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Tailoring tech to fit 21st century fashion

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Australian entrepreneurs Rob Fisher and David McLaughlin are combining their patented 3D printing and body scanning technology to disrupt the fashion industry.

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Who hasn't wished for a wardrobe full of clothes that fit perfectly?

Thanks to Rob Fisher and David McLaughlin, you can soon have a range of garments tailored to your unique size and shape without having to undergo countless fittings.

Fisher and McLaughlin have developed scanning technology that takes a precise avatar of a customer's body. The scan is then "digitally teleported" to a manufacturing facility where it is printed as a life-size 3D torso of the customer using the companies patented 3D printers, from which a garment such as a suit or shirt is crafted.

The duo's innovative technology has the potential to disrupt the conventions of the custom-made clothing market – whether the business is bricks-and-mortar or online.

Tailoring tech for disruption

Fisher and McLaughlin are co-founders of Melbourne technology company Custom Innovation Co., which has two core businesses: a tailored menswear company called Tailors Mark and Tec.Fit, a firm providing software solutions to e-commerce retailers.

Friends for 20 years, Fisher and McLaughlin started Tailors Mark four years ago while Fisher was living in London. He had observed how innovation was influencing the way the fashion business was operating. Everywhere, that is, except tailoring, where old traditions remained steadfast.

Combining their diverse experience and individual skill sets, the two men set out to develop a new approach to custom-made menswear that could be delivered online and commercialised to meet a large-scale operation.

“We knew we wanted to use the internet and technology to create a better experience for the customer,” Fisher says. “We wanted smart software to drive the business,” adds McLaughlin.

More than 35,000 hours went into developing Tailors Mark’s proprietary systems, including consumer-facing and back-end platforms to enable the business to deliver a consistent product in a scalable manner. These include global fulfilment systems and seven regional sites, all with the ability to handle thousands of daily orders.

The return rate for products is minimal, a remarkable result since this is a major stumbling block for online custom-made fashion brands. By using the new body scanning and 3D printing technology as part of the tailoring process, they hope the return rate will be reduced to nil.

“Until now, there has been no technology that guarantees how a garment will fit, until it is put on the body of the client,” says Fisher.

A made-to-measure competitive advantage



Tailors Mark suit. Credit Katie Fergus.

Customisation has a long tradition in boutique products, especially in fashion, and it is now a growing trend in the mainstream retail sector for both online and bricks-and-mortar businesses.

In early 2017, Tailors Mark will implement the first stage of its 3D scanning and printing technology when Tailors Mark fitting consultants will begin using a handheld scanning device to take customer measurements whilst attending client fittings at their homes or offices.

“The second stage is a mass market solution, which will be launched later in 2017,” McLaughlin says. “We will launch a mobile app that allows customers to scan themselves. The digital avatar created from the scan will then be sent to Bangkok where the customer’s life-sized body will be printed using Tailors Mark’s proprietary and patented 3D printers. Their order will then be crafted in stages, as per the traditional tailoring experience, guaranteeing a perfectly fitting garment without the need for alterations and subsequent fittings.”

McLaughlin, Head of Technology at Tailors Mark, says their digital innovations are the outcome of 30,000 hours of research and development over the last 15 months.

“The new system will give us a significant advantage in the highly competitive but fragmented tailored menswear market,” McLaughlin says.



David McLaughlin and Rob Fisher, co-founders of Custom Innovation Co, a retail and technology focused company solving 'fit' issues in the retail sector. Credit: Hayden Somerville.

More innovations in the pipeline

Fisher and McLaughlin believe their innovative technology accounts for their success to date. Fisher says Tailors Mark has built an online ordering platform and global fulfilment system that covers all major markets and can manage significant volumes of orders. This is a distinct advantage over most players in the space who are largely limited by their production capacity.

Tailors Mark currently has 17,000 customers and moves up to 2,000 units per month. Eighty per cent of their business comes from outside Australia, mostly from the UK and Europe.

“No-one else can do what Tailors Mark can – that’s a claim backed up by eight patents (in progress), putting us in an ideal position to take advantage of the 3D printing revolution,” says McLaughlin

Fisher says their other business – Tec.Fit – is working with the University of Sydney and the University of Technology Sydney to research and develop commercial applications of body scanning and 3D printing technology across different business sectors.

He anticipates a day when Tec.Fit technology is powering the digital retail operations of Tailors Mark’s competitors.

“Any industry where the merchant and customer need to be physically together to create a perfect-fit product can benefit greatly from the Tec.Fit technology,” says Fisher.

“Some of the businesses that have shown interest in our technology include optometrists, shoemakers, bridal dressmakers and online fashion retailers.”

For both men, tailoring remains an art. Fisher says their technology provides immediate access to expert craftspeople in a central manufacturing facility, rather than the technology itself creating the garment.

“The ramifications for our business are enormous,” he says. “We believe we have solved the biggest impediment to scaling a business in our space. Our technology’s broad applications will play an important role in delivering true, custom-fit garments and accessories.”

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