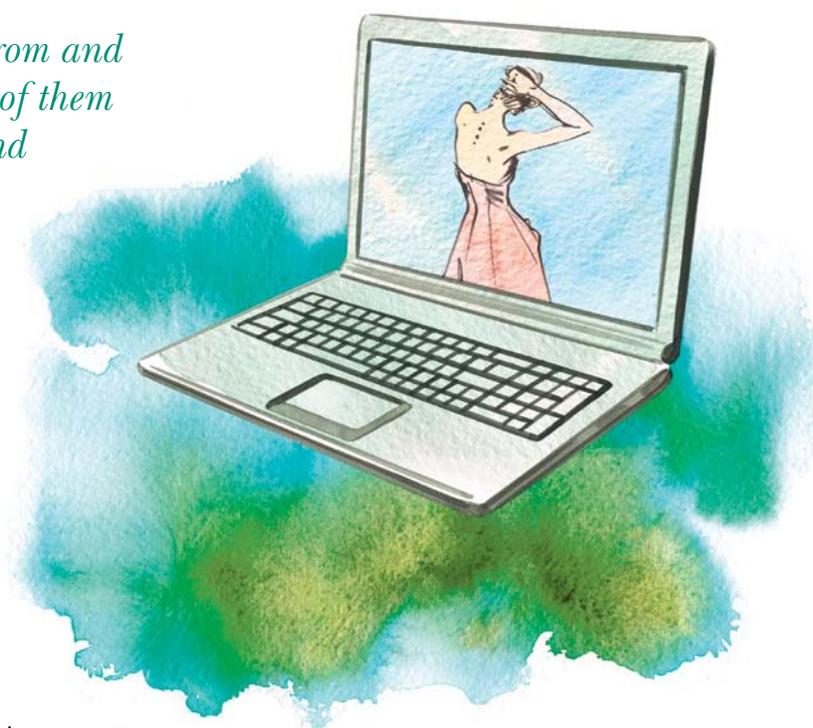


Finding a production unit/manufacturer

“I have my sample collection I’ve sold from and I now have orders from 20 stores, some of them high profile – but I just can’t seem to find anywhere who can make these garments to the standard I need them to be who will not charge me a crazy price.”

Designer



For any designer, a key to success is having access to a reliable and professional manufacturer or production unit. But many young or new designers are struggling to find manufacturers who have the skills and facilities to make their product. The high-end designer fashion industry (which includes both designers and manufacturers), is small and specialist. As a result, information tends to be shared in a very informal way, often by word-of-mouth.

In fact, some designers are reluctant to share their ‘good’ manufacturers for fear that it might affect their own production.

This means that it can be hard to get the right names and contacts for manufacturers unless you are already established. Designers are often forced to draw upon their own informal networks as there is no reliable source of information.

Part of the problem is that manufacturers don’t generally devote time to marketing themselves, due to lack of time, low levels of IT skills and a lack of available finance. Together, these factors make it difficult for emerging designers to find manufacturers, except through referrals. Many manufacturers – particularly those who are older and have been in business for a long time – may lack even basic IT skills, and therefore do not have any online presence. This is problematic for young designers used to using the internet for information who are struggling to find a production unit.

Even when details of manufacturers are available, designers often find it hard to tell what standard of garments the manufacturer can produce; for example, can they deal with a specific fabric type, or do they have the skills or machinery to give a particular finish? Unfortunately in most cases the manufacturer’s skill and proficiency is only really made

clear once production has started. This can end in high costs for both the designer and the manufacturer if there are production problems and the garments need to be re-made. In addition there are sometimes discrepancies between designers and manufacturers in terms of what each considers a 'luxury garment', depending on the knowledge and experience of each party.

It's not just emerging designers that struggle with sourcing a manufacturer; many established designers also find it difficult to source a production unit in the UK that can meet an increase in demand or grow with them. For designers who are more established, producing larger order sizes can be a problem, as many of the UK's high-end manufacturers are small operations. Designers don't always know where to go to find a factory that can produce larger orders. Often they will end up continuing to get sampling done in the UK, but will send production overseas.

Currently there is no single directory, either print or web-based, that has a comprehensive list of high-end manufacturers. Likewise, for those manufacturers that are actively seeking new designers, there is no obvious place to go to find them. The situation is made worse by the reluctance of designers to share contacts with each other. In reality the sharing of contacts is mutually beneficial to designers and manufacturers alike. If a manufacturer doesn't have sufficient clients, they might be forced to close, which ultimately doesn't help any of the designers.

Top Solutions:

- Database of manufacturers, including details of specialist skills.
- IT training for manufacturers to enable them to use database, search engines etc. Create their own webpages.
- Cross-sector forums/events to bring designers and manufacturers together.
- Cross-Industry Factory Assessment Criteria.
- Cross-Industry Quality Requirement Criteria.

Relevant sections from the Fashion Toolkit:

- Code of Practice.
- Factory Assessment Checklist.



BRITISH
FASHION
COUNCIL

skillset
The Sector Skills Council for Creative Media

mas
The manufacturing advisory service

ukft
association

An Alliance of five key partners working together to support the UK's high-end designer manufacturing sector