

Taking a holistic view of durability



Whistles wanted to approach durability across different aspects of the business, having identified that making garments last longer was important to its customers, the brand and the environment. WRAP and Whistles looked at opportunities to improve the durability of clothing by ensuring customers have a positive experience when visiting Whistles stores, using the website, and when taking their clothes home.

The project elements included:

- refining and standardising the returns and repairs process to understand what garments were being returned, when and why; and
- updating the care guidance for Whistles clothing.

- By standardising its returns and repairs process, Whistles managed not only to improve its internal systems, but also to identify consumer behaviour patterns on product returns.
- Care guidance developed for all fabrics used in Whistles garments will help store staff give advice to customers, and ensure these clothes last longer.

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Returns and repairs process

Historically, Whistles managed returns and repairs through several different avenues, including through their Customers Services team, their Technical team or directly in-stores. Across the company, there was limited visibility of what products were being returned or repaired, and why.

Whistles undertook a due diligence exercise to amalgamate the returns' information that was gathered across the different elements of the business. This process has been standardised and all returned (either repaired or refunded) products are now recorded in a centrally managed database. This helped to produce a clear picture of why garments are most frequently returned, as well as understand customer behaviour patterns.

Petty Cash Request Form

Through the returns process analysis, Whistles identified that stores were using local repair services ad hoc, and data captured on petty cash forms was inconsistent. To formalise this process, a 'Petty Cash Request form' has been adapted to collate more detailed information about the repair or dry cleaning requests and the local service used. This enables Whistles to build a database of local services used on a store-to-store basis so that the information is retained centrally, as well as locally.

Identifying product failures

By consistently collecting and collating faulty returns data, Whistles have been able to map patterns of activity and use the information collected to improve communications with suppliers.

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This allowed Whistles to make some direct product improvements such as:

- changing a fabric mill for silk sourcing, as the previous silk quality used was causing repeated seam slippage; and
- redesigning the Lola dress and improving customer information on its swing tag. Many returns for this dress were due to fabric damage occurring from customers using the wrong setting when ironing.

Results of the standardisation process

Whistles have implemented a number of actions as a result of reviewing and improving the returns and repairs process. These include:

- the Customer Services team and Technical & Product Compliance Manager now meet quarterly to review the assembled data and assess activity, trends and behaviours of Whistles customers; and
- the Customer Services team meets with the Head of Department to review collated numbers and trends.

The Lola dress



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Helping customers care for Whistles products

Customer engagement is paramount to Whistles, and helping customers care for garments after purchase can ensure that clothes last for longer.

WRAP helped Whistles develop a care guide for all Whistles products, destined to stores. This information will help store staff communicate good care practice and advice to customers at point of sale.

The care guide covers advice for refreshing and laundering the different fabric types used in Whistles products, such as silk, wool and cashmere. It also contains guidance on care labels, washing at 30°C, dry-cleaning and storage of garments, with lots of tips from WRAP's consumer behaviour change campaign, [Love Your Clothes](#).

To support the care advice store staff give, Whistles is also working with Mr Black, a premium range of care products designed to prolong the life of clothes.

Next steps

Whistles' Technical team is currently working with their Marketing colleagues to import the Care Guide information into a web-friendly format.

"Looking at durability as a commercial issue has enabled us to engage teams across the company and to make significant and measurable changes to our systems. As a result, this will ensure we offer longer lasting products to our customers."

Roz Adams, Technical and Product Compliance Manager

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WRAP's vision is a world where resources are used sustainably. It works in partnership with governments, businesses, trade bodies, local authorities, communities and individuals looking for practical advice to improve resource efficiency that delivers both economic and environmental benefits.

This case study was developed as part of the [Sustainable Clothing Action Plan \(SCAP\)](#). This is part of a series of [industry trials](#) focussed on extending clothing life, based on improvement actions identified in the [Sustainable Clothing Guide](#). The guide highlights how interventions can be made in design and throughout the supply chain, to make clothing last longer.

Our mission is to accelerate the move to a sustainable resource-efficient economy through:

- **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.