



Exenta PLM for the Apparel Industry

How PLM Supports Faster Digital Supply Chains and Remote Product Teams





Speed and Agility in the Fashion Supply Chain

The fashion industry moves fast, and in a hypercompetitive marketplace, brands are vying to get to market first with new designs and materials. As fashion moves faster and faster, brands have been making strategic investments in digital supply chain transformation.

Enter the many twists and turns of 2020 into this equation, and the fashion industry is confronted with radical disruption. Suddenly, and unexpectedly, international travel stopped. Global supply chains and logistics were impacted. At least one designer even found himself stranded abroad during a factory visit. Stay-in-place orders forced brands to send employees home. Fashion designers and product managers switched to working from their homes. Runway shows were cancelled and later replaced with some virtual tradeshow. Brands rapidly pivoted to create digital lookbooks and other virtual tools for demonstrating products.

In the midst of rapidly unfolding challenges, having access to real-time, accurate information about your global supply chain evolved from an aspirational goal to a strategic necessity.

Brands that had invested in digital transformation prior to the pandemic, including cloud-based Product Lifecycle Management (PLM) software, were better positioned to collaborate remotely with internal teams and external partners.

How PLM Drives Supply Chain Improvements

There are many technological pieces within an end-to-end, digital supply chain management solution. For fashion and sewn goods manufacturing, PLM is one of the most critical links in the chain. Within product development, PLM makes it possible to:

- › Speed time from product concept to marketplace
- › Gain operational efficiency to contain costs
- › Strengthen sourcing to meet customer demand while improving agility
- › Lower sampling costs and raise quality
- › Increase supply chain visibility to increase business resilience

Let's look at how PLM improves each step of product development, addressing common challenges faced by design teams.

Design

PLM accelerates design through efficiency while enhancing the creativity of designers. The right PLM solution should be built to solve for three important challenges to the design process.

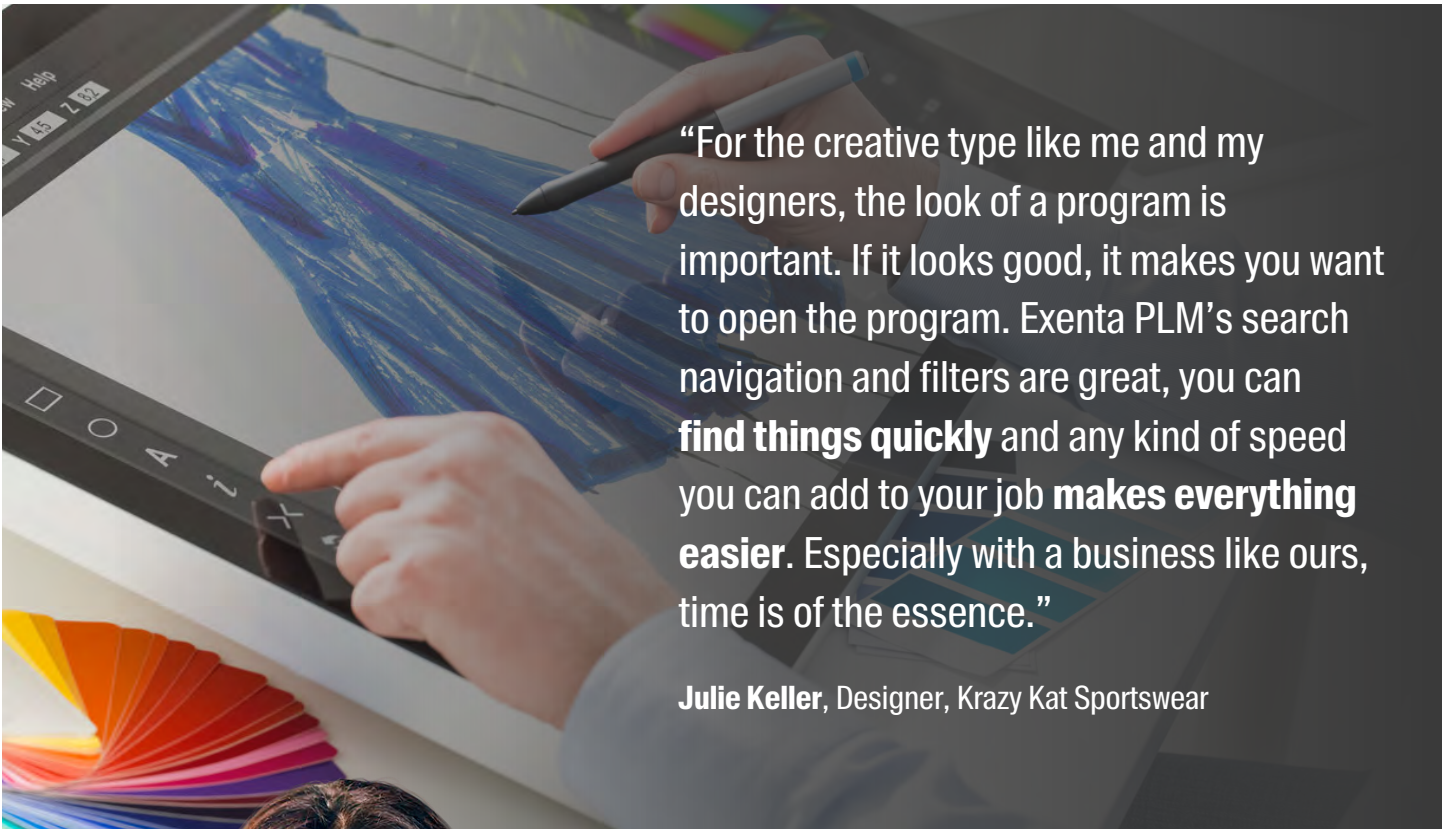
First, designers hate the tedium of data entry. They don't want to set up reference tables or enter the same information twice in different systems. The PLM system should be integrated into other supply chain solutions in use. Designers don't want to export and possibly compress images from their design tool in order to copy and paste them into a PLM. The right PLM system will make it very easy to capture the information and images needed for tech packs, RFQs and other product management tasks.

Second, as important as it is to centralize design data, designers simply don't enjoy working within an interface that stifles their natural creativity. That's why a good PLM solution needs to let designers work within the Adobe and Mac environments they prefer. They don't want to use a clunky emulator software; they want a clean, web based, fully functional interface that unleashes their creativity.

Finally, the more design teams can locate, and even reuse, designs, materials and other elements, the faster a brand can get to market with new fashions. PLM significantly speeds new designs by giving designers easy access to all past product designs and tech packs.

“Exenta ERP is the backbone of all our systems, and I am particularly pleased that we have integrated, web-based Exenta PLM to support our designers who are working remotely as Healing Hands aids our nation’s healthcare workers.”

Carrie Bovender, CEO, Grand Forest



“For the creative type like me and my designers, the look of a program is important. If it looks good, it makes you want to open the program. Exenta PLM’s search navigation and filters are great, you can **find things quickly** and any kind of speed you can add to your job **makes everything easier**. Especially with a business like ours, time is of the essence.”

Julie Keller, Designer, Crazy Kat Sportswear



“The Exenta PLM design plug-in for Adobe Illustrator enables designers to **launch new concepts**, as well as contribute to and use information from PLM software, without ever leaving their preferred design tool.”

Tech Pack Development and Sample Tracking

PLM automates the creation of tech packs and helps design teams keep them organized and up to date as products move through the development cycle. Without a modern PLM system, the product team usually creates spreadsheet tech packs, using different tabs to track various types of samples and measurement specs.

When you have a cloud-based PLM, the experience of creating, updating, and sharing tech packs is much more collaborative and efficient. Data about samples or measurements gets entered just once, eliminating many opportunities for errors in duplicate data entry. Because all team and vendor communication occur within the system, nobody ever forgets to transfer a key piece of information from an email back to the tech pack.

As samples come in and fit tests are performed, new data entered automatically updates the tech pack. Communication tools let team members communicate with each other and with vendors, keeping a record of these communications within the PLM. Version control features help avoid the potentially costly mistake of sending the wrong version of a tech pack to a vendor.

Sourcing and Costing

When it comes to efficient sourcing and costing processes, fashion brands need three things from a PLM:

- ▶ Automation of routine tasks to save time
- ▶ Excellent tracking to stay organized
- ▶ Meaningful comparisons for decision making

“Before we had Exenta’s PLM, the design team was pretty inefficient, dedicating a lot of time to different tasks that didn’t add value to our company. Since PLM was implemented all the employees involved with the system are not only enjoying their work a lot more, they are also much more efficient, including myself. Our team is a little smaller than before and we are able to achieve better results, with fewer people.

We’re thrilled with Exenta PLM.”

Luisa Zamora, Director of Development and Design, Confecciones Zoe

In sourcing, the product development team usually needs to request materials from multiple vendors. The right PLM system will speed this process by helping the team generate sample requests immediately and then track the return of sample materials. After samples come in, designers are able compare results between different vendors within a whole sourcing list of those particular material requests. The information for decision making remains centralized and consolidated.

After sending Request for Quotes (RFQs) to partners, PLM enables product managers to see which quotes have been returned, without back and forth emailing. The system should enable side-by-side comparisons of multiple quotes without any need to build a spreadsheet. Teams can save an additional step and even more time by enabling partners to add their own quotes into the Exenta PLM. With the ability to easily compare on key factors, the product team can quickly determine the best costs.

Client Spotlight: Northstar Sourcing Group

A leader in its industry, Northstar is a product sourcing company focused on high-quality footwear, apparel and accessories. With offices and partners worldwide, Northstar has an established global supply chain with a track record for timely delivery and accuracy. Founded in 2003 in Seattle, Northstar started as an idea to create a network of factories for US shoe brands seeking overseas production and has evolved beyond footwear to offer a full-service apparel and accessories division. The company offers a unique and personal approach to each customer, in a “one stop shop” model, offering sales staff, design to fulfillment, material and technology research, in-house testing, prototyping, collaborative design, CAD / blueprints and material development. Northstar uses Exenta’s PLM integrated with Exenta ERP to streamline processes from design through promotion.

When the COVID curtain came down on the fashion industry, it was clear to the Northstar team that the businesses that would survive and thrive out of the crisis would be the ones with the most operational efficiency, and strongest customer relationships. “As a footwear and apparel sourcing business that had been running on excel and email for far too long, the decision to invest in Exenta’s PLM was a no-brainer,” said Jack Perkins, Project Manager at Northstar. Northstar saw PLM as an opportunity to rehaul its product development process with a few key goals in mind:

1. Take sample and material development conversation out of email and into a centrally managed platform – improving visibility for the Northstar team, its vendor partners and its customers
2. Save design hours traditionally spent on manual ‘tech pack’ creation
3. Reduce total sample development quantity

Working with Exenta’s implementation team, Northstar was able to implement PLM in 5 months. “The combination of the support we received from Exenta’s team and the buy-in from all Northstar staff allowed us to execute on our lofty implementation timeline goals,” said Perkins. When evaluating different PLM and ERP platforms, a key question Northstar considered was: “will this vendor provide the same support in implementation that we’ve received throughout the sales process?” “With Exenta, it was clear that we’d be receiving a close-knit, hyper-focused implementation team that would work closely with us to achieve our goals. We were fortunate enough to work through implementation with one dedicated project manager, from start to finish. Our Exenta PM really got into the weeds with us to learn our business needs and determine how we could accomplish our goals using the tools provided in Exenta PLM”, concluded Perkins.

Fresh off implementation, Northstar is already seeing process improvements in many areas and looks forward to continuing to optimize the Exenta application suite to better serve its customers.

Six Benefits of a Cloud PLM System in Product Development

Brands that invest in the technology to support an end-to-end, digital supply chain can level up across the organization in terms of efficiency and productivity. Here are some of the many benefits organizations can expect with a modern, cloud PLM:

1. Communicate and Collaborate Effectively, From Anywhere

Right now, many product teams are scattered with some employees working from home. The ability to communicate clearly within a remote group has never been more important. Cloud-based software solutions let team members work from anywhere, including vendor partners—an important advantage over spreadsheets or offline PLM systems. In-system collaboration and notification tools help team members and partners communicate quickly and effectively, capturing a record of these communications automatically. The result? Less time spent on manual work and more time focused on getting stylish products out the door, so you can beat competitors to market.

2. Stay On Track and On Schedule

As time-to-market in fashion has accelerated, product development teams are under more pressure to hit tighter deadlines. PLM automates information that otherwise must be tracked manually, allowing designers more time to be creative. Additionally, access to the full performance history of each vendor, in terms of costs and lead times, enables product managers to make informed decisions based on budget and schedule.

3. Improve Time to Market

A cloud PLM centralizes all of the information about a product in one place, so the development team, partners and clients can all access the right information at the right time. With everyone working from the same information, decisions get made more quickly and the approval process is much shorter, resulting in better speed to market.

4. Protect Margins and Stay On Budget

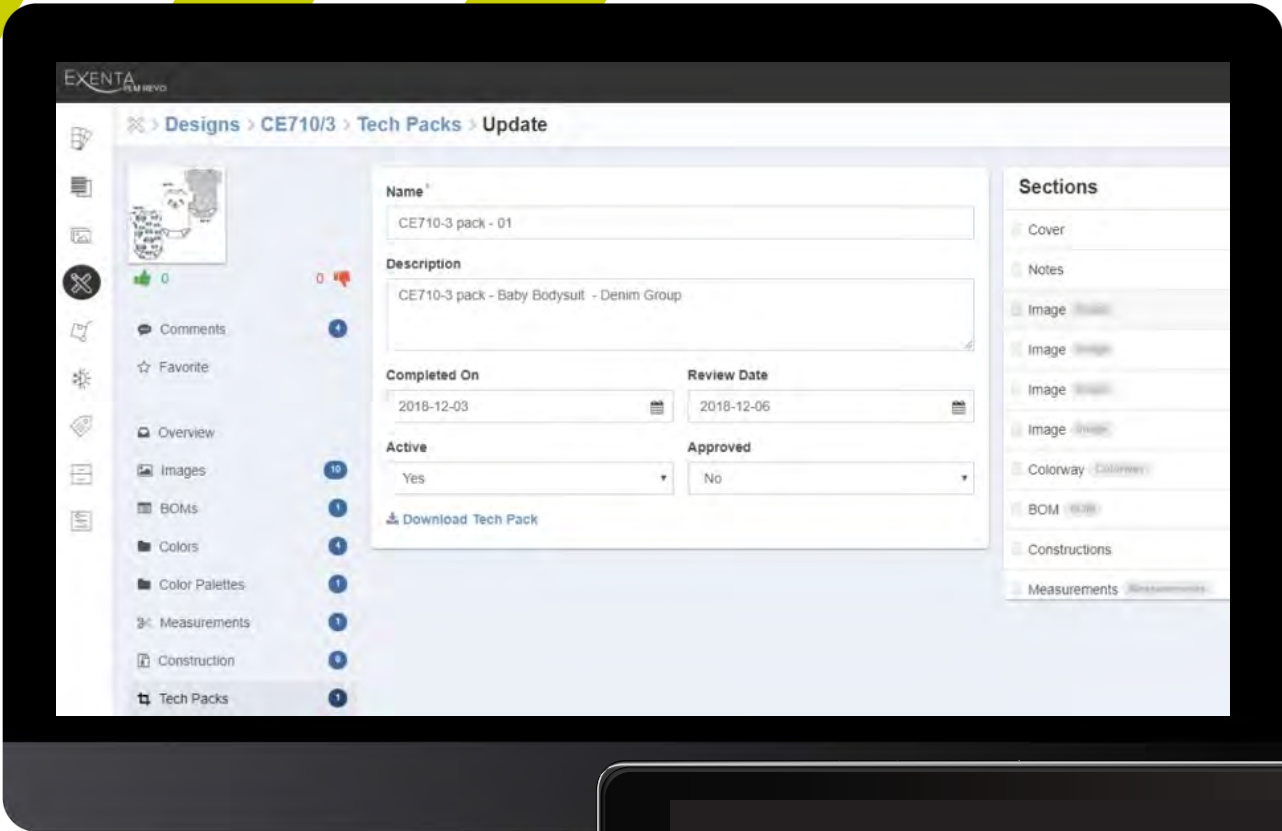
Because it is easy to make side-by-side comparisons between multiple vendor quotes, and even run margin scenarios, product managers are able to lower the cost of sourcing. This empowers better decision-making regarding materials, making it easier to stay within the budget and maintain profit margins.

5. Lock Down Designs and Eliminate Version Control Problems

A good PLM system will help you automate the approval process to eliminate back and forth emails, spreadsheet tracking and manual approval requests. Security features let you lock an approved design as final, so that version of the tech pack is safeguarded for production. You don't have to worry about anyone making last-minute changes that could cause mistakes at delivery.

6. Gain Visibility Into Your Supply Chain

Having a cloud PLM system puts real-time and historical product development information at your team's fingertips, providing brands unparalleled visibility into material sources and costs, vendor availability and performance, scheduling and lead times, samples, and more.



A good PLM solution provides a centralized, complete view of product costs, so you can protect the wholesale and retail margins you and your clients require.



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Contact us at info@aptean.com or visit
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