Texprocess 2015: Methods Workshop speeds labour cost calculations

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The latest software from Methods Workshop is designed to help retailers, brands and manufacturers accurately predict a garment's labour costs by answering just a few questions about the product – and lets them compare costs across different sourcing locations.

"The one missing link for manufacturers to react more quickly to the needs of retailers is the fact they can't get a labour cost quick enough," John Stern, president of the US-based company, told just-style at last week's Texprocess trade fair in Frankfurt, Germany.

The firm's recently redesigned Quick TruCost v9 (QTC) early-stage costing software was making its European debut after earlier launches in the US and Latin America.

As the apparel industry continues to face increasing pressure for cost measurement and control throughout the design to delivery processes, Stern points out that companies "need to be able to react more quickly to a new style and make money on it." He also reasons: "If you don't know how much it's going to cost, how can you set a price?"

Information on common construction details is used to calculate manufacturing time and labour cost

By knowing a garment's labour costs from the start, development teams can quickly determine target price points – and ensure profitability of production programmes without relying on "guesstimates."

QTC v9 is designed for early-stage design, product development and pre-production costing - and as well as accurately predicting new product costs, it can also be used to manage the cost implications of each pre-production change or addition.

It does this by using information on common construction details to calculate total manufacturing time and labour cost. These might include the number and length of seams, components, match points, bartacks, buttons and buttonholes, and product parts.

Crucially, the product is intended to be used by product development, sourcing, engineering and production teams – and especially by the design department.

"The challenge for many companies is finding an industrial engineer, so we had to create an easy interface for the designer to come up with the cost. QTC analyses don't need to know the type of sewing machines, rpms, or construction details," says Stern.

This means that "at the same time as developing new styles, designers can immediately and accurately come up with a basic labour cost [for that style] and add fabrics and trims to come up with the full cost."

The software also allows users to make comparisons across a variety of sourcing or manufacturing locations, comparing the cost to produce a T-shirt, for example, in different countries and helping to make decisions on where to manufacture more cheaply. It also enables manufacturing performance to be benchmarked against global standards.

Another key feature is the ability to cost new products – such as a shirt maker wanting to add pants to its range – to the same accuracy and consistency as existing ones.

The new QTCv9 also incorporates the ability to cost cutting labour over tasks such as spreading, cutting, and bundling – "a client request for many years," according to Stern. Once the time values for each task are established, and the frequency with which it is carried out, it is easy to compute on a cut-to-cut or product-to-product basis based on an actual cutting order or projections, he explains.

QTC v9, and Methods Workshop's Engineered TruCost v9 (ETC) production methods engineering and labour costing solution, are built on the Microsoft .NET software for what the company describes as "a superior user experience on a dependable and scalable computing platform." What this means, according to Stern, is that: "You turn it on and you use it."

Users of the tools include Brooks Brothers, Carhartt, Dickies, Gildan and Leonisa.