

Source of Knowledge

Cotton Council International uses its global experience to help buyers find the right fabric suppliers

Sourcing with a partner

In the fast-moving world of fashion, sourcing fabrics can be a difficult process. There is a mass of decisions to make, ranging from mill selection, to compliance requirements, through to fabric issues such as minimums, qualities, costs and delivery issues.

All in all, sourcing for the fashion industry can be problematic and time-consuming. But there is an alternative to going it alone...

Partnership initiatives in the supply chain offer buyers quick, hassle-free routes to the perfect mill partner, as well as marketing support. One such partnership is offered by Cotton Council International (CCI), the marketing arm of the National Cotton Council (NCC) of America, a not-for-

profit organisation, governed by the US cotton industry. Among its many services, CCI helps companies to connect with suppliers that can meet their stringent requirements. On top of this, it offers its partners marketing support, to help boost their retail sales and, in doing so, develop the market for American cotton.

CCI has over 50 years of experience of working with textile mills and promoting US cotton fibre and products to the trade and consumers throughout the world. With this expertise, it developed the Supply Chain Marketing (SCM) programme, which aims to optimise the sourcing process by supporting businesses at all levels of the supply chain, from the cotton field to the moment the finished garment



Feel the difference

leaves the retailers' stores. The programme can be split into two main sections – sourcing and retailing.

Sourcing

The SCM programme revolves around CCI's knowledge of the leading mills around the world due, which are using of good-quality US-grown cotton. CCI, along with its sister company, Cotton Incorporated, has developed the COTTONWORKS Fabric Library – an online resource that buyers can use to use in identifying global suppliers of 100% cotton products, thus saving considerable research time. For those buyers more interested in hands-on experience, CCI sponsors 'buyers tours' to leading cotton-textile supply countries. These



Cotton Council International helps put brands in contact with suitable suppliers

tours form a platform for buyers and sellers to meet and establish relationships.

Will Bettendorf, CCI director of global supply-chain marketing, explains: "Buyers often spend a lot of time investigating prospective suppliers. CCI's tours and networking events fast-track the process, saving them a significant amount of time and frustration." CCI has organised tours to countries such as China and India and has held networking events at major trade shows, including Interstoff Shanghai, Material World and Heimtextil. Once a buyer has found a mill partner, CCI can set up a personal introduction to get the ball rolling.

These initiatives use CCI's knowledge of the industry and extensive relationships to reduce the amount of time it would take buyers to source cotton products independently. The approach motivates buyers to cultivate longstanding relationships with their suppliers by ensuring a perfect match from the outset. This leads to stronger relationships, providing reliability for both the buyer and mill. If the relationship should come to an end, CCI will be on hand with suggestions for alternative mills.

Retailing

Once fabric suppliers are in place, the SCM programme helps retailers promote their US-cotton-rich products with marketing and promotional support – a level of service that most brands and retailers value greatly. Past projects have included the production of a store catalogue, bus advertising and internal communications programmes, as well as consumer competitions.

CCI uses ingredient branding to relay the quality of its products, by providing retailers with a free licence to use the COTTON USA 'Feel the Difference' Mark on qualified merchandise.

COTTON USA is CCI's consumer brand, which is intended to embody quality in cotton. The COTTON USA 'Feel the Difference' Mark shows that the product is made of 100% cotton, including at least 50% US-grown cotton. This assures consumers that the product they are buying is of a high quality, explains Stephanie Thiers-Ratcliffe, CCI international marketing manager: "Consumers have become aware that any product displaying the COTTON USA 'Feel the Difference' Mark is made using the highest quality cotton available. The Mark is a symbol of comfort, versatility and luxury and the slogan, 'Feel the Difference', has become a call to action for discerning consumers who appreciate this combination."

For the lone buyer, the benefits of entering into a partnership that provides sourcing and marketing support is apparent. Thiers-Ratcliffe continues: "Having been a buyer myself, I know that sourcing can be very stressful and time-consuming. On top of this, having the support of a quality ingredient brand such as COTTON USA is reassuring, to know we have added support to promote the products at retail.

"I believe that the holistic approach we take assures the buyer that the quality of their decisions are relayed to the consumer, resulting in better results for the product and, of course, the buyer." **FBI**



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