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Sportswear

Software Tracks Fashion Samples

DKNY, ZAC POSEN AND FASHION PUBLIC relations firm KCD are using special software to track samples traveling among editors, celebrities, the sample room and factories.

"Our samples are our most valuable asset," said Susan Posen, chief executive officer of Zac Posen's company, Outspoke LLC. "If we lose them, it's huge for us."

Outspoke uses Fashion GPS, from the New York company of the same name, to track samples for showroom sales, editorial loans, production and celebrity dressing. The company might have as many as 100 samples in play at any one time.

"A huge amount of resources and energy go into lending, tracking and maintaining the collection," Posen said. "It always seemed to me there had to be some technology solution for this."

Typically, a company would track the comings and goings of samples on a spreadsheet or paper. The shared database of Fashion GPS makes it possible for anyone in a company to see and reserve samples. In addition, a company such as Outspoke can coordinate lending with its p.r. firm, in this case KCD. The software can be set up so that one firm or both can see and reserve all the samples shared by the two companies.

The latest version of the software, which came out in October, can use either bar codes or radio frequency identification tags to organize a fashion closet and check items in and out. It lets designers put together a look book for editors to browse online. Editors can request samples in much the same way anyone would shop online, by placing the items in a virtual shopping cart. This automatically sends a request to the software, where employees can approve the samples and make reservations. The software also has a calendar and lets firms run reports to see which loans resulted in editorial hits.

"GPS has made reserving and trafficking samples as easy as sending an e-mail," said Aliza Licht, vice president of global public relations for Donna Karen International. Every sample in the company is in the database, which can handle duplicates and note when a sample is one of a kind, she added.

Other clients of GPS are Gucci, Marc Jacobs, Armani, Versace, Victoria's Secret and Juicy Couture.

The service is subscription-based, and there is an initial setup fee. A typical installation might start at about \$20,000 a year, said Kevin Spector, vice president of marketing for Fashion GPS. A complete package with real-time reports, credit management and editorial and advertising value analysis, as well as other features, could cost as much as \$50,000.

The company is working on other modules to handle press check-in at events and sample sales.

— C.T.C.