

Making Small Batch Sewn Goods in the USA.

## Bad Cutting is Forever



Almost everyone I meet who wishes to “make” something in the USA is really wanting to buy their creation from somebody else, a factory that will actually cut and sew the goods. I understand, they have a good idea and would like to get it to market as efficiently and effectively as possible without getting into the nitty gritty of manufacturing. They are perfect new customers for small batch sewing shops because they are often more focused on innovation and selling direct to market instead of the rock-bottom cost of goods a reseller demands. With that in mind, the following is a primer for working with a sewing contractor and preparing to manufacture your million-

dollar idea.

First, you will be making product in way referred to as CMT manufacturing (Cut Make and Trim). That means you will provide the factory with the needed fabric and patterns while the factory takes on the responsibility for cutting the pieces out, sewing them together and using their own generic trim, i.e. thread, elastic, buttons, etc. Note that anything that is color specific or expensive you’ll have to provide, so get ready to buy a lot of parts.

**Design** – This takes on many forms, however, creating the technical specifications, or tech pak, is the threshold to being serious about making a product. The tech

pak consists of the concept drawings and detail art, the list of all the materials (width, color, source, cost), and the measurements of the finished product. Updating spec is a never-ending job on the creative side but it pays off big-time later. Know your details.

**Pattern Making** – The individual with the single greatest impact on your product is the pattern maker. Check references and get to know a good one with experience in patterning your kind of product. They are professionals; pay them well, bring them gifts, and listen closely to what they have to say.

**Fabric** – Nothing “for real” can happen in your product’s development and manufacturing process until the fabric has been selected. Every other detail from pattern to construction is dependent on the fabric being used. If at all possible develop your product with the same fabric you plan to sell.

**Cutting** – This is where design, patterning and fabric converge. The patternmaker will interface with the factory down the road in the most expensive and dangerous event in the product’s life; laying out a pattern marker and cutting up all that expensive fabric. Be ready before then by knowing all the details and double-checking your patterns. Bad cutting is forever.

**Sample Making** – There are three basic kinds of samples you will need; design samples that confirm the pattern, construction and size, sales samples that are meant to be shown to the market, and production samples that will

come from the factory and are absolutely what-you-see-is-what-you-get in nature. Everyone loves sample making because you actually get to see and touch something. What no one likes is how long it takes and how much it costs. Remember, perfect samples are the only route to perfect product. You will be paying not only for what works, but what doesn’t. Revise, resew, repeat.

**Testing** – The good thing about all the samples you are about to make is that they allow for convenient field-testing. Use your design and modify it early in the development process for better function and easier production. You will be amazed how simple changes can lower a product’s manufacturing cost.

**Factory** – Until you are ready to pull the switch on a production order, your good idea is just a distraction to a business that sews for a living. Obviously the most important process in your scheme happens inside the factory. Vet your manufacturing candidate completely. The triad of you, the pattern maker and the factory must be simpatico for any chance of long term success. Rules for a happy factory relationship include: 1) Answer questions immediately. 2) Clearly communicate your timeline. 3) Agree on quality standards. 4) Offer to pay for everything they do on your behalf. Without a doubt, you will save time and money throughout the entire process by being well prepared and polite.

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Disclaimer: If time is indeed money then Mr. Gray should be a millionaire. His opinions are not necessarily shared by the publisher or those who understand false equivalence. ●