

Apparel™

INAUGURAL RESEARCH STUDY & ANALYSIS

The State of Transparency, CSR and Compliance in the Global Supply Chain

Successful supply chain compliance and corporate social responsibility (CSR) for the fashion industry requires a determined commitment to trust and transparency among trading partners and between retailers, brands and the end consumer. This e-book explores some of the greatest challenges and how technology and global collaboration are helping make them more surmountable.



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INTRODUCTION TO THE SURVEY

What are the most important results from our first research study on the state of transparency, CSR and compliance in the global apparel supply chain? Perhaps the biggest finding is that for CSR, compliance, and transparency to be successful in building compliance and customer trust, companies need to combine their efforts and link them with technology—for programs that are consistently reliable, scalable and sustainable.

The study also underscores the trend toward “baking in” CSR and compliance at the beginning of the sourcing, design and manufacturing processes, rather than treating them as an afterthought at the end of the process. In this regard — as *Apparel* interviews show — CSR, transparency and compliance are undergoing a transformation similar to the “Quality Revolution” of several decades ago, when quality was “engineered in” to design and manufacturing rather than relegated to a final, often cursory inspection at the end of the line.

Yet the legendarily competitive reality of the global fashion supply chain sometimes makes it seem tough to achieve such seamless connectivity, for a variety of reasons. This e-Book illuminates some of the most common challenges the apparel and footwear industries face. It also offers some real-world, actionable solutions that not only meet compliance and CSR objectives, but can lay the foundation for successful CSR and compliance-based marketing. These solutions include new technologies and initiatives moving the fashion industry forward on its journey to a transparent, compliant supply chain and stronger social responsibility.

1/3
of all
consumers

Buy from brands based on their environmental and social impact.

SOURCE: UNILEVER STUDY OF 20,000 ADULTS

The State of Transparency, CSR and Compliance in the Global Supply Chain



WHO TOOK THE SURVEY? Most of the following content draws on fresh data straight from apparel industry professionals. Using an independent research firm, *Apparel* conducted an audience survey during a four-week period in July and August 2017. Approximately 175 respondents participated in the survey, representing a balanced mix of retailers and apparel brand manufacturers and marketers. Many deal with compliance issues every day. Others are C-level leaders ultimately responsible for their brand's equity, reputation, relationship with — and impact on — people and the planet.

Respondents came from a wide variety of departments and teams, with the largest share (32 percent) in C-level or executive management, followed by product development/design management (13 percent), other (11 percent) and IT/systems management (7 percent).

Survey participants' companies are staffed at many different levels to manage safety, CSR and compliance, with slightly more than half having five or fewer associates involved in these areas on a full-time basis.

\$1.15 TRILLION = the opportunity for brands that make their "sustainability credentials" clear

SOURCE: UNILEVER STUDY OF 20,000 ADULTS

FIGURE 1
PRIMARY BUSINESS

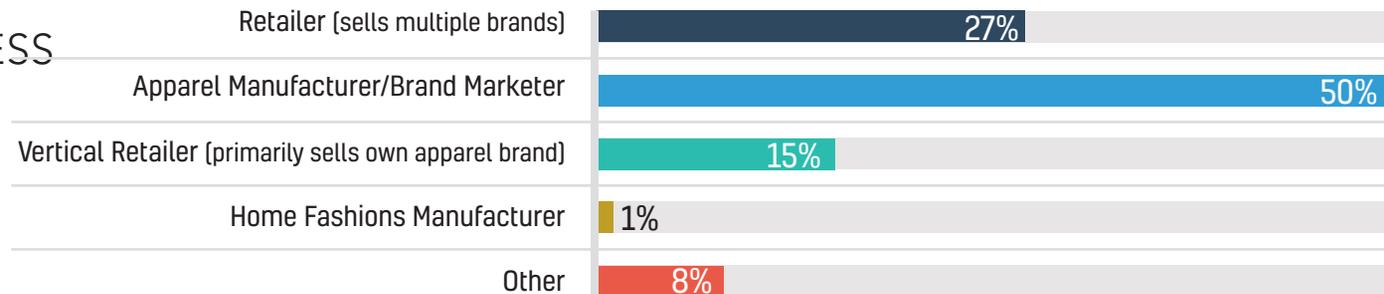
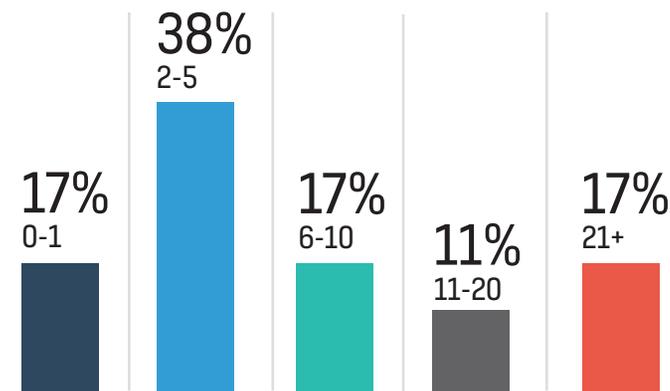


FIGURE 2
NO. OF FTEs INVOLVED IN PRODUCT SAFETY, CSR AND COMPLIANCE





CSR AND COMPLIANCE COME TO THE FOREFRONT

The survey results demonstrate that compliance, CSR, quality and safety are top priorities for today’s fashion companies. Companies indicated the primary reason they need transparency in their supply chains was for CSR. They know CSR has a huge correlation to consumer trust in their brands.

Internal and External Drivers of Transparency

- 54 percent of respondents said internal stakeholders were the biggest drivers of supply chain transparency

- 27 percent said customers/consumers were the primary drivers
- 20 percent feel transparency is driven by the government, NGOs or the extended supply chain

“CSR is now becoming an integral part of the management of the production of clothing,” says Avedis Seferian, president and CEO of the Worldwide Responsible Accredited Production (WRAP) organization, the largest independent factory-based social compliance certification program for the sewn products industry. “It [CSR] is no longer just an add-on — something you do after your production run for PR purposes or as a necessary evil. No. That’s all gone. Now CSR is being

FIGURE 3
WHAT’S THE PRIMARY REASON YOU NEED SUPPLY CHAIN TRANSPARENCY?

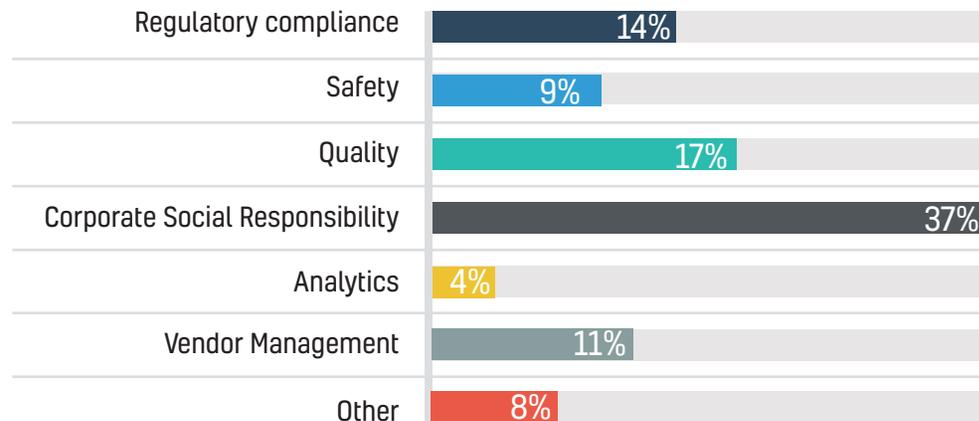
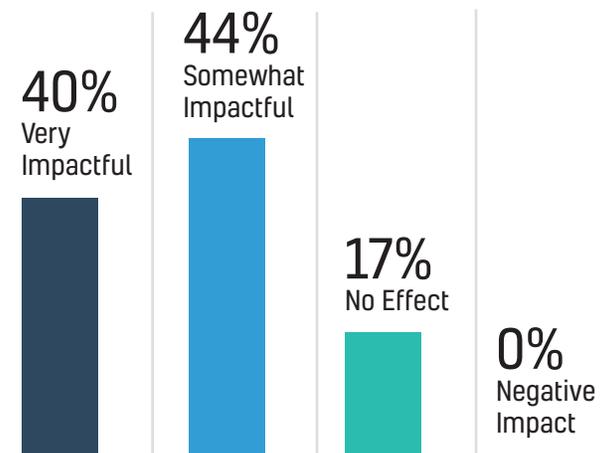


FIGURE 4
TO WHAT EXTENT DOES CSR IMPACT CONSUMER TRUST IN YOUR BRAND?





integrated into the production process *per se*. I often liken this evolution that we're seeing with CSR to the evolution that quality underwent decades ago."

Before the advent of continuous quality improvement processes, companies often discovered quality problems only after entire order runs were finished and inspected. Today, most factories perform in-line inspections and have procedures for nipping quality problems in the bud. "Compliance and CSR are going through the same evolution," Seferian says. "It's becoming baked into the process. You do it all along, with every step, just like you check for quality."

It's a view shared by Jason Kibbey, CEO of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition, an industry alliance focused on sustainable production. SAC is focused on building and promoting the Higg Index, a standardized supply chain measurement tool to help all industry participants to understand the environmental, social and labor impacts of making and selling their products and services.

"We've seen the definition of CSR change dramatically over the past decade," Kibbey says. "While it used to indicate a company 'doing good,' corporate social responsibility is now a critical business strategy. It's an indication of the strength

of a brand, how it treats its employees, how well it understands limited resources and how much it respects its customer. Transparency, by definition, requires an openness that not every company is ready to embrace. Those that are — and many of them are in the apparel industry — take sustainability seriously. They recognize the opportunity to make changes throughout the value chain that support CSR, as well as an ongoing commitment to quality."

Consumers are watching for signs of CSR, some generations more closely than others. "Millennials expect modern brands to be open and communicative about how they operate in the world and to seek incremental and positive social change," said a March 2017 *Forbes* article, "Millennials Driving Brands to Practice Socially Responsible Marketing." Citing research from the Haas School of Business at Berkeley in California, the article said "more than nine in 10 millennials would switch brands to one associated with a cause."

A recent study of 20,000 adults in five countries by consumer goods giant Unilever found that:

- One-third of consumers buy from brands based on their environmental and social impact
- A €966 billion (US\$1.15 trillion) opportunity exists for brands that make their "sustainability credentials" clear



CHALLENGES POSED BY A COMPLEX GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN

Clearly, there is consumer momentum and corporate commitment behind compliance and CSR, but the actual execution is still fraught with difficulties.

What's Clouding the Picture?

- **Less than a quarter (22 percent) of apparel professionals feel their current systems and technology are “very effective” at achieving transparency and compliance.**

Most (57 percent) feel they are only “somewhat effective.” Twenty percent say they are “very ineffective” or “somewhat ineffective.”

- 36 percent cite internal organization challenges as the biggest obstacle to supply chain transparency and compliance, followed by lack of visibility (22 percent)
- One-fourth of respondents said lack of supply chain transparency is the greatest challenge to meeting CSR objectives

Supply chain visibility has historically been elusive for fashion businesses, who often rely on complex networks of suppliers around the globe. Many work with agents or large conglomerates who, in turn, have relationships with tiers of their own partners.

Among the internal challenges that can complicate CSR and compliance efforts is the fashion industry’s long-time emphasis on price, quality and on-time delivery. For many decades, these have been the driving metrics by which many in senior management are measured. Compliance emerged as a relatively new focus area in the mid- to late-1990s and has come into its own in the past five to seven years, observes Seferian. “It has yet to fully integrate itself into the thinking of the organization at all levels of hierarchy the way price, quality and delivery have done because they have a much longer history of being part of management thinking when it comes to supply chain issues,” he says.

For some fashion firms, another internal organizational issue standing in the way of supply chain transparency and compliance is a bifurcation of sourcing and compliance functions, making it difficult for companies to speak with a united voice to factories, Seferian says. A factory can be instructed by a compliance team to do something one way, and then sent different signals by the sourcing team.

A lot of the confusion ties back to how both individuals and their companies are incentivized financially. “How do organizations internally incentivize or reward performance if the metrics that you’re judged by are purely around on-time delivery, for example? If there’s no reward for ensuring that the factory you’re sourcing from is



a compliant factory, then that will drive a certain kind of behavior,” Seferian says. “It doesn’t mean you’re against compliance or that you don’t want factories to be transparent and compliant, but if you’re not incentivizing that aspect of it, then it’s not going to get as much attention as the things you are incentivizing. It’s a significant internal organizational challenge.”

The industry’s pivot toward more frequent collections and catwalk-to-consumer style availability isn’t making it any easier. Seferian points to two primary challenges that fast-fashion production poses to CSR and compliance. One is the compressed cycle time, which may not allow much room to make adjustments to the sourcing plan if safety or quality has been compromised. The other is the transactional, short-term nature of some fast-fashion engagements between retailers, brands and suppliers.

“To be done right, compliance needs long-term thinking,” he says. “It’s not something you can go in and change in a factory in two days, and then you’re all set for the one fast-fashion production run you plan to do with that factory. It takes time to build up systems and ramp up management. The



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**AVEDIS SEFERIAN,
PRESIDENT & CEO, WRAP**

big challenge with fast fashion, at least the way it’s practiced these days, is that it tends to emphasize or encourage short-term thinking.”

By speeding up the compliance cycle and tracking supplier performance over time, transparency technology makes CSR and compliance checking feasible, even in the short time frames over which fast fashion operates.

Globalization, Fast Fashion Add Complexity

- Almost 60 percent of apparel professionals say fast-fashion trends have made it “much harder” or “somewhat harder” to comply with product safety, CSR and internal directives
- 44 percent plan to increase global manufacturing somewhat or “a lot”
- 72 percent rank the difficulty of supervising compliance, CSR and safety abroad as being somewhat to much more difficult than supervising these activities in their home country

There are very real risks if compliance and CSR efforts fail. An October 2016 report by the *Harvard Business Review* said, “Supply chains today extend around the world and are vulnerable to natural disasters and civil conflict. Climate change, water scarcity and poor labor conditions



in much of the world increase the risk. McKinsey reports that the value at stake from sustainability concerns can be as high as 70 percent of earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization.”

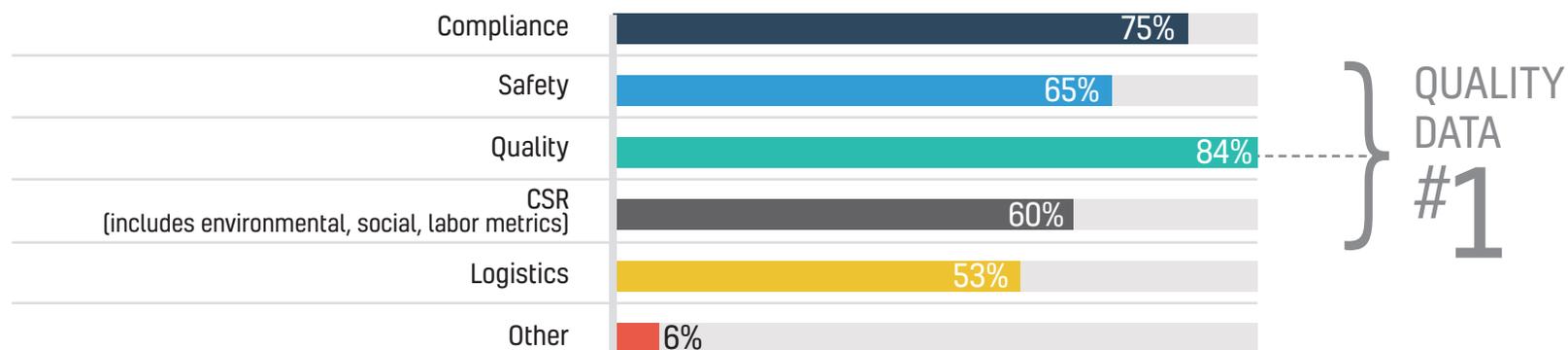
“The preponderance of evidence shows that sustainability is going mainstream. Executives can no longer afford to approach sustainability as a ‘nice to have’ or as a siloed function separated from the ‘real’ business. Those companies that proactively make sustainability core to business strategy will drive innovation and engender enthusiasm and loyalty from employees, customers, suppliers, communities and investors,” the report concluded.

THE SOLUTION RESIDES IN TRANSPARENCY AND ACTIVE DATA SHARING

With improving global Internet connectivity and cloud-based software platforms, it is becoming more cost effective and feasible for companies to achieve better visibility through the strategic use of technology. Already many apparel companies are capturing a tremendous amount of information about their suppliers. Yet blind spots remain, especially for upstream materials, components and chemicals. Perhaps more concerning, not all of the information gathered is necessarily leading to better transparency.

FIGURE 5
DATA REGULARLY COLLECTED ABOUT SUPPLIERS

MULTIPLE ANSWER CHOICES ALLOWED





Transparency Strong for Some, a Struggle for Many

- 30 percent of apparel professionals say they have full visibility into their products and suppliers and their suppliers' suppliers as well
- 55 percent say their supply chain is "somewhat transparent," meaning large parts are visible but significant parts are not
- 15 percent say their supply chain is "mostly not transparent" or has "very little visibility"

A full 70 percent of Apparel survey respondents say their supply chains are only somewhat transparent, mostly not transparent, or have very little visibility. A big part of the problem is the manual manner in which many apparel retailers, brands and manufacturers report they are collecting and managing supply chain information. Additionally, when systems don't talk to each other, it takes a lot more effort and focus for internal teams and global trading partners to do so. It's almost inevitable that there will be challenges in effectively sharing that information across the organization.

FIGURE 6

TO WHAT LEVEL IN YOUR SUPPLY CHAIN DOES YOUR COMPANY HAVE TRANSPARENCY FOR THE MAJORITY OF YOUR PRODUCTS?

MULTIPLE ANSWER CHOICES ALLOWED

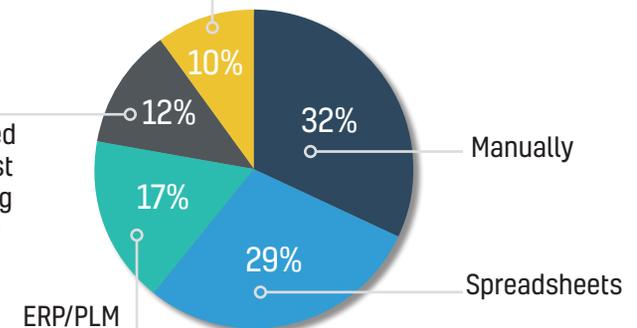


FIGURE 7

HOW DO YOU COLLECT COMPLIANCE AND CSR INFORMATION NOW?

A Broader Platform/Solution for Compliance as Well as for Managing Other Critical Functions

A Specialized Solution Just for Managing Compliance





Working with Product Safety and Quality Information

- Almost half (47 percent) of apparel companies rely on “mostly manual” or “entirely or almost entirely manual” processes for product safety and quality
- Another 47 percent say their product safety and quality processes are “somewhat automated,” meaning large parts are automated but routine tasks still require regular human attention
- 5 percent report having “fully/almost fully automated” processes

Significant Supply Chain Data in Silos

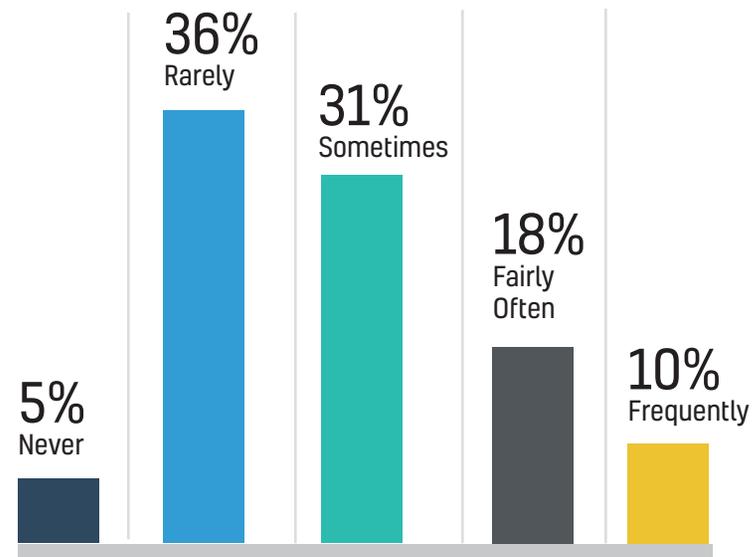
- 42 percent say their current systems and information on their supply chain have “little or no compatibility”
- 30 percent have some compatibility
- 19 percent say most systems are compatible
- 8 percent report full compatibility

Just How Easy Is Data Sharing?

- Half (50 percent) of respondents say it’s “somewhat easy” to share compliance, product safety, quality or CSR data with other departments
- 35 percent report it is “somewhat difficult”
- 9 percent find it “very difficult” or do not share
- 7 percent say it’s “easy”

Another major issue is the timeliness and accuracy of the data. If software solutions do not help companies automate and simplify the collection and interpretation of data, then businesses generally are not working off of the most current information, or are potentially using false data. By comparison, the right software solution gives end users a view of reality as it currently is. This is particularly crucial in matters of compliance and safety, when delays in recognizing a problem can lead to both physical and economic dangers and damage.

FIGURE 8
HOW OFTEN IS QUALITY, CSR, ETC. INFORMATION SHARED OUTSIDE OF TEAMS WHO OWN IT?





There also are many issues around trust and differing values, Seferian says. How do buyers and suppliers know that the information they exchange is trustworthy? What if one party's social compliance programs shine a light on a different list of potential issues than the trading partner's? Retailers and their suppliers are often simply unfamiliar with each other's compliance questionnaires, tactics and audit arrangements, Seferian says. But a tougher challenge lays in their lack of trust in the veracity of the data collected and shared. How can both "sides" be sure the auditors booked to check factories will use roughly the same process, tenacity and attention to detail in their work?

It's also important to ensure that all information comes directly from the trusted verifier — and therefore maintains its integrity. "Automatically associating certifications and test results with specific merchandise and vendors is critical to ensuring transparency. It helps everyone in the supply chain if you cannot just trust, but also verify, when it comes to compliance and CSR," says Matt Smith, founder of ICIX and an expert on supply chain collaboration technology.



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JASON KIBBEY
CEO, SUSTAINABLE
APPAREL COALITION

FASHION RETAIL: AN INDUSTRY HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

While it can be nearly impossible to agree upon a set of universal values for compliance and CSR, the fashion industry is working hard toward agreement on a universal questionnaire to address all of the most important compliance issues. The Social and Labor Convergence Project, an independent effort facilitated by the Sustainable Apparel Coalition, is developing a standardized questionnaire. It will serve as a foundational element for a common audit tool for the social compliance industry. In addition, the Association of Professional Social Compliance Auditors is in the midst of setting standards for the minimum qualifications social auditors must have.

"When trading partners know that auditors are asking the same questions, and they're being asked with the same level of vigor, and the veracity of their findings are being validated with a known level of competence, that is when the trust barrier can be overcome and we'll be able to see much more sharing," Seferian says.



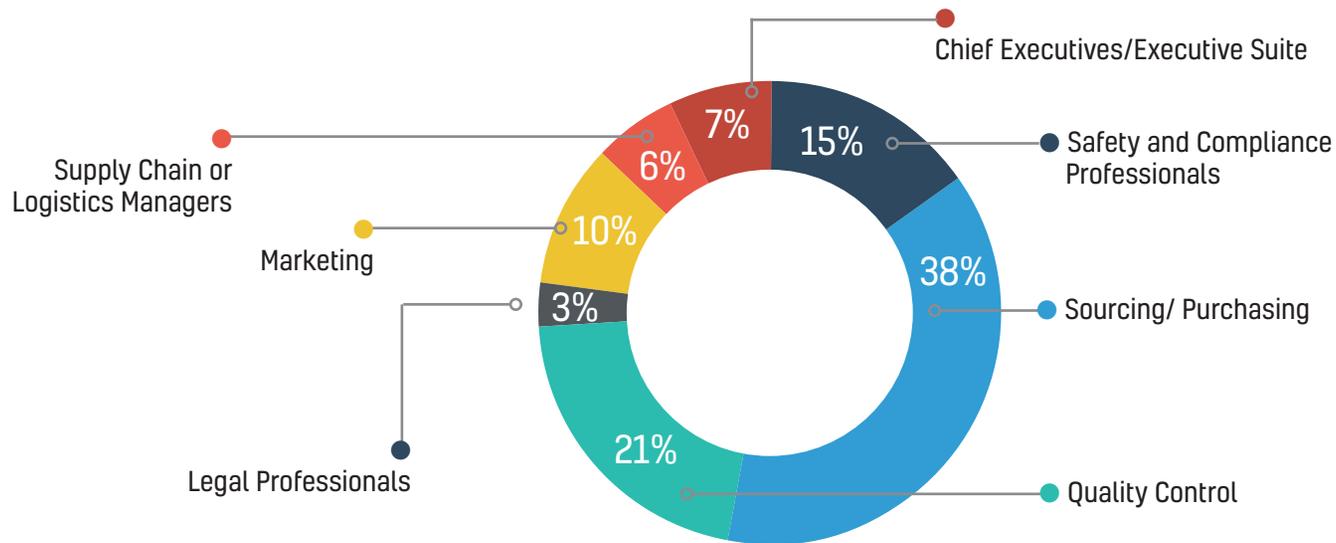
As these collaborative initiatives unfold, fashion businesses also are planning to put more money behind their own transparency strategies. Senior leaders seem to see the advantages of leveraging technology to gain better supply chain visibility, manage compliance and support CSR. The bar is being set by solutions that automatically capture current, accurate data from disparate sources and store it on a central platform with seamless accessibility to key stakeholders.

Financial Commitment Behind Transparency

- 40 percent say they plan to invest “a lot more” or “somewhat more” in transparency over the next 12 to 18 months
- 52 percent will keep budget expenditures associated with transparency “about the same”
- 5 percent will invest “somewhat less” and 3 percent “significantly less”

FIGURE 9

WHICH DEPARTMENT/PERSONNEL WILL GET THE MOST BENEFIT FROM IMPROVED COMPLIANCE?





“The ability to have these cross-sectional platforms that will enable sourcing and compliance and audit firms to put all the data in one place will make it that much easier for the big picture to emerge more clearly,” Seferian says. For example, if a style proves to be a hot seller, sourcing may need to double the size of an order or move up some delivery dates. If compliance teams and auditors have visibility to this sourcing decision and understand the drivers behind it, they can better anticipate and react to different challenges they know the factories may encounter. “It’s much better if companies can manage the whole process together as opposed to operating in silos that don’t know what the others are doing,” he says.

Seferian also says he expects apparel companies to continue to gain deeper visibility into their suppliers’ operations and to take it a step further and become much more familiar with their suppliers’ upstream raw material sources. This will come as a result of greater use of technology as well as the development of more stable, long-term relationships. “Fifteen years ago, you didn’t even have conversations about going past that first vendor-supplier tier,” he says. “Now we’re seeing the evolution of going deeper and deeper into the supply chain. In part, it’s a sort of increased enlightenment, and in part, it’s an increased ability. When there’s a closer relationship between the buyer and their supplier, it enables them to work together on improving the compliance of the next tier. The evolution



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of compliance is closely tied to the strengthening of the relationship — you’re partnering with each tier and then cascading the requirements down to the next tier beyond that.”

Companies see the potential for widespread benefits across many departments and personnel when they can demonstrate improved supply chain compliance and give different associates access to CSR-related information.

“Data and information is the left brain of the business operation, and it’s critical for making informed decisions,” Kibbey says. “Specific to the apparel industry, as more and more brands shift toward more sustainable operations, the need for data is even more important. At the earliest stages of product creation, for example, designers benefit from information that will steer them toward selecting lower impact materials, using more efficient construction techniques and considering the complete life cycle of the product.”

As might be expected, industry leaders also envision significant benefits for sourcing and purchasing teams. These individuals often are on the front lines of navigating through massive amounts of information about suppliers as they try to plan production of thousands or



even millions of SKUs. Automation can support efforts to streamline their supply base down to those vendors who are most compliant and reliable. For example, a compliance/CSR platform can readily highlight which suppliers consistently have all of their compliance documentation in order by the shipping deadline and which have passed all of their safety audits. It also can highlight traditional business metrics, such as the percentage of on-time shipments by vendor. Easier access to these insights provides a path to optimization and cost savings for retailers and brand marketers, who can then focus their management efforts on a smaller pool of stronger vendors. It also enables them to address occasional exceptions, rather than having to monitor all activities, partners and products manually.

Big Data insights gleaned from newer IT platforms also can help apparel businesses get away from a one-size-fits-all approach to the resources they devote to their supply base, Seferian says. For example, a supplier who demonstrates consistent excellence in compliance may not require multiple audits throughout the year. But a newer vendor or a supplier that's had some challenges will require more attention to ensure standards are met. "A software platform can enable you to take a much more granular approach," he says. "The increased visibility and transparency that technology allows for today is really what drives the ability to manage social compliance issues better."

And, says ICIX's Matt Smith, automating the management of most of the everyday aspects of compliance



"It's much better if companies can manage the whole process together as opposed to operating in silos that don't know what the others are doing."

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means that whenever a non-routine issue comes up, it can be given the attention it deserves.

"Automating many aspects of trading partner collaboration frees companies to manage by exception, not by emergency," he says.

Beyond sourcing, many other departments across the apparel enterprise can benefit from improved supply chain compliance. Today, a full 10 percent of apparel professionals feel marketing has the most to gain from better compliance. This percentage may increase in the coming years as fashion businesses leverage their supply chain insights to be more transparent with consumers through their advertising, websites, point-of-sale messaging, social media and other customer-facing engagement. When CSR and compliance information resides on the same platform used to manage customer relationships, it's much easier to tap into this data to share with a broader audience — and perhaps to capture some of the trillion-dollar opportunity the Unilever study says are waiting to be claimed by CSR-driven brands.

"Consumers are becoming increasingly curious — and outspoken — about the values of the brands they buy," says Kibbey. "We're definitely seeing many of our members expanding their communication efforts to consumers."



Q&A WITH MATT SMITH, FOUNDER, ICIX

Matt Smith founded ICIX in 2004 with a focus on helping the retail industry secure its supply chains and meet increased safety requirements in the wake of the Bioterrorism Act of 2002. Over the past 13 years, ICIX has expanded its services and capabilities to help retailers and brands gain transparency and manage their safety, quality, compliance and CSR for general merchandise, apparel and footwear. Here Smith shares some of his latest insights about the fashion industry's quest for stronger visibility and CSR and technology's supporting role.

Q HOW DOES A CORPORATE CULTURE OF ACTIVE TRANSPARENCY DIFFER FROM ONE THAT IS MORE LAISSEZ FAIRE?

MATT SMITH: It's a commitment and an understanding of the importance of where your products come from and which companies along that journey touch your product. It's really got to be deep in the culture of a company to want to achieve Active Transparency™. Transparency depends on an openness and willingness to provide that clear view, whether it's to a consumer or another company.

At a company that's not willing to do that, you see a lot more hidden agendas. Active Transparency isn't cheap, and it's not easy, but I think in today's market, it's critical to have it. There are plenty of examples that show how avoiding transparency is detrimental to companies. For those who have invested in transparency, the results are tremendous in terms of the public's and media's perception of those companies, not to mention the potential positive financial impact.

Q WHAT IS THE IDEAL WAY FOR TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT TRUST IN RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FASHION INDUSTRY TRADING PARTNERS?

SMITH: The job of any technology is to make things easier. In this case, that means easing the burden of information gathering and communication throughout each company's supply chain and the ecosystem that surrounds it — among business customers, suppliers, other trading partners, and even consumers, where appropriate. Technology that can do that can build trust, insight and intelligence throughout a trading partner network. That could be very impactful for generations to come, particularly in spreading education and knowledge to developing companies and countries, which is critical for CSR proliferation.

Q IN THIS INTERTWINED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRUST AND TECHNOLOGY, WHERE DOES THE CONSUMER FIT INTO THE PICTURE? HOW IS THE CONSUMER'S LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT WITH CSR EVOLVING?

SMITH: Consumers are the key drivers. Companies will figure out how to deliver what the customer ultimately wants. If the consumer is conscious and inquisitive around those CSR initiatives, that's going to be the ultimate driver. Hopefully, we're passing the baton on the awareness and importance of these issues down to the next generations. The information access consumers have today is greater than at any other time in history. They play a huge role in CSR, and their engagement will drive companies and regulatory bodies around the world to react.



CONCLUSIONS

- Compliance and CSR are the “new quality” in many ways for apparel retailers, brand marketers, manufacturers and their suppliers. Just as quality came into the limelight and underwent a transformation around total quality management (TQM), now compliance and CSR initiatives, new processes and supporting technologies are being embedded into apparel operations.
- Among other organizational challenges, companies must now create new incentives around compliance and CSR to augment traditional performance metrics and financial incentives based on price, delivery and quality.
- Fast-fashion trends and extended global supply networks add complexity to apparel industry compliance and CSR efforts, as do a lack of automation, compatible systems and ability to readily share information.
- Collaborative industry initiatives are focused on creating a universal CSR questionnaire and on developing a standard set of minimum qualifications for social compliance auditors, both of which should help establish greater trust between trading partners and simplify engagement on CSR matters between them.
- Specialized technology platforms can centralize and automate much of the data collection, storage and sharing, making more information available in real time and helping brands and retailers manage by exception versus manually monitoring everything.

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ABOUT ICIX

ICIX helps leading companies in the apparel and retail industries collaborate across trading partner networks to achieve Active Transparency™. Our solutions enable companies to safeguard consumers, protect their brand, and build trust — all while improving margins. The ICIX network connects trading partners through a central hub to provide a holistic view into the extended supply chain, making the exchange of information simple and efficient. Once connected on the network, trading partners leverage ICIX applications to collaborate in order to verify and monitor business-critical information on products, organizations and facilities. Over 20,000 businesses are active members of the ICIX network, including leading retailers and manufacturers, their trading partners, and over 50 testing laboratories, inspection companies and certification bodies. A wide range of industries including food, general merchandise, and apparel and footwear are using ICIX to manage supply chain risk and safeguard consumers. For more information, please visit: www.icix.com.

