanship is invested in particular garments. Because of all this, the cost of production is quite high and therefore very few people can actually afford the designs. In the case of designers whose clothes are considered 'works of art', the expectation is that they will not be sold in high quantities. Producing in smaller quantities affords the designer more flexibility and freedom for their creations.

### Increases in Popularity

A rise in the popularity of a particular fashion will occur as the new fashion is bought and worn more and more often, resulting in more people seeing it. With regards to expensive garments, it is expected that sales will be small, but they could also become the most popular of the latest high-priced fashion garments. Often, if the style gains popularity, it can be adapted and modified. There will be manufacturers who may buy the rights to produce duplicates of the style, which they can then sell at less than the original price tag. Another thing that may occur, and usually does, is that other manufacturers will try to copy the garment but with cheaper fabrics, and others still, may copy the design but with much less detail and for even lower pricing. Modifying the original garment design to suit certain customers and their needs will be done by other manufacturers, too. In these cases where the garment styles are being produced en masse, the pre-established trends are followed, rather than new ones created.

### **Peak of Popularity**

Styles that have widespread appeal are usually produced in different variations. With high popularity, a garment style is in high demand and manufacturers will make copies or copies with modifications which have many differing price levels.

### **Decline in Popularity**

When there are a very high number of copies produced, fashion-conscious people usually tire of the style and start looking for new styles. Customers still buy the garment in the same style, but they will not pay the regular price for it. As such, retailers will then have to place these garments on sale or discount, in order to move them out and bring in something new.

### **Rejection of a Style, or Obsolescence**

The final phase of the style cycle is the rejection phase, where people are no longer interested in buying the garment even at discounted prices. It is at this stage that consumers have already started looking for new styles, thus is the beginning of a new cycle.

### **Length of Cycles**

It is difficult to predict the actual time-cycle of a fashion trend as there is no real measurable timetable for doing so. In some cases, a fashion style may peak quickly, while another will take much longer. The same goes for its decline in popularity. The time a garment style lasts also differs, from only one season to several seasons. Some disappear quickly, while others don't completely disappear at all.

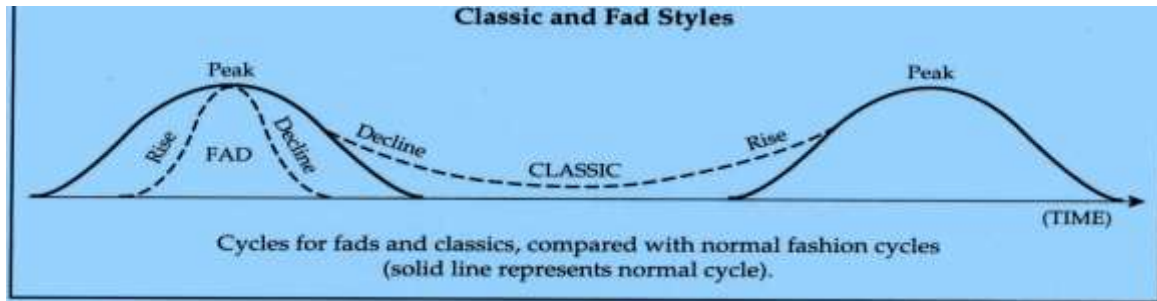
### **Classics**

As mentioned above, some styles never completely lose their appeal. They continue to be more or less accepted for an extensive or indefinite period of time. This is what would be termed a 'classic' style and its characteristics are usually in its simplicity of design, which stops it being easily dated. The Chanel suit would be one such example - it had its peak in the late 1950s and gained popularity again in the late 1970s. The House of Chanel, which is located in Paris, as well as other manufacturers, continued to produce these Chanel suits for a small, dedicated clientele.

### **Fads**

Fads are referred to as such because they come and go, usually within a single fashion season. They don't have the 'strength' of design to keep the consumer interested for a long time. Usually, only a very small consumer group is influenced by fads. They are mostly found in lower price ranges, so are cheaper and easier to copy. This is usually why they only flood the market for shorter periods of time, and it is because consumers are saturated by the particular design that they get bored with it - just as quickly as they became infatuated with it. In the early 1980s, for example, it was the 'punk' look from

the UK that was saturating the junior market . This was not a classic look, it was a fad which came and went quite quickly.



### Cycles within Cycles

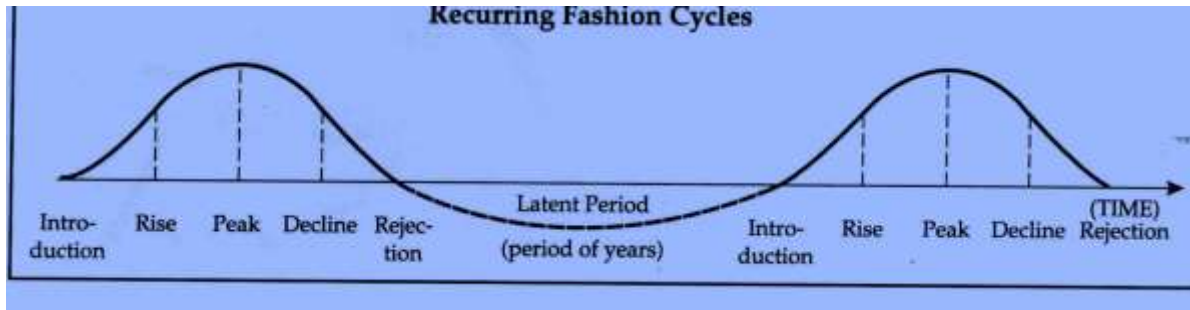
Often, a particular style will be popular but certain elements of the design can change, such as the silhouette, colour or texture. If we take jeans as an example of a cycle within a cycle, it is easy to see that, even though they became popular in the late '60s and throughout the '70s, certain silhouettes came and went such as bell bottoms, cigarette or baggies. Jeans still enjoy popularity today, although often with different silhouettes.

### Interrupted Cycles

Sometimes, retailers and manufacturers do not want to keep making or stocking certain merchandise because it will soon lose its popularity, in which cases consumer buying can be halted ahead of time. Those consumers who try to buy a particular summer garment in August will find that the production has been stopped. At other times, social upheaval or economic crises may either prematurely interrupt the progress of a fashion cycle, or it may extend its life period. In the 1930's for example, people were preoccupied with more important things, such as the great depression and the upcoming war. The wedge-shaped, big shouldered silhouette in women's fashion therefore had a longer than usual life expectancy, extending through the entire war period. Then, during the late 1940s, a new look emerged which was small-waisted garments with sloping shoulders and longer skirt lengths. This seemed highly radical, because the previous cycle had lasted for an unnaturally long period.

### Recurring Cycles

Sometimes, even after a certain fashion has faded, it may reappear at a later time. Designers sometimes look to the past for ideas and when an older style reappears, it is interpreted in a different way for a different time. The actual silhouette may remain the same, but the fabric or detail matched with it will be different. With this in mind, it is important to note that there is never anything completely new, but there is never anything exactly the same either. As the century drew to a close and the new millennium approached, a nostalgic look back at the earlier part of the century (from the '40s through the '80s) began to resurface, but the difference was in the colours, or fabrics, or details (or lack thereof) that made the new looks unique.



## Consumer Identification with Fashion Cycles

### Taste

Taste is what will draw individual consumers to a particular preference of one or more things over others. Having good taste in fashion is thought to mean being sensitive to that which is beautiful and appropriate for the time. An accepting public does not inevitably mean that a design is beautiful, but rather that its timing is right. Often, very beautiful designs are not really accepted by the broader public, as they are seen to be either very extreme or very expensive. On the other hand, strongly edited versions often can and do lose their original beauty when copied.

### Consumer Groups

Specific stages of a fashion cycle can be matched with different types of consumers. For example, fashion leaders usually buy and wear a new style right at the beginning of its cycle and others are inclined to follow. Taste comes into things here, because what is fashionable to one particular group is not necessarily so for another. Fashion leaders often wear what is seen to be extreme for fashion followers. However, when that fashion is accepted by the followers, it is usually already out of fashion for the leaders and they cease to wear it. Retail stores and manufacturers also fall into either leaders or followers of fashion. This depends on which particular consumer groups they target as their main buyers.

### Fashion Leaders

Fashion leaders are not actually the creators of fashion in most cases, but because they provide momentum for fashion by finding and wearing new fashions, they have an important role to play. Only a small percentage of the general public are actually fashion leaders. These people would usually be found in higher income groups and the reason for this is, of course, because high-end fashion is quite expensive.

Fashion leaders always keep their eyes out for interesting new styles including new colours, fabrics and ways of wearing garments, as well as any accessories that come with them. These leaders are very enthusiastic and will often go out of their way to find new fashions, even looking for them in other countries. As they are able to travel more than the average person, fashion leaders may discover

different styles while travelling. A large proportion of fashion leaders are in positions that give them greater exposure, and therefore greater influence over how people dress. The media also gives them airtime when they are seen at public events, on screen or television, for example. These fashion leaders usually don't buy a lot, but are very shrewd when it comes to what they will buy and wear.

Fashion leaders are people who are quite confident and fixed in their own tastes. They are not interested in other people's opinions when it comes to what they choose to wear, but dare to be different. Having these sorts of people wearing a designer's clothes almost inevitably makes the clothes fashionable.

### **Fashion Followers**

When we speak of the general public, it is usually the case that people are looking for acceptance and conform to what fashion leaders are doing. They need leaders to give them confidence in what they are wearing and make them feel that it is acceptable. People are fashion followers for a few main reasons. It may be because they lack the money, the time and even the interest to dedicate to fashion leadership, or they need longer exposure to new styles before they're willing to adopt them. These people are usually not as secure in their own tastes, therefore must look to others for what they have approved in order to know what is acceptable and will *bring* approval. Fashion followers have a tendency to imitate people they admire. Most people in the fashion industry are either copiers or adapters and this is specifically because of fashion follower consumer types. Looking at things from a marketing angle, followers make mass-production a success because when a particular fashion garment is mass produced, it can be sold to a great many consumers and therefore be very profitable.

### **Adoption of Fashion**

Three variations of the fashion adoption process exist. These are: traditional adoption, reverse adoption and mass dissemination. It is necessary to understand how each of these processes work, how new fashion is disseminated and how it is adapted to lifestyles, tastes and indeed the budgets of various consumers.

#### **Traditional Fashion Adoption**

Courage and confidence to try new looks are the qualities that all innovative designers have in common. In the beginning, new looks can seem quite extreme, even outrageous. But after a while, consumers start to see how they can be adapted to their particular needs. It is important to note here that the general public does not accept every new, extreme design. However, in order to move in a different direction, high fashion often has to be extreme. If a top designer displays harem pants, it is not necessarily the case that everyone will want to wear them. However, it would show a trend beginning to move towards ankle appeal.

Traditional adoption theory is founded on the premise that high fashion is expensive. This being the case, it is only available to a small group of people. The more exposure the garment gets, the more

people see it and the more chance there is that they will like it and be moved to purchase, although at a much lower price tag. It is this group that manufacturers and retailers then wish to appeal to and go about adapting the particular fashion for the purpose of selling it to the general consumer. These are then copied again, in order to appeal to even the most conservative buyers. Discount houses will display these items later; when their popularity fades and people tire of them, they'll disappear.

Fashion carries a certain, important suggestion of newness, so when a fashion item is copied and edited then sold at lower prices, this newness and its quality will be lost. This is one of the drawbacks to traditional adoption of fashion – the original gets so modified that it loses its appeal and often becomes unrecognisable.

### **Reverse Adoption**

In most cases, as has already been stated, fashion flows down from high-priced designer clothes to the general public. However, there are certain times when fashion is activated by the consumer. During the '60s and '70s, it was the younger generation in London and San Francisco that influenced the fashion industry, through their combination of clothes that were old, new and handcrafted.

### **Mass Dissemination**

Mass dissemination, also known as Missy, is a more conservative adaptation of proven or accepted designer looks, which use cheaper fabrics and softer silhouettes.

This market styling is usually adapted from designer fashion by traditional means. It is the consumer that inspires active sportswear and denim through the reverse process. With regards junior fashion, it may be mass disseminated as the original ideas are usually produced for this specific young market.

## **Criteria Consumers Use in Fashion Selection**

In order to decide how acceptable a fashion is or will become, manufacturers and consumers must consider what principles are used for its selection. Certain components of fashion appeal attract the consumer's attention. Quality and price tags also play a part, of course, and these are things that the consumer carefully considers before buying.

### **Elements of Fashion Appeal**

Fashion appeal elements and design elements are very similar, except that fashion elements are perceived by the consumer and not the creator. These elements would be:

#### **a) Colour**

Colour is generally the first feature of a garment that consumers respond to. As colour is a very personal thing, people tend to gravitate towards certain colours that have some kind of

meaning for them. Colours are chosen because they either appeal to the person or suit their own colouring (skin, hair etc).

Texture is another part of fabric design that will appeal to consumers, again reliant on individual tastes and suitability. It is the surface of a piece of fabric or accessory, which is referred to as the texture. It has a hint of sensuality to it, and therein lies its appeal.

### **b) Style**

A style can be defined by the line or silhouette and details upon a garment. How it looks on a hanger, otherwise referred to as 'hanger appeal', also affects a garment's appearance. The fashion consciousness of consumers is what will affect their judgement and this, in turn, is conditioned by what is currently fashionable.

## **Practical Considerations**

### **a) Price**

Price is perhaps the main practical consideration regarding fashion for the average buyer. Price is what will be considered when the buyer evaluates the fashion appeal of a garment in its entirety.

### **b) Fit**

Trying on an outfit is a vital stage in the buyer's selection of a piece of clothing. This is because a size tag does not necessarily guarantee a good fit. Setting sizing standards is something the Department of Commerce has attempted to regulate, but each manufacturing company will always vary, even if only a little, in their sizing patterns. Companies will fit the sample garments on models which are considered typical of the company's consumer base. It can be challenging to set size ranges and grading rules to fit every different type of figure, so trying things on is essential so that customers can judge for themselves if a particular fashion element suits his or her body type and their general appearance.

### **c) Appropriateness**

Fashion items must be made suitable or acceptable for certain occasions and also for the consumers' lifestyles. An example of this may be that those who live in rural areas tend to require less formal modes of dress than those in urban areas, especially those in big cities.

It is necessary to point out here the emergence of impulse buyers. These are people who do not consider whether or not an item is appropriate or suitable before purchasing and often buy things that do not suit their wardrobes or even their needs.

#### **d) Brand**

A brand is a way of identifying a particular manufacturer's work. There will be consumers who make their buying decisions based solely on a brand's reputation. This decision is often made as a result of heavy advertising, or other media attention.

### **Areas of Fashion Design**

Specialising in a particular area of fashion is how a lot of professional fashion designers start out. If a market is small, it is highly probable that a company will be able to get the right look and feel to their clothing. Another advantage is that being known for one particular type of product makes it easier for companies to establish themselves in the fashion industry. A fashion company may decide to expand its range after it has become well-established, has regular buyers and is well-known within the trade *and* by the public. The general rule is that a company should expand into an area similar to the one it knows as there is a greater chance of success. An example of this is a women's underwear designer, who might move into men's underwear designing.

#### **a) Women's Wear**

Classifications exist in women's wear such as: dresses, evening wear, suits, sportswear, lingerie, and outerwear. Also included would be specialty wear such as bridal wear and maternity wear - both of which are specifically for women. Women's wear also includes an extremely large variety of accessories, which includes handbags, shoes or other footwear, shoulder wraps, belts and jewellery.

#### **b) Lingerie**

The lingerie range encompasses all undergarments, sleepwear and loungewear. There has been a huge surge in lingerie interest as women are again prioritizing more beautiful and elegant things, and will spend the money required to have them.

#### **c) Dresses**

Dresses can range from very soft silhouettes with ruffles for informal occasions to very tailored outfits with more severe lines and seriousness for wearing at work.

#### **d) Evening clothes**

Evening clothes have a larger range than most people realise, incorporating not only cocktail dresses, both long and short, but also party pyjamas.

**e) Suits, jackets and skirts**

Suits can range from the crisply-tailored to the soft 'dressmaker' suits. These are usually sold together with skirts and jackets.

**f) Outerwear**

The function of outerwear is mostly protective. The outerwear range would include things like coats, thick jackets and capes. It is meant to keep the wearer warm or dry and covered for protection. The fabric used will usually be that which will keep people warm, often made using wool or quilting and includes water-repellent rainwear.

**g) Sportswear**

Due to increases in income levels and the fact that people are engaging more and more in leisure activities, sportswear is the category that has expanded the most in recent years. Sportswear appears in two categories: **active** and **spectator**.

**h) Spectator**

This type of sportswear was originally designed for wearing to sports events, but today it includes sportswear that is worn for everyday activities.

**i) Active sportswear**

Active sportswear was created specifically to allow ease of movement, particularly when participating in actual sports. Sportswear lines are arranged in two ways; either in what is called separates and includes things like blouses, skirts, pants, sweaters and other tops, or co-ordinates which are other pieces that can be mixed and matched with separates, but are priced independently to separates.

**j) Men's Wear**

In the past, there were not as many categories of men's wear as there are today. More and more men are becoming fashion-conscious and stores routinely use specific promotions to attract more men to buy.

**k) Tailored clothing**

Tailored clothing for men includes pieces such as overcoats, suits, vests, sport coats and trousers made for both day wear and evening wear.

**l) Furnishings**

Furnishings are additional items like neckwear, sweaters and other tops, socks, shirts, pyjamas and robes.

**m) Sportswear**

Sportswear includes related separates that fill the demand for more casual and leisure wear.

**n) Active sportswear**

Active sportswear would include windbreakers, ski jackets, jogging suits, tennis shorts and other such items.

**o) Work clothes**

Work clothes are just as their name suggests – for work. This includes things like overalls, work shirts and heavy-duty pants worn by labourers. Work clothing collections are created today for men and women alike.

## Designing a Collection

- **Planning**

When planning a collection, it must first be thoroughly researched. It is necessary for all the items within a collection to complement each other and be in-keeping with the particular fashion look the company/brand is known for.

- **Predicting trends**

Predicting future needs is a skill that designers must master - it is also one of the most difficult. Designers must look at the fashion directions of previous seasons, read up on fashion forecasting through forecasting magazines, and make sure they are aware of what others are doing in the fashion industry. Understanding their own customers is also important, as it will give them clues as to which styles were successful and which styles were not so popular in past seasons. A designer's own imagination is possibly one of the most important aspects of fashion designing, as it is with their imagination that they can come up with new and innovative ideas. A designer's inspirations are usually portrayed through a particular theme.

- **Choosing a theme**

When choosing a theme for a collection, designers might choose a particular period in history, a foreign destination, a range of colours or a specific fabric - something that has a strong visual impact.

## Designing a Garment

- **The design**

Every designer works in a different way. Some designers like to sketch their ideas on paper, others drape fabric on a dress stand - pinning, folding and tucking until the idea for the

garment emerges. Other designers modify their own patterns from previous seasons. It is this final method of designing that gives a sense of continuity to a fashion studio's output.

- **Making a toile or muslin**

A toile is called a muslin in the U.S. and the first step when making a toile or muslin is to either make a pattern on rough paper or a life-size 2D plan of the garment. Then, a sample machinist or an accomplished sewing machine operator will make a trial version from plain-colour calico. The toile is then placed on a dress stand or sometimes a model, in order to see whether it hangs properly and fits well.

- **Making a card pattern**

The toile (or muslin) is shown to a professional pattern maker when the designer feels satisfied with its fit. The pattern maker then makes the completed, working version of the pattern out of card. The job the pattern maker performs is very precise and painstaking. The accuracy of the garment will determine if the fit is right or not.

- **The finished dress**

Finally, a sample garment is crafted using the real fabric chosen.

## Areas of Work

Designers work in three main ways:

- **Freelance:** Freelance designers work for themselves and sell their work to fashion houses, directly to shops, or to clothing manufacturers. The garments will display the buyer's label.
- **Working In-house:** In-house designers are those who are employed full-time by only one fashion company. Their designs are the property of that company, and therefore cannot be sold to anyone else.
- **Setting up a company:** Fashion designers frequently set up their own companies. Designers tend to like this options and enjoy a greater sense of satisfaction, because their designs bear their own brand labels.

## Computer Aided Design (CAD)

Computer aided design or CAD in textiles has become extremely precise and uses cutting-edge technology. It aides the design process in ways that make it quick, accurate and inexpensive. This is because actual samples are not needed as early or as often. CAD is more difficult to use for clothing, though there are various systems which contribute to the preliminary design process - especially when designing simple garments. The initial garment is translated into a two-dimensional pattern, which in itself is an achievement, though there is more to be done. After the prototype pattern is produced, the CAD's role gets even bigger and must now adapt and grade the pattern. Computerised marker systems have been used for a while now and can deliver markers for the cutting room quicker and more accurately, as well as with more detailed information. The order, from initial design to marker planning, is typically amalgamated as one supplier offers all the equipment.

### Further Reading:

- ✓ *Fashion Design Essentials: 100 Principles of Fashion Design (By Jay Calderin)*
- ✓ *Fashion Design Course: Principles, Practice and Techniques (By Caroline Tatham, Julian Seaman & Thames and Hudson)*