

# Enhancing Durability through Wearer Trials



Cath Kidston Ltd started in 1993 when designer Cath Kidston began by selling vintage fabrics, wallpapers and brightly-painted furniture associated with her childhood in a small shop in London. Her shop soon became a big success.

Cath began to design her own prints and products and steadily expanded the product base to include an extensive range of homewares as well as women's fashion and accessories.

In 2008, the business launched the Cath Kids brand.

## Key Facts

- The project undertook an analysis of six garments that are part of their core selling items.
- 'Wash and wear' trials were undertaken to develop an evidence base and improve understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each garment in the trial in relation to quality.
- The business reviewed specifications and developed a list of questions to ask suppliers. This ensured the buyers were better informed when discussing aspects that will enhance the durability of clothes.
- Cath Kidston also use their weekly meetings to discuss complaints, customer feedback, store feedback and international feedback.

Cath Kidston –  
Wearer Trials

Background

Developing  
Specifications

Wash & Wear Trials

# Case Study

## Background

Over the years, Cath Kidston Ltd has entered into some high-profile collaborations.

In 2008 it worked with Tesco to produce printed eco shopping bags made from plastic bottles, which saved about six million plastic bottles from landfill.

In 2014 Cath Kidston Ltd continued to demonstrate its environmental focus by becoming a signatory of the Sustainable Clothing Action Plan (SCAP) 2020 Commitment. Managed by WRAP, SCAP seeks to significantly reduce the environmental impacts of clothing across its lifecycle.

As part of this commitment, the business explored opportunities to enhance the durability of some of its clothing lines by taking steps to extend the life of some of its core garments focusing on popular lines that are sold season after season.

## Defining standards for 'durability'

The Cath Kidston brand is strongly associated with the production of high quality items. Customers expect the clothing they buy to wash and wear well and to continue to maintain its hand-feel, form and colour.

One important gauge of how well the products meet these customer expectations is the number of garments, of each type, that are returned.

Cath Kidston products are often given as gifts, therefore, it is difficult to know whether clothing is returned due to being faulty or because customers are not fully satisfied with the garment's performance. The business is keen to learn from returned clothing.

The weekly quality meeting agenda now has a slot for technologists to discuss complaints, customer feedback, store feedback and international feedback. These sessions have been very useful to help understand garment failures and to provide a roadmap for addressing them.

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## Developing Specifications

With support from sustainability experts at the School of Design, University of Leeds, Cath Kidston created a template for fabric and yarn specifications which could be shared with their suppliers.

The objective of the template was to provide greater visibility in relation to the match between the raw material specification and the resulting product.

By generating this transparency, Cath Kidston hopes that they will be able to work with their suppliers to identify and implement changes to the specifications to enhance the durability of clothes.

They plan to record the specific aspects of the specification that were changed in order to map and learn from the experiences. This will enable them to replicate the improvements in other products where appropriate.

## Engaging Suppliers

The business has engaged its suppliers through the specification template which the suppliers have been asked to complete.

They have also engaged suppliers through a process of continuous product reviews and testing.

Cath Kidston believes that these partnerships are key to developing a better understanding of the opportunities for enhancing product durability.

*'At Cath Kidston we take sustainability seriously, placing it at the heart of our brand values. Understanding how our customers use the clothing they buy from us, and how we can enhance the quality and durability to meet that need, has played a key role in supporting us to improve our environmental footprint.'*

**George Demetriades, Head of Technical & Compliance, Cath Kidston**

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## Wash & wear trials

Cath Kidston carried out two week wearer trials on core products from across baby, childrenswear and womenswear.

The items included baby bodysuits, pyjamas, knitted cardigans, knitted jumpers and dresses.

The objective was to understand the impacts of wear on the garments in order to better understand product lifecycles.

Over the duration of the two weeks, 16 wearers were engaged and each individual wore the garment for between 12 and 120 hours and between one and seven times over the course of the trial, depending on the item and its function. All items were washed according to care instructions.

Each garment was compared to its gold seal control garment equivalent for visual differences taking into account the feedback from the wearers on any changes in size, feel, colour and fit.

## Results

Different issues were found with different garment types.

Some knitwear items experienced pilling, colour fading and change in feel, and some women's items experienced a change in feel and colour fading.

Wearers also reported on positive results where the garments kept their shape, colour and feel. Some garments were considered to wash well - one garment was considered to improve in hand-feel post washing.

The trials were considered very informative. They were used, alongside the specification template and with suppliers, to explore what changes could be made to improve the garments where issues were being experienced by customers.

To support the learnings, Cath Kidston intends to undertake wearer trials on key competitors' equivalent clothing items to understand how the quality and durability compare.

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- **re-inventing** how we design, produce and sell products;
- **re-thinking** how we use and consume products; and
- **re-defining** what is possible through recycling and re-use.