

# Quality control

Achieving a good quality standard is not just about having a good factory – although having good manufacturers is part of the battle. Much of the discipline and technique involved in achieving high standards stems from the designer in the first place. How the requirements are formulated and communicated can have a tangible effect on the quality of your production garments.

Sales orders are won through hard work and are much too important to risk by being laissez-faire about quality and timeliness. Retailers frequently cancel orders if they do not meet their quality expectations. How you work with your factories will ultimately be the deciding factor in satisfying these quality requirements.

The responsibility and initiative for the whole quality process starts with the designer. The garments must be able to be manufactured and the product and quality requirement must be suitable for the selected factory. It's no good expecting beautiful tailored trousers from a dress factory – no matter how good the factory is.

The selection of the factory is a crucial part of the quality process and the first step is to think about what you want.

To achieve a good quality standard, you need to:

- Choose the right factory for the product.
- Be clear and concise about your expectations.
- Communicate regularly and constructively.
- Develop a good working relationship.

## Applying a standard

- Once production starts, visit the factory after cutting and when the first garments have just gone on the machines. Get the factory to tell you when they are close to finishing the first one so that you can go and see what has been achieved.



- Visit the factory regularly whilst they are producing for you – even if only to have a cup of tea with the boss. It is so much easier to achieve what you want if you have a good relationship.
- If you don't like something the factory is doing, then tell them at the first possible opportunity and listen to their response carefully. They may have a really good reason for doing it or alternatively they may not even be aware that it is happening. They may have ideas about how to overcome a difficulty or alternatively they may not 'get it'. Nevertheless you need to keep up-to-date with what they are doing so that you can quickly make changes if necessary.
- Use the combined Specification Sheet/Quality Control checklist to tick off the making features that you specified earlier at sample stage. If discrepancies are encountered then record them in the comments box and get the factory to acknowledge the discrepancy, ideally by initialling the comment, to signify their awareness of the situation.

## Troubleshooting

- If the factory reports fabric issues, it is vital that they are dealt with promptly. If they are laying up the fabric and encounter problems (shading, flaws, shortages etc.) the first thing to do is ascertain whether the fabric is useable or not. It may be that the factory is anxious to continue cutting – they will not want their cutting table blocked whilst the issue is resolved – but be careful to satisfy yourself that the problem is marginal before you let them carry on. There is no better way to see the problem than to visit yourself. Don't forget that if the fabric is cut or laid up and then found to be not useable, the fabric supplier is highly unlikely to replace or compensate you. It is usually too late to claim for fabric problems if the garment is already made. If the factory is cutting out damages then ensure they keep those pieces safely, as the representative of the fabric producer will want to see them if you are claiming compensation.
- If the garments are not coming up to your expectations then how do you deal with it? If, despite your clear instructions, constant communication and frequent visits, the production is not going to meet the retailer's standards. What do you do?
  - The first thing is to get the factory to acknowledge the issue. Unless you can both agree that the problem exists in the first place, you will not be able to solve it.
  - Ask the factory how to fix it.
  - Get more time from the customer so that you can give the factory a reasonable timeframe to work within. This is particularly important if the garments need major surgery.
  - Get the factory to rectify one sample so that there is a standard to work to.
  - Again, visit frequently to ensure consistency.



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## Resolving a dispute

In the eventuality that your troubleshooting efforts have failed then you are in the difficult position of having to resolve a dispute.

You have bought and paid for the fabric and trims. You have incurred expenses producing patterns and visiting the factory and the order is still in danger of being cancelled because even if the issue can be rectified it might be too late for the customer. Obviously you need to avoid getting into this position in the first place, but now you're in it what do you do?

Your options are limited.

1. Negotiate with the factory and customer to achieve a mutually beneficial compromise.
2. Sue the factory for the costs you have incurred and lost gross-profit.
3. Write off the garments, and the situation, and start again.

It may well be a cliché but, when it comes to garment quality, it is definitely true that 'prevention is better than cure'.

The knack of having no, or few, quality issues comes down to the key points outlined above:

- Work hard to build a relationship.
- Be clear about letting the factory know what you expect in the way of quality and logistics.
- Communicate frequently and in person at the factory.
- Be up-front and prompt about voicing any concerns.
- Give the factory feedback.



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## Specification Sheet and Quality Control Check

Your Name Here		Date		
Garment Description		Style No.		Check
Fabric	e.g. Red Silk Satin			
Seam Type	e.g. Open - satin bound			
Seam Allowance	e.g. 4mm			
Zip	e.g. 18cm invisible			
Fastenings	e.g. 4 24l buttons			
Stitches per inch	e.g. 15			
Thread Type	e.g. Gutermann 70			
Thread Colour				
Interlining				
Pad				
Key Measurement 1				
Key Measurement 2				
Key Measurement 3				
Key Measurement 4				
Key Measurement 5				
Content Label				
Logo Label				
Swing Ticket				
Hanger				
Bag				
Other				
Other				
Comments				



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