

WWDExecTech

Better Dress Forms Through Scan Data

By Holly Haber

DALLAS — Mannequin form maker AlvaProducts Inc. has created a new fit consulting division led by Ed Gibben, the co-inventor of the Intellifit body scanner and former president of Intellifit Corp.

As director of strategic services at AlvaProducts, Gibben will help companies pinpoint the shapes of their target customers by extracting information from a database of 130,000 body scans that he assembled at Intellifit. The company can then develop measurements and proportion for fit forms for specific customer groups by age, ethnicity and region.

Only four years old, AlvaProducts produces customized, proprietary fit forms for a lengthy list of major retailers and manufacturers, including Wal-Mart, Liz Claiborne, Limited Brands and Polo Ralph Lauren. The company is an outgrowth of Sterling Products Ltd., a Hong Kong manufacturer of private label children's wear that began developing its own fit forms to better match kids' anatomy.

By hiring Gibben, AlvaProducts can fine-tune



AlvaProducts plans to supplement its traditional hourglass form with new shapes.

the forms based on Intellifit's database, which he has exclusive rights to use as a consultant.

"I bring very detailed information on body shapes and proportions of literally 130,000 people," he noted. "Even if you slice it down to a unique group, like girls' size 12.5, I have over 1,000 girls who are that size."

To come up with a form for a client, Gibben compares the client's current fit measurements with the actual size of the target customer indicated by the data.

"We make recommendations as to how they can better fit their target base without alienating the current base who is happy with the product," Gibben said.

The company then works with a model agency or occasionally real customers to find an appropriate candidate to scan as a model for the form. The model's body is scanned by one of sev-

eral machines, including units by TC2, Human Solutions or Cyberware.

Retailer David's Bridal worked with Gibben while he was at Intellifit and with AlvaProducts to develop new forms based on body scanning for its bridal labels, which are all exclusive to the chain and include Oleg Cassini and Monique Luo.

Ken Green, senior vice president of sourcing, said the benefits have been "quite dramatic" since the forms went into use last year. He's asked AlvaProducts to build new forms for bridesmaids and flower girls, and David's Bridal is considering addressing petites and mother-of-the-bride.

"A lot of retail companies underestimate how important fit is to customer satisfaction," he said. "With a wedding dress, it's one of the most important purchases and certainly one of the most emotional, and fit is everything."

Since the sizes have been tweaked, gowns require less alteration, he noted, and sizes are consistent across all brands.

"It saves a lot of time and anguish," he said. Gibben theorized the most widespread problem with fit is that many companies create patterns for an hourglass shape, but that matches only 8.4 percent of the population, according to SizeUSA research.

"People's bodies are not shaped like the industry thinks they are," Gibben pointed out. "The waist-to-hip ratio is much smaller than the industry thought. The industry needs to move closer to the middle of that spectrum."

AlvaProducts is also developing standard forms for the predominant body shapes, noted Janice Wang, chief executive officer. It plans to introduce misses' "rectangle" and "spoon" forms in the third quarter, followed by three plus-size forms next year. The company already has an hourglass form.

"Smaller companies can come and buy a representative form off the shelf," Gibben noted. "And if they are religious about using it throughout the supply chain, they will get the accuracy they are looking for."

Wang emphasized that all aspects of the production chain need to be on board with the technology.

"When a client has decided to do this, that doesn't mean the rest of the organization understands what they are trying to do," she said. "The factory is not next door but overseas, and everybody has to understand, what does this woman or man or child look like? They are designing for a new shape, and trying to make it look good."

One of the biggest faults of the apparel industry, Gibben pointed out, is a common linear grade rule that extends all dimensions as sizes increase, resulting in elongated sleeves and inseams.

"If people would just stop and think — so much of the body is skeletal and won't change with weight gain and mass, like arm length, shoulder and inseam," he said. "And in plus sizes, as some things get bigger other things shrink. If you analyze the measurements up to a size 24, 26, 28, arm length actually decreases. It has a lot to do with posture."

BITS & BYTES

By Cate T. Corcoran

LOST AND FOUND

These sneaks can't sneak away, because they come with a GPS homing device embedded in their soles. The global positioning system chip transmits its location via satellite to a cell phone, laptop or emergency services. Maker Fele Holding Corp. of Miami said it believes the shoes will have practical



applications, such as finding lost children and adults with dementia. The shoes will retail for approximately \$285; the wireless service that connects the data to as many as 10 destinations costs \$30 a month. Fele said it hopes to sell the shoes through department stores starting in August.

WHITE, BLACK, RED AND LOUD

The **Geneva XL** sound system amplifies an iPod and comes in black, red or white lacquered wood. The 600-watt XL will retail for approximately **\$1,075**.

MUSIC INTERRUPTED

Doffing Headphones, from London-based design student Synnove Fredericks, solve a newfangled problem with old-fashioned manners. If you're listening to music and you run into someone you know, you can gesture hello by lifting the armpiece up and away, much as a gentleman might have once doffed his hat. Or you can tuck it under an arm if you stop for conversation. This conceptual prototype is made of tortoiseshell acetate, brass and holly wood. A working version would use the Bluetooth wireless technology standard to transmit music. The idea was inspired by "mobile clubbing" parties in London, where people gather in public places to drink cocktails and dance to their iPods. Doffing Headphones will be demonstrated in an ongoing fashion show at the CTIA Wireless conference in Las Vegas this week.



25%

of online searches result in a purchase. Of those purchases, 63 percent occur offline. — ComScore Networks study sponsored by Google

Levi's Expands RFID Testing

By Denise Power

CHICAGO — Levi Strauss & Co. plans to expand tests of radio frequency identification technology in U.S. and Mexico stores this year.

Glen Bradley, information technology director, U.S. supply chain, for Levi's, told WWD the apparel company tested RFID with one U.S. retailer and is looking for more test partners. He declined to name the retailer involved. The one-store pilot is separate from Levi's work to meet Target and Wal-Mart's RFID compliance initiatives.

The U.S. test follows a successful item-level RFID pilot in a Levi's-owned Mexico City store last year. Levi's outfitted a second Mexican store with RFID technology last month and plans to equip all new stores and remodels in Mexico with the system. By yearend, at least 10 Levi's stores in Mexico are slated to have the technology, according to sources familiar with the project.

In the Mexico City test, item-level RFID tagging reduced stockouts by 56 percent and generated a small sales lift, Bradley said during the National Retail Federation annual conference in January. Cycle counts once took four employees more than two days to complete every six weeks, he said. With RFID, one employee can take inventory in 45 minutes, and the process is done daily. Accuracy levels reach as high as 99.7 percent, Bradley said.

The ability to conduct cycle counts frequently is one of RFID's great opportunities, said Marshall Kay, senior manager and RFID specialist at Kurt Salmon Associates. He said stores often do not know what they do not have in stock, and that leads to lost sales. "Perpetual inventory inaccuracies can lead to as much as a

20 percent loss in comp-store sales opportunity, based on failure to replenish basic items that are thought to be in stock," said KSA principal Mike Brown, citing KSA research during a live Webcast last month.

RFID tracking and frequent cycle counts provide that inventory visibility. "Because you are doing a daily cycle count, you can identify a hole in the planogram, and you know if you don't have it in the back room," said Kay.

With RFID-tagged merchandise, stores can identify priority cartons within an incoming shipment — such as those containing hot sellers or items that are out of stock — and get them to the sales floor quickly.

Levi's Mexico City test saw speed improvements in the receiving process, too, Bradley said. Processing 650 units manually had taken at least two hours; with RFID, 650 items are received in 30 minutes, Bradley said.

The Mexico City test used RFID technology from Alien Technology of Morgan Hill, Calif., embedded in labels printed by Paxar and attached to garments. That test involved handheld readers, but Bradley said Levi's is "intrigued" with the prospect of shelf-mounted RFID readers.

There is much talk about RFID technology, but many companies testing it are reluctant to share test results. RFID proponents say more success stories need to be made public to give the movement momentum. There's also concern that business and technology executives still have a steep learning curve to scale.

In an RFID skills survey released in late February, 75 percent of respondents indicated there is not a sufficient pool of talent in RFID technology today. And 80 percent of this group said the lack of people skilled in RFID technology will affect its adoption. The survey was conducted by the Computing Technology Industry Association, a trade association based in Chicago.

"The respondents indicated that training and education of their staff on RFID was one of the major challenges to implementing RFID technology," said David Sommer, vice president of electronic commerce at CompTIA.



A pair of Levi's Capital E Skimmer jeans.