

Retailer and Brand Roundtable - Consolidated Insights and Key Takeaways

This summary reflects the critical areas for improvement and strategic focus, emphasizing actionable steps to align with the needs of apparel brands and retailers. It integrates insights and recommendations from the discussions with Adidas, Bella + Canvas, C+A Mexico, Dillard's, Superior Glove, Target and Truewerk.

5 Key Takeaways

1. Expand Woven Offerings

- Growing demand for technical wovens and performance materials represents an untapped opportunity for manufacturers in the Western Hemisphere.
 - Current product offerings focus heavily on basics (knits), and there's a need to diversify to attract a broader range of buyers.
 - Investments in advanced yarns and technical fabrics are essential to meet these evolving demands.
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2. Invest in Design and Innovation

- Brands value suppliers with in-house design teams and dedicated innovation resources to reduce dependency and enhance speed-to-market.
 - Faster sample turnaround times and improved development cycles are critical for competitiveness.
 - Suggested Actions:
 - Build design teams that can work collaboratively with brands.
 - Offer proactive innovation to support buyer goals and strengthen partnerships.
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3. Tailor Speed-to-Market Approaches

- Speed-to-market is critical but is defined differently by brands, encompassing aspects such as:
 - Lead times for sample and product delivery.
 - Flexibility in adapting to shifting market demands.
- Same-time-zone communication and streamlined workflows are key differentiators for regional suppliers.

- To improve speed:
 - Invest in automation and advanced manufacturing technologies.
 - Simplify and accelerate the sampling and production process.
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4. Sustainability is a Baseline Expectation

- Sustainability has moved from an aspiration to an expectation, often outweighing other priorities like speed and cost.
 - Factories must stay ahead of global sustainability standards and prepare for stricter legislative requirements.
 - Key Areas of Focus:
 - Offer sustainable material options and transparent reporting on environmental impact.
 - Invest in ethical labor practices and infrastructure improvements to align with buyer goals.
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5. Leverage AI as a Competitive Advantage

- Brands and retailers are beginning to explore AI for:
 - Forecasting and planning.
 - Supply chain optimization.
 - Design mock-ups and conceptual work.
 - Early adopters report benefits in efficiency and market intelligence, though practical applications are still evolving.
 - Recommendations for Manufacturers and Service Providers:
 - Pilot AI tools to support forecasting and inventory planning.
 - Share successful AI case studies to inspire innovation across networks.
 - Provide training and support to help partners integrate AI effectively.
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