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DISCOVER  
HOW BUSINESS  
LEADERS SUCH  
AS KMART MD  
IAN BAILEY ARE  
INNOVATING IN  
THE FASHION  
RETAIL SPACE.

## The Retail Edition



# The future designer

KMART'S APPAREL DESIGNERS ARE CURRENTLY LEARNING A REVOLUTIONARY NEW WAY TO FASHION CLOTHES, CHRISTOPHER KELLY INVESTIGATES.

**W**ith 95% of Australian garments being manufactured overseas - according to a 2022 report by the Australian Fashion Council - it's a wonder what lead times were like during COVID-19. Even now, post-COVID, average lead times can vary between 30-90 days.

But Australian department store Kmart is disrupting this fashion design process by rolling out a 3D digital design technology.

Kmart senior designer Alexis Belcher says the new technology allows designers to create animated 360-degree views of its products. It can show important details such as how the fabrics hang, move and look across diverse sizes.

"Best of all, it removes the need to send physical samples across the world, reducing lead time and wastage," Belcher says.

Belcher adds that as well as improving Kmart's product development process, the technology also offers benefits to customers - "like access to a more detailed fit and sizing information, analytics that allow us to improve our designs, and one day even the ability to browse digital avatars rather than 2D product photos."

"The design team have all been really excited to work with this new technology, as this is essentially the future of fashion, and this technology is pioneering in this space," Belcher says.

According to divisional merchandise manager in womenswear, Natasha Smith, the average lead time for fashion production at Kmart is 120 days for new items, and 60-days for repeats. She says the department store has two big seasonal launches for Autumn/Winter and Spring/Summer every year, with additional collections dropping every month.

Her colleague Tara Broomfield, who is the divisional manager of mens and footwear, says there are 70 in-house designers at Kmart, including for kidswear, with an additional 60-70 people in the merchandise office.

"So that's buyers, planners, assistants, and then we've got a team of product technologists and then also design," Broomfield says. "So it's a collection of partnerships with factories and then obviously our in-house designers."

Speaking on the 3D design technology, Smith says some of the dresses in its Melbourne Fashion Festival runway debut were designed in 3D.

"So we make our decisions on silhouette, styling, and some of the print," Smith explains. "We might change a print based on how it looks in 3D before we go into a first production."

"It just helps us make better decisions and also make sure that we can see the product based on the 3D application design.

"Then there's speed-to-market

as well, because we can see what that end product looks like instantaneously without waiting for the final product.

"We can see range balance on the screen as well."

Smith adds that Kmart is potentially cutting out one or two samples due to the new technology, "because you can pick up if something might not fit correctly."

"And the volume of fabric as well," says Bloomfield. "So if you want more volume or less volume, you can really see it straightaway."

Speaking on Kmart's lead times, managing director Ian Bailey says they are relatively shorter compared to where it was historically.

"A lot of that was just manual processes where we just took out unnecessary approvals," Bailey says. "So it's just constantly looking for where's the unnecessary work; if you can remove that, it makes everyone's life easier."

Bailey adds that Kmart sources apparel globally, in countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Bangladesh, India and China.

The 3D design technology first launched through two pilot departments in womenswear, across knit and woven fabrics. Smith says it is rolling out to other departments, with the intention to go apparel-wide in the future.

Belcher confirms it is currently in the process of onboarding its menswear department. 

