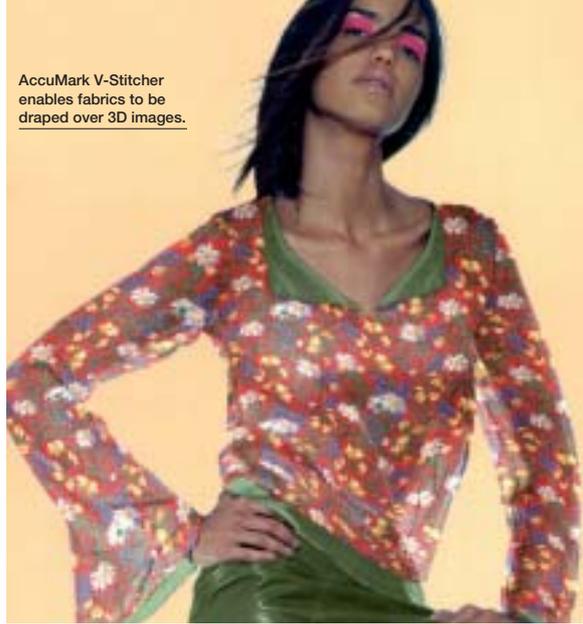**AccuMark V-Stitcher enables fabrics to be draped over 3D images.**

Creative impulses

These days, Computer Aided Design software is more than just computer aided design software. It is about enhancing the interface between the user and the supplier, and about making the design process more interactive. And it does not have to stop there, as Lotte Debell finds out.

Design software can form just one part of a package that helps govern the whole life cycle of a collection, from the initial ideas, through textile, pattern and garment design to the finished product. But it can also help manage communication between suppliers and customers, and suppliers and manufacturers across an increasingly international chain.

This kind of technology, however, need not be restricted to large companies whose supply chains stretch half way across the world. Large or small, companies or even individuals, can find something to suit their needs, with modular software that can be chosen in a mix and match fashion according to requirement. The other important thing to understand, says CAD CAM specialist Lectra's Cécile Harari-Alle, is that the technology is created for the user and as such it does not dictate a method of working, but adapts to fit, giving flexibility rather than being limiting. Even in the days when almost everyone uses a computer, technology can still be intimidating, but the UK's suppliers of CAD/CAM and related software all agree that this should not be the case.

Nor is it only the supplier that benefits. Well managed collection design and supply chains are an advantage to buyers too, and the more interactive and visual nature of the design process and client presentations makes creating the perfect new look much easier.

'Our customers need to understand how technology relates to the challenges they face, that are a result of the changing global market,' explains Cécile. 'With so much manufacturing now happening offshore things like lead times and prices are of great concern, and these are issues that technology can help with. Design and presentation tools can reduce the number of prototypes that need to be made by making it easier to decide on designs without samples, and fewer samples means less money. Also, patterns, garments and markers designed using software can be sent directly to the manufacturer, saving on fabric by eliminating errors and misunderstandings.'

Lectra's textile design software PrimaVision, fabrics and colourways can be switched and modified to create a range of styles.

Tex-Design, developed by Koppermann and distributed in the UK and Ireland by Tex Data Design Solutions, includes many automated features to simplify the design process such as storyboards that automatically update changes to the original designs, the creation of multiple colourways the can be stored in one file, ease of image retrieval and the creation of internet presentations.

The use of software can also save the designer valuable time, and help companies manage collections efficiently. Tex-Define, also

> **"Our customers need to understand how technology relates to the challenges they face"**

Design

When it comes to design, ease of use seems to be the watchword. Lectra's Kaledo Style, which takes only two days to learn, allows designs to be drawn up easily and quickly using a variety of drawing tools such as symmetry and stitch lines, and allows the designer to tweak aspects at the click of a mouse. With libraries of standard, adaptable designs, compatible with

from Tex Data Design Solutions, for example, is a database software programme for designers that controls product development information, such as styles, fabrics, graded sizes, colourways and costings, and stores it in an easily accessed central database that can interface with other systems in a company network. It is also fully integrated with Tex-Design. The software facilitates the planning and development of collections, and its integrated calculation module can help manage day to day logistical manufacturing decisions, whether manufacture occurs in house or overseas. It is, says the company, an ideal tool for managing and analysing subcontractor data to monitor and ensure quality, and also to maintain other important issues such as social and environmental standards.

Another advantage is the saving in terms of time and money that is a result of being able to access previously stored designs and adapt them for new collections, as Cécile explains. ➤

Lectra software is easy to learn and has been created with the user in mind.

➤ 'For example, if an airline wants to refresh and update an existing range without designing a new one, it is easy to recall those designs and make changes to them.'

Presentation

From the buyer's point of view, an undeniable benefit is the development of sophisticated presentation tools that allow proposed designs to be viewed in an interactive and highly visual manner. Design software Colour Matters CAD CM32, from Rich & Pure, was created with the needs of designers and sales executives in mind, says director Tahir Naeem. Presentations can be loaded onto laptops and taken to clients' sites and the various styles can be presented in a number of colourways. Colour Matters CAD, part of the Styletexpro solution, was used in this way by MM Careerwear to convince a client of the benefits of one colour scheme over another.

The company was originally asked to present a range of designs based on navy and blue, then the client changed its company colours to burgundy two days before the presentation. MM Careerwear, convinced the old colour scheme would look better, used the software to demonstrate both the blue and burgundy colourways to the client, who was duly convinced – so convinced that MM Careerwear won the contract.

Rich & Pure recently launched a new online demonstration on its website. 'It is not always practical to send people to clients for demonstrations, especially if they are overseas.' explains Tahir. 'With the online version you can now make an appointment online and someone will call you and present CM32 from their PC as though it is installed on your PC. In the future we hope to use this for training and support pur-

poses, and for last minute presentations. It could also be used to get an idea of what a customer is looking for before a visit takes place. It is all about enhancing communication between the buyer and the client.'

CM32 can create garment and fabric designs and patterns and comes with a ready-made library of silhouettes. Hand drawings can be scanned in, and photographs, or designs can be drawn directly with a pen digitiser. A picture of a model can be loaded into the software and garments and fabrics draped on. 'You can scan in a picture of one of the customer's employees and use it to demonstrate to the client how certain fabrics and colourways would look and whether they fit in with the company image and culture and even office décor,' explains Tahir.

Accumark V-Stitcher, from Gerber

the perfect design.'

For the buyers, this allows much more involvement in the design process. You like the shirt, but you want to see it with short sleeves? Say so. You want to see it in blue? No problem. How will that skirt look when the wearer is walking? You can see that too. 'The models in V-Stitcher can be made to walk,' says David, 'simulating how the garment will look when the wearer moves.'

Production

The usefulness of technology does not stop at the design or presentation stage, however, but can continue right through to the cutting and manufacture. 'It's possible to manage the process of bringing a collection to life,' says Cécile, 'helping clients to integrate all the

"It is all about enhancing communication between the buyer and the client"

Technologies also comes with advanced 3D imaging software. 'V-Stitcher is something of a cross between two of our existing products,' explains Gerber's David Vickers. 'The textile/conceptual Fashion Studio, with which you can develop print, weave and knit designs and control colours, and AccuMark, our pattern, grading and marking software. V-Stitcher has the ability to take both textile and pattern functions and put them together in a 3D body shape.'

Using avatars, 2D patterns and garments can be draped over 3D forms and different textures, patterns and styles can be assessed. 'The result is very realistic,' says David. 'You can manipulate designs on the avatars, changing collar shapes, the length of garments or the size of patterns. You can add logos, and play around with the size, positioning and colour. It means you can work closely with buyers, either online or face to face, to create

aspects involved, taking into account the global situation of many companies and the need to communicate effectively with suppliers, clients and manufacturers. As the information is virtual it can be emailed with no mistakes or delays.'

Lectra's Galleryweb is an example of a software solution that manages the entire process from concept to production. It integrates fabric and product design with marketing, sourcing, quality management, production and distribution, allowing information sharing between all stages, between suppliers and partners, inside and outside the company, or indeed the country.

'Today, technology is available and affordable to everyone,' Cécile concludes. 'In fact it is essential now because of the level of competition, and technology gives companies the means to compete in national and global markets.' ∎