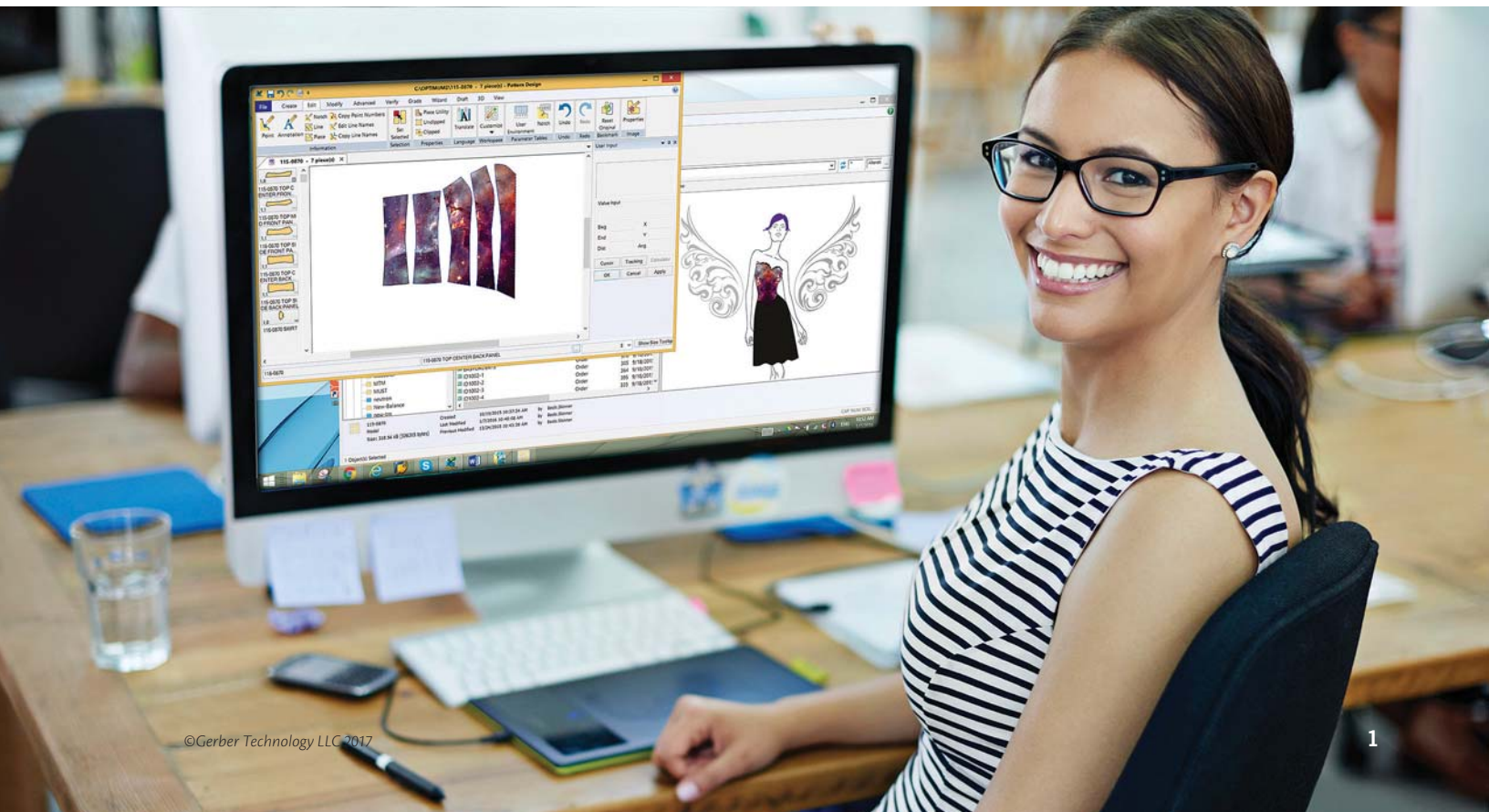


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Textile and Apparel Careers

The textile and apparel segments of the soft goods chain are vital to the U.S. economy. They have a high number of firms, employees, and dollars invested. This segment needs fashion specialists to design, manufacture, promote, sell, and distribute the products.

Producers of textile and apparel goods and industry trade associations offer a great number and variety of fashion careers. In small companies, one employee may do a combination of several of these jobs. Large companies, with many more employees, have a larger number of more specialized positions.

Textile and apparel manufacturing have always been labor-intensive, but are now becoming more capital-intensive because of industry restructuring, consolidation, and use of technology. They have also traditionally employed a high percentage of unskilled labor at below U.S. average wages. The skill level and wages, however, are moving upward with automation and electronics. Textile jobs, especially marketing and sales, are located in fashion centers while other textile jobs are at the headquarters and plant sites of producers, such as in the Eastern and Southern states. Apparel jobs are also near fashion centers.

To get creative textile or apparel jobs that require design or artistic abilities, prospective employees need an excellent portfolio of original examples. A portfolio can be a case of loose, neatly mounted art or design papers showing a person's creative work, or a portfolio can be electronic. A professional-looking portfolio should contain a balanced representation of your best abilities.

Both the textile and apparel segments require fashion-oriented people to guide their efforts. New product development, manufacturing, and distribution systems require employees trained in new technology. The best career opportunities arise for people with solid educational backgrounds and continually updated skills. After employees gain experience in several areas of



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In large textile and apparel companies employees do specialized jobs, such as operating a saw to cut many layers of fabric at a time into garment parts.

the industry, they can reach higher levels of success. The following sections describe the main career opportunities in the textile and apparel segments of the fashion industry.

A Career in the Textile Industry

Many careers exist in the textile industry, from developing the initial fibers to selling the finished fabrics. The general areas of these careers are textile research and development, textile design, textile production, and textile sales.

Textile Research and Development

Research and development (R&D) is innovation to discover new knowledge, develop new products, and improve old products. It is vital to the textile industry. People in textile R&D careers work for fiber manufacturers, textile mills, and private testing laboratories. Government agencies hire chemists and lab technicians to see that textile products on the market meet government standards. Sometimes, the researchers must develop the specifications for the standards. Universities do a great deal of this research, often by graduate students who learn professional methods and gain experience while earning advanced degrees.

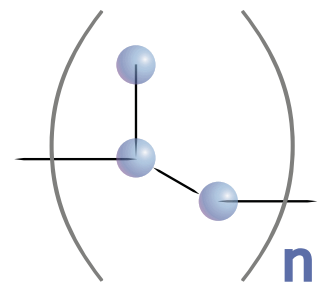
Aptitudes to go into R&D include a creative imagination, curiosity, and attention to details. A person in R&D should enjoy science and like to perform experiments alone, yet be able to communicate clearly their precise, realistic, and practical results to others. People who work in these careers need patience, persistence, and flexibility in working toward a solution, since it often takes months or years to invent a product or solve a technical problem.

Textile research scientists do R&D in several different textile areas to satisfy needs for specific end uses. They may develop new manufactured fibers that have certain characteristics, or blend fibers in new and better ways to create desired qualities. They work on different fabric constructions and find new finishes for better fabric performance.

To be a textile research scientist requires a college degree, and usually an advanced degree. Degrees might be in polymer chemistry, textile science, chemical engineering, or physics. Manufacturing experience in a textile plant, possibly through a work-study curriculum, is a great asset. Textile research scientists might be with a project from the initial idea to actual installation in a manufacturing plant.

Salaries are good for beginning textile research scientists and usually go up to high or very high pay with experience and proven abilities. Work hours are usually regular, with occasional overtime demands. Personal satisfaction can be great when solving complex problems or creating something new. In addition, there may be opportunities to broaden your career into other areas of the company, such as manufacturing supervision or marketing.

Textile laboratory technicians help conduct research, often working under research scientists. They have high school diplomas and usually technical school certificates. These technicians learn many of the specific procedures they do on the job, such as setting up equipment, writing down computations,



Polypropylene

lyricsaima/Shutterstock.com

Universities with textile curriculums have to do research in laboratories. The research results can help industry introduce innovative products to the consumer market.

and categorizing experiment results, are repetitive. They may duplicate each step of a future manufacturing operation to evaluate its quality and efficiency. They may also test the serviceability of finished fibers, yarns, and fabrics. They receive medium wages.

Technicians who are textile testers work for textile mills or independent testing labs. They test new products against required specifications of durability, colorfastness, and shrinkage. They check different fibers, yarns, fabrics, or finishes after development but before introduction to the public. They also perform tests during the textile manufacturing process to assure good and uniform quality.

Textile Design Employment

Textile design employees are responsible for the look of the final textiles. They should have a creative imagination and artistic ability, with a good sense of color. They need knowledge of the fashion field, as well as a love of beautiful fabrics. A wide knowledge of computer technology and the marketplace is also important. Since fabric offerings guide apparel designers and manufacturers, textile design is important to companies later in the soft goods chain.

Fiber and fabric companies are at the beginning of the pipeline, so they work farther ahead of retail selling seasons than others in the chain. Textile fashion departments research and forecast upcoming trends. They interpret and guide company products toward meeting those trends, with the proper yarns, blends, textures, weights, and performance characteristics.

Fabric Designers

Fabric designers structurally and artistically develop the fabrics via computer that apparel and other finished product manufacturers will want for their new lines. Fabric companies employ designers with artistic ability who have technical knowledge about fabric construction and digital design skills. In small fabric mills that do not have a fashion director, the fabric designer makes the fashion decisions. Larger companies share decisions that involve large capital investments for equipment and thousands of yards of new fabrics when a new season's line is prepared. In addition, companies must be able to sell the resulting fabrics within a specific price category.

Fabric structural designers interpret the findings and advice of their company's fashion department to create new woven or knitted patterns, or redesign existing ones, usually directed toward a specific market. Yarns of different textures or colors are combined in interesting ways. Computer programs to create the designs have totally replaced the old tedious methods of doing calculated drawings on graph paper. The digital design shows the fabric structure and then controls the weaving loom or knitting machine. Small samples can be produced and approved for production before large quantities of fabric are made. Three specialized areas of fabric structural design are woven, knit, and lace/embroidery designing.

For fabric structural design, workers need to understand technical processes and capabilities of manufacturing equipment. Fabric designers and equipment-technical people may cooperate to gain the needed production automation. The designer must know about new fibers, dyes, and finishes. Textile colleges offer four-year technical degrees with an art emphasis. Some

two-year schools of design or technology also offer degrees for this type of work. An apprenticeship may be a requirement.

Fabric surface designers translate the company's color choices and applied-print looks onto fabrics. They may specialize as print/repeat artists, colorists, or strike-off artists. These may be entry-level positions requiring an associate's degree.

A *print/repeat artist* does original textile surface designs, which may include color combinations and repeats. After sketching out one *motif* (design idea or theme) on an electronic tablet, the motif is combined with repeats of itself to form a continuous pattern. Such design combinations are often a response to customer requests.

Colorists work out different color combinations for the designs. A colorist might give new colors to previous designs for a new seasonal line, or adapt designs for specific customers or markets. The same motif may be produced in several different color combinations, shown with computer printouts before the final versions are tried on fabrics.

A *strike-off artist* arranges prints on fabrics after establishment of the motifs and colors. He or she interprets the intentions of the surface design department to the plant. Sometimes, the strike-off artist must modify a design or color combination because of quality or production restraints.

Fabric-surface design jobs are available with fabric mills, textile converters, and garment producers that make their own fabrics. They are also available at fabric design studios, forecasting services, retail private label product development offices, interior decorating fabric companies, and computer graphics design firms. Almost all jobs require CAD skills.

For fabric-surface design jobs, your portfolio should show versatile skills, especially with computer work. It should indicate your ability to meet professional standards. Successful job applicants must also be able to follow directions and meet deadlines.

Fabric Stylist

A *fabric stylist* serves as a bridge between the creative and business aspects of the company, coordinating fabric design, production, and sales. This high-level job requires knowledge of textiles, long-range planning, fabric design, the entire fashion industry, and the consumer market. Company sales depend on the stylist's ability to gauge demand and stimulate interest in new fabrics. He or she also guides the production staff at the plant to produce the correct amounts of fabrics in the right qualities. Many years of textile industry experience and a wide range of industry contacts and resources are helpful for this job. The pay level is high or very high.

Fabric stylists organize fabrics into lines each season, grouping them to show and sell to customers. These stylists put together swatches and color cards for sales presentations in the company's showroom, as well as sending them to prospective customers. In addition, apparel designers/manufacturers can request large enough fabric samples to make samples of their new garment designs. When the stylist receives feedback about garments to be produced with the company's fabrics, the information is used for promotion to the press, retailers, and consumers.

An entry-level job with fabric companies is an *assistant to the stylist*. This person sets up appointments for the stylist and does clerical work. He or she also acts as a go-between with the company's plants or mills, and works with clients and salespeople in the stylist's absence. This job is *not* the same as the job of *assistant stylist*, which is a middle management position in large fabric firms or textile design studios. This person works with the stylist in compiling lines, preparing storyboards, and doing forecasting. He or she gives assignments to the fabric designers and some directions to the plants.

Fashion Director

The *fashion director*, sometimes called the *merchandiser*, heads the fashion department. The fashion director determines the fashion direction the business will take, and communicates that information throughout his or her organization. This person attends worldwide fashion events and keeps in close touch with sources of fashion information. Sometimes, he or she buys sample fabrics abroad. When the fashion director of a fiber producer learns that the upcoming season will feature a certain color or silhouette, he or she works with the fabric mills that use the company's fibers, to develop the correct types of yard goods for the market.

Fashion directors send fabric presentations to apparel designers, manufacturers, buying offices, fashion magazines, and retail companies. They help these companies with fashion-related problems, and set up fashion exhibits for the trade. They must be able to coordinate apparel and accessories, stage fashion shows, and work well with the press. Before appointment to this position, these individuals must prove themselves in the industry. They have high esteem and receive very high pay.

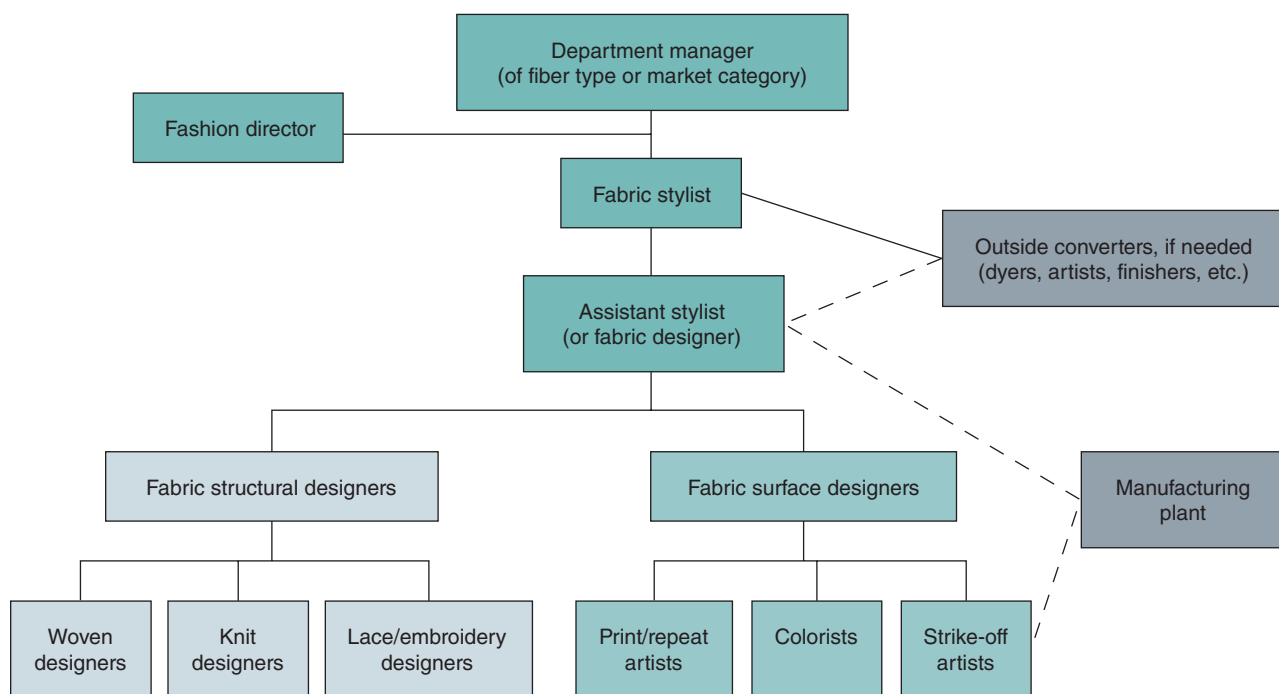
Depending on the size of the firm, the fashion director may have one or many assistants. An *assistant to the fashion director* is often involved in glamorous activities, such as running a fashion show of a designer's collection made from the company's fibers or fabrics, or helping to entertain influential people. Usually, the assistant takes care of routine chores, such as follow-up phone calls and e-mails, scheduling meetings, and sending out correspondence. Lower-level employees who aspire to be fashion directors someday often seek this job.

A fashion-related college degree is becoming more necessary to be an assistant to the fashion director. The pay can be low, medium, or good, depending on the company and the number and levels of assistants that are company employees.

Other Design-Related Textile Positions

An organization chart that illustrates fabric line development. Fabric designers might become assistant stylists and eventually work up to stylist. The *department manager* at the top of the chart is responsible for the entire fabric type (such as polyester knits or cotton broadcloth), or market category (such as women's career wear or men's sportswear). In a smaller company that markets only one fiber type or to one market category, the *vice president of merchandising* would likely be at the top of this chart, with no department managers.

Fabric Line Development Organization



Mary G. Wolfe

Many textile experts contribute to the development of a company's fabric lines. They have different amounts of expertise and responsibility, for which they receive different compensation. In addition, companies of different sizes have more layers of employees and various titles for jobs. Dotted lines mean they interact but do not have direct authority over these functions.

A *fabric librarian* is in charge of the fabric library that most manufactured fiber companies, natural fiber trade associations, and home sewing pattern companies maintain. These visual collections that change each season show everything that is new and important in textile trends. Fabric swatches are clipped to cards on which detailed descriptions and sources of supply are recorded. The librarian must be able to discuss the latest fashion trends, fibers, and fabrics with interested fabric and apparel designers and manufacturers.

Also assisting this process are *market analysts* who conduct market research to try to discover future textile needs. They are alert to supply and demand shifts. They keep track of what their competitors are doing in long-range pricing and supply, and work closely with their firm's stylists so they offer the right products at the right time. Market analysts know every aspect of the industry and have training in textiles, business, marketing, economics, psychology, and statistics.



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Fabric librarians research, organize, maintain, and regularly updated the collection of fabric samples, showing the many textiles available for use in apparel, crafts, and home decorating.

Textile Production

Textile production involves the largest single portion of textile industry employees. *Textile production workers* operate the machines that perform

the manufacturing procedures. They have high school diplomas and usually receive training on the job. They may have taken courses in trade or technical schools. They should have good mechanical aptitude, physical coordination, vision, and manual dexterity. Some belong to unions.

Textile production occurs during day, evening, and night shifts, with extra pay for those who work the evening and night shifts. The average textile worker's earnings have moved from the low pay into the medium pay category. Fringe benefits and working conditions are generally good. Many plants sponsor recreational, social, and athletic activities for employees and their families.

With new technology, most production jobs now require computer skills. Electronic equipment is used for such tasks as forecasting amounts of raw materials needed and computing how much of each type of fiber or fabric to produce. Computers do statistical analysis for quality control, as well as automatic weaving and knitting from CAD instructions.

Production supervisors oversee various manufacturing operations to maintain the highest worker productivity and product quality. College graduates with degrees in engineering, textile technology, business, or chemistry might begin their careers as production supervisors. The companies that hire them usually offer management-training programs. Likewise, most firms send their production supervisors to periodic seminars, workshops, and classes to help them keep up with developments in the industry.

Textile *quality control inspectors* work in all phases of production to analyze the quality of fibers, yarns, or fabrics. They check to see that products meet precise standards and specifications. They identify quality problems, try to find solutions, and report on their findings. They should have good analytical skills and enjoy detail and follow-up work. Most quality control inspectors have completed a textile technology or production college program.

Plant engineers make sure all environmental systems are operating properly. If the heat, air conditioning, electrical, materials handling, noise reduction, or other systems are not functioning well, the plant engineer modifies or repairs them. A college degree in engineering is desirable. The pay is good or high.

Industrial engineers are cost and efficiency experts who save companies time and money. They study each operation to determine the most efficient, least expensive, and safest method to get it done. They decide what machines are needed and are constantly looking for better ways of performing production tasks without reducing the quality of the final product. Preparation for this requires a college degree in industrial engineering or textile manufacturing.

A Career in the Apparel Industry

Careers in the apparel industry exist in fashion design, apparel manufacturing, and sales and distribution.

Fashion Design

The job of *fashion designer* is to create new ideas that combine function and beauty, with an understanding of the market. The goal is to have the firm's

garments at the leading edge of fashion. Designers might specialize in womenswear, childrenswear, menswear, or they might design in specific areas such as swimwear, bridal attire, or shoes. The success of the manufacturer's business depends on the salability of its designs.

Most fashion-design jobs are full-time; however, a few work on an independent freelance basis for several small firms that do not have their own designers. Fashion designers often work long, hectic days, especially when a line is being finished for a showing. Designers find that expressing their creativity and being responsible for successful collections is very rewarding. This career requires a degree from a college or technical school in fashion design.

The largest number of fashion design jobs are in California and New York, with most designers working for manufacturers that mass-produce low priced items. Instead of originating ideas, these *design stylists*, also called *copyists*, adapt higher priced fashion designs to the price ranges of their customers. They may select the fabrics, coordinate the lines, and oversee other details. They receive lower salaries and less prestige than designers of more exclusive garment lines; however, entry-level jobs may be available to gain experience in the industry.

Medium-sized manufacturers that have several designers usually produce moderately priced apparel. Each designer has an assistant or design room staff. These designers are generally unknown because their names are not publicized or sewn into the clothes they design. They are strictly important employees working for their firms. They usually design on CAD systems and receive good to high wages.

Very high-priced apparel firms employ only the most talented designers. A designer must have recognition as being gifted in the field to fill one of these scarce positions. The salary is extremely high. Aspiring designers often work as assistants for top designers to learn the trade. They receive good pay and invaluable experience.

An *assistant designer* might follow up on a designer's sketches through draping, pattern making, sample cutting, or sample making. He or she might contribute some design ideas or help the designer select fabrics and trimmings. Clerical duties involve keeping records of fabric, notions, and trim purchases. The assistant might also make appointments, answer telephones and e-mails, and run errands. It is important to be able to follow directions accurately and work well under pressure.

Most opportunities for assistant designers exist in ready-to-wear manufacturing firms. A few are available in companies that create home sewing patterns. Assistant designer jobs might also be available as summer employment during college years or as work-study programs. When applying, you must present a portfolio of your own fashion design ideas.

The Qualifications and Work of Fashion Designers

Fashion designers need imagination and creativity for a constant flow of ideas. They must be aware of changing social and economic trends so their designs satisfy market demands. A natural fashion flair, supplemented with education and experience, should provide a strong sense of color, line, texture, balance,



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Draping enables fashion designers to understand how fabrics fit the human form. Even if the final designing is done using a computer, having draping skills is part of the combined expertise for success.

and proportion. Likewise, enthusiasm, determination, and drive to succeed are necessary for this demanding career.

Fashion designers must have technical knowledge of fabrics, trimmings, and fit. Expertise in CAD pattern making, draping, and sewing are especially important. Designers must understand manufacturing processes and costing, so they can stay within the production capabilities and marketing plans of their firms. They must be able to visualize a finished, three-dimensional garment before it is made. Patience is necessary, since design specifications may have several revisions. Additionally, flexibility and cooperation are needed as well as the self-assurance to sell design ideas to others.

Some designers visualize their ideas by sketching on paper or by draping fabric onto a dressmaker's form (mannequin); however, most use CAD equipment, often with three-dimensional programs that allow the simulated garment to be turned and viewed from all sides. The designer can add more or less fullness where desired, work with different color combinations, and see how various trims might look. When the design is just right, the designer saves it and prints it in realistic color. Photographic quality images of designs can be distributed electronically to corporate and production decision makers.

Designers submit finished designs to top management for approval. Management discussions sometimes result in changes, which the designer enters into the CAD system, and then creates patterns. Next, a prototype of each design is cut and sewn (often in muslin fabric) to work out all details and to edit the line. Finally, samples are made in the chosen fashion fabrics, which salespeople use and show to retail buyers.

Designers must plan and supervise the work of their staff, such as assistant designers, sample cutters, and sample hands. They deal with fabric salespeople and retail buyers. They also work with management, production, and promotion/publicity employees. It is exciting to be a trend forecaster or part of a fashion design team.

Sketching Employees

Fashion firms sometimes employ *sketchers*, who do freehand drawings of the ideas that designers have draped onto mannequins in fabric. This work is good for those who can draw precise, accurate accounts of other people's ideas at a fast pace. It requires outstanding sketching skills and a fashion sense, but not much original design creativity. The work is quite confining, except when asked to meet customers, do promotional work, and assist with presentations of new collections. Digital illustration is replacing much of the freehand sketching.

Large manufacturing firms and pattern companies employ sketching assistants. They mainly record designs in precise, technical detail. They point out all construction and design features of a seasonal line of samples to keep

with the company records. They swatch the sketches by attaching fabric and trim samples. They also do some clerical work, filling out a specification sheet of construction details for each item.

Sketching employees receive low to medium pay. They need training in art or fashion illustration after high school. When applying for a sketching position, potential employees must present a portfolio of artwork. Candidates should be fashionably well groomed, poised, and articulate.

Sample Workers

A *sample cutter* cuts out sample parts, and a *sample maker* (also called a sample hand) sews sample garment designs together, following the designer's pattern, sketch, and specifications. He or she does all the required sewing and finishing. This tests the pattern in fashion fabrics, after which final changes or refinements are made to the design.

This is exacting work. Sample makers must be skilled in all construction techniques, and able to interpret someone else's ideas into garments. This can be an entry-level design job, but usually a factory sewing machine operator moves up to this position because of skill, hard work, and a good attitude. Sometimes, he or she has taken vocational school courses. The low to medium pay is higher than that of most sewing machine operators in the factory.

Apparel Manufacturing

Ready-to-wear apparel is mass-produced in large quantities. Apparel factories are located in many areas of the U.S. and the world. The labor intensity of apparel manufacturing requires many workers; however, the number of apparel-industry production workers in the U.S. has decreased. This is mainly because of imports and the use of higher technology. Most companies specialize in only certain types of apparel.

Preproduction Employees

Pattern makers translate apparel designs into the right number, size, and shape of pattern pieces needed for mass production. A precise master pattern is made in the company's basic size, while trying to keep fabric yardage at a minimum. This work is typically done by computer, rather than by hand cutting of heavy paper patterns. For intricate or expensive designs, however, some fashion experts feel electronics cannot duplicate the flair and judgment of a skilled traditional pattern maker.

Based on the master pattern, *pattern graders* cut patterns in all of the different sizes produced by the manufacturer, by enlarging or reducing the pattern pieces exactly the right amounts. This technical and precise work must often be done under the pressure of tight production schedules. Workers need computer expertise to direct the computer program to grade the design patterns, on command, into the needed sizes.

Markers are employees who figure out how to place the pattern pieces on the fabric for the most efficient cutting. They place the pattern pieces in the tightest possible layout, on a paper marker, so the least amount of fabric is wasted during cutting. Computerized plants now do this electronically.

Pattern makers, graders, and markers are employed wherever there are apparel firms. One employee may do all these procedures digitally. Even if factory sewing happens offshore, the design, pattern making, and grading may take place domestically; all of this can be transmitted overseas electronically. Pattern employees need a good background in flat pattern making, draping, design, fabrics, clothing construction, and CAD technology. They must understand body proportions and garment fit. They should have at least two years of technical education, studying pattern-making technology.

Experienced CAD pattern makers, who also create the grading and marking files for preproduction, receive high pay. The jobs in this industry are changing as competition encourages high-tech production. Faster and more accurate procedures, requiring fewer but more educated and well-trained workers, are replacing old methods.

Cutting, Sewing, and Finishing Jobs

To begin the factory production process, *spreaders* lay out the chosen fabric for cutting. These employees guide bolts of fabric back and forth to form smooth, straight layers. With computerized equipment, technical training is a requirement to operate the systems. Cutters often do this job.

In older factories, *cutters* carefully use power saws, knives, or shears to cut out stacks of garment parts. In modern factories, they control the computer cutting equipment. In that case, no paper marker is used—the layout arrangement and pattern piece outlines are in the memory of the computer. Sometimes, a computer-controlled laser cuts only one layer at a time, extremely fast.

Cutters who use handheld equipment need physical strength, good manual dexterity, and excellent eyesight. They must take pride in accuracy. They often have some technical training, but learn the actual job at the plant site from experienced cutters. However, computerized plants need people with education in computer operations and programming, combined with apparel production technology.

Assorters (also called assemblers) prepare the cut garment parts for production sewing. For progressive bundle manufacturing, they sort and tie the parts into bundles of 12, mark any construction details, and put them into rolling bins. Later in the production process, they bring parts together, such as slacks with their corresponding zippers and waistbands. Factories that use computer-aided manufacturing (CAM) need fewer assorters. Here the parts may be loaded together for each garment on an overhead carrier that will automatically take it through the operation. Some assorters may also fold and package finished items.

Sewing machine operators, sometimes called *sewing technicians*, construct apparel on fast industrial power machines. In some factories, they sit and do just one specific task over and over again. When the operators develop more skill and versatility, they can advance to jobs that are more complicated. If a factory uses stand-up, hand-off modules, the team sewing machine operators



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With this automated production cutting system, consistent and accurate cutting is controlled through the computer by a trained employee.

have higher skills. They receive training to operate many machines for many different assembly procedures.

Sewing machine operators need a basic knowledge of sewing construction and should enjoy doing routine tasks. They must have good manual dexterity, coordination, and eyesight to handle materials and use equipment. They must be able to do neat, steady, and accurate work at a fast pace in a compact work area. The work can be tiring because of the rapid pace and pressure for high performance.

Sewing machine operators usually work regular hours. Many belong to workers' unions. Earnings are low to medium, but increase with higher skills needed for the new technology of the industry. A high school diploma is recommended. Trade and technical schools offer some training, and manufacturing companies give on-the-job training in the specific construction techniques for their garments.

Finishers are employed mainly by better quality, higher priced lines. They finish garments, such as hand-attaching fasteners, trimmings, hems, or linings. They must have good eyesight and finger dexterity to do rapid, accurate hand sewing. There are few opportunities, but the pay may be higher than that of a machine operator. No higher education is required.

Inspectors/trimmers cut off loose threads, pull out basting stitches, and remove lint and spots from garments. They examine garment parts during production, as well as finished garments after production, to check for flaws or poor quality. They pull out unsatisfactory items and arrange for minor repairs. Bad sewing goes back to the operator responsible or to *alteration hands* in the factory, who correct the production defects. Alteration hands need experience in clothing construction to perform skillfully all techniques.

Pressers flatten seams, iron garment surfaces, and shape garments with steam-pressing machines. Pressing occurs during construction of better garments, as well as to garments in most price ranges at the end of construction. Pressers should have a high school diploma and possible technical school training. They must be willing to learn on the job from a supervisor and have a tolerance for steam and heat.

Production Management

Production management employees oversee the work of others. They study and prepare reports, attend business meetings, and guide the operations so the company can reach its goals. They have college degrees in apparel management, apparel production, or engineering. They may start as *management trainees*.

Production managers with large companies may transfer to different locations during their careers, moving to plant sites in small U.S. towns and/or to international locations. Good communication, math, computer, and problem-solving skills are requirements. A combination of production, technical, administrative, and marketing knowledge is required. People with maturity, the ability to work with varied personalities, and a good sense of organization can advance quickly.

Product managers are in charge of every aspect of one of the company's lines or a specific category of garments within a line. They oversee the design, manufacture, and sales/distribution of that line or category of goods. They may work with suppliers, set prices, coordinate promotional activities, and work with their salespeople. They look for new market opportunities and respond to trends, competitors' products, and the image and goals of their company. For instance, they might ask the following questions:

- Do the colors mix and match with other clothes we are selling?
- Will the prices be competitive?
- Is the plant's production machinery able to produce them?
- Can existing sales methods and retail outlets be utilized?
- Can we meet manufacturing and delivery dates?

If the answers to these questions are "No," design ideas must be changed or rejected.

Product managers are practical with a good business sense. They have college degrees, such as in fashion merchandising, and lots of industry experience. They receive good or high pay. They report to a *marketing manager* who plans and directs all marketing endeavors of the company.

A *plant manager* is in charge of all operations and employees at a manufacturing plant. This person is responsible for estimating production costs, scheduling the flow of work in the factory, and hiring and training new workers. He or she oversees the purchasing, cutting, sewing, pressing, quality control, shipping, and all other aspects of production. Plant management is a complex task that has very high pay. A person achieves this job after years of working up to it through lower plant management jobs.

Production assistants do detail work and record keeping for plant managers. They keep track of materials, assist with production schedules, and oversee factory workflow. They control inventory, incoming deliveries, and outgoing shipments. They also keep customers informed about their orders, and expedite certain deliveries. To do this, production assistants need good math, organizational abilities, and spoken and digital communication skills. They should be accurate, assertive, thorough, and have a high tolerance for stress. They probably have a college degree in apparel production management or engineering.

As in textile manufacturing, apparel *production supervisors* oversee the workers in the factory. They make sure there is a smooth flow of work, solve problems, and try to motivate the operators to achieve the highest quality and speed of production. They receive medium or good pay.



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Complete assortments of buttons, trims, and notions that are available for pattern designers, apparel designers and manufacturers, to help decide what will be promoted and produced.

Piece goods buyers are purchasing agents who research and buy the fabrics, trims, and notions that designers choose and that receive approval by management. Piece goods buyers try to get the highest quality materials at the lowest possible prices. They also oversee any production problems that occur with the fabrics or trims. They should have an interest in and knowledge of fabrics and production methods. They need good math, communication, and organizational skills, along with specialized training in textiles, fashion merchandising, or apparel production management. They receive good or high pay.

Costing engineers determine the overall price of producing each item, including the cost of fabrics and notions, wages for the operators who produce it, and all other manufacturing expenses. To price each separate design in an upcoming collection, they may have to travel to various plants to view production operations and consult with plant managers. They sometimes have *costing clerks* who assist them by inputting data and analyzing the figures on CAD systems that do automatic costing calculations when products are under development.

Just as in the textile industry, *quality control engineers* develop specifications and maintain standards for the products, *plant engineers* oversee the physical sites, and *industrial engineers* are efficiency and safety experts. Industrial engineers also plan the layout of production lines, workstation progression, and storage areas. Their time and motion studies establish piece rates for pay of sewing machine operators.

A *technical designer* works with the corporate design team and the contract factories in other countries. He or she oversees the offshore work to ensure correct garment construction, appropriate fabric choices, and proper fit. The technical designer decides which fit and construction changes to make before mass-producing the garments.

Textile and Apparel Sales and Distribution

Textile producers and apparel manufacturing companies have similar important career opportunities in sales and distribution. For most of these, experience within the industry and some specialized skills are as important as a knowledge of fashion. The jobs offer a variety of interesting tasks at a fast pace.

Sales employees should represent their companies in a professional manner, while providing their clients with good service. They communicate and sell the textile or apparel company's products to customers. Fiber salespeople sell to yarn producers or fabric manufacturers. Greige goods producers sell to converters. Firms with finished fabrics and notions sell to apparel designers and manufacturers. Apparel manufacturers sell to buying offices and retailers.

Sales employees must be friendly, likeable, and ambitious. They must have thorough knowledge of their products to communicate reputable advice and service to each customer. They also need to follow through on details. They should understand the entire soft goods chain, and be able to think quickly to present merchandise with flair and enthusiasm.

As the link between the firm and its customers, salespeople must have integrity to gain and keep the trust and respect of customers. Honesty about quality, dates of delivery, price, and other matters sets the groundwork for future sales. Creativity and sensitivity are necessary to make the best of each situation and respond to the views of others.

Sales representatives must have poise, self-confidence, maturity, and personalities that can stimulate desires for their products. They should be outgoing, yet sincere, and able to get along with all kinds of people. They must be hardworking and organized to make their own appointments and set their own hours. They must give attention to both the needs of the customers and the interests of the company, using feedback to advise their managers, market analysts, and stylists on fashion directions in the marketplace. Salespeople are the communication link between their company and the market. Line editing and manufacturing are adjusted accordingly.

Sales is a very competitive area of the textile and apparel segments and is not for everyone. It requires stamina, and the ability to withstand pressure and maintain enthusiasm for the company's line. Salespeople receive responsibilities and earnings in proportion to their job performance. For those with the right aptitude and interest, the opportunities and financial rewards can be great. Pay often includes a base salary plus a commission on the amount sold. Additionally, there are opportunities to advance into a marketing or sales manager's job.

It is desirable for sales employees to have completed a program in textiles, apparel, fashion merchandising, business administration, marketing, the sciences, or liberal arts. Necessary skills include techniques for showing a line, making a presentation, handling objections, and closing a sale. Sales employees should have excellent grooming, be fashionably dressed, and show poise and confidence.



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Showroom salespeople explain and sell their goods to buyers who come to the company's sales locations. Each salesperson hopes to write many orders after spending time with the buyers.

Sales Positions

Showroom salespeople are in-house sales employees at the firm's sales offices who present the goods to visiting buyers. They show buyers the newest features and colors of the line. Many fashion industry showroom salespeople work in New York City, Los Angeles, Dallas, or other market cities or marts. Hours for showroom salespeople are usually regular, but are long during market weeks. The pay is medium or good.

Sales trainees learn how to be effective in sales by working under experienced salespeople. They learn about the firm's products, production processes, merchandising techniques, and customer needs.

Showroom salespeople get to know the buyers of the company's important accounts and try to service their needs. For instance, a fabric salesperson might show sample garments made of the fabrics to apparel manufacturers. An apparel salesperson might suggest

ways retailers can present and display the merchandise in their stores. Some apparel companies have *merchandise coordinators* who make sure retail stores present their merchandise as effectively as possible. This job, with medium pay, is less stressful and demanding than sales, but is very interesting.

The *showroom manager* supervises all of the personnel and activity in the showroom. He or she ensures the attractive display of all items and that all samples are in stock for the buyers. The showroom manager handles any buyers' problems that occur, and trains new showroom employees. This position receives good pay.

Traveling sales representatives make up the outside sales force that sells away from the firm's sales offices/showrooms. They travel around for constant contact with customers and the marketplace. Usually, they cover a certain geographic selling territory for the company by car. They receive sample textile swatches or garment samples at home office sales meetings just before the launch of each new line.

Traveling sales reps make appointments with their accounts to inform them about such developments as price changes or new styles added to the line. They may offer displays to customers to promote their products, prepare demonstrations, or present fashion or trunk shows at stores. They work to acquire new accounts and plan exhibits, and do selling during market weeks at marts or convention centers. They take orders and follow through on them to make sure the plant keeps delivery commitments. They must also deal courteously with customer complaints. Some have the title of *account executive*, since they work with specific customers (accounts) in determining their needs and providing products to suit those needs.

Most traveling sales reps are away from home much of the time. They may work long and unusual hours, especially during peak times. Sometimes, they are transferred to a different territory. The job can be exhausting, exciting, and very satisfying for those who enjoy both people and fashion. With commissions, the financial rewards for successful reps can be high.

Sales managers supervise several sales representatives in an established *district* (area) of the country or a division of the company. They set sales goals and guide their salespeople to achieve or surpass the goals. To direct a smooth flow of products from the plant to the customer, they must understand every step of the industry, through research, design, production, sales, and distribution. Successful sales managers have a good sense of fashion and sound judgment about what customers want.

Sales managers must relate well to people and have strong administrative abilities to achieve top sales. The job is demanding and stressful, with high or very high pay. A college degree is a requirement, and some sales managers have an MBA degree. Success in the job can lead to top management. Most sales managers were successful salespeople before promotion to this position.

Technology has caused new sales opportunities to open up in fashion companies. An example is the field of *social media marketing* for apparel brands. Creative job seekers can take advantage of important areas of business that may not yet be commonplace.

Distribution Jobs

The physical distribution of goods is a large and dynamic field with many career opportunities. Professional distribution employees must have knowledge of quantitative methods, finance, accounting, and marketing. *Traffic managers* manage distribution centers (DCs) and try to get products quickly from manufacturing to the customer. They keep computerized shipment records.

Distribution requires workers to pack and ship the merchandise. Workers move bins of fabric bolts or racks of garments from place to place, to storage areas, or to the shipping department. Orders must be received, processed, and sent from the manufacturer to each separate account in the right quantities, colors, and other specifications. Honoring business partnership agreements is important.

It is important to meet delivery dates to satisfy customers and to check incoming and outgoing goods accurately. Some of these jobs do not require education beyond high school; however, these workers must be accurate with details and conscientious about doing a good job. Some of the job titles for distribution center workers include shipping clerk, order picker, checker, packer, and transportation specialist.

Retail Careers

Almost everyone buys apparel either for themselves or others. Thus, fashion merchandising will always be necessary. You can be on the *cutting edge* in retailing as the industry moves forward with new ideas and technology! Fashion merchandising is exciting for those who want to combine fashion with business.

The field of fashion merchandising and retailing involves all of the functions of planning, buying, and selling. The selling activity has two parts—direct selling done by retailers, and indirect selling or promotion.

Is a Retail Career in Your Future?

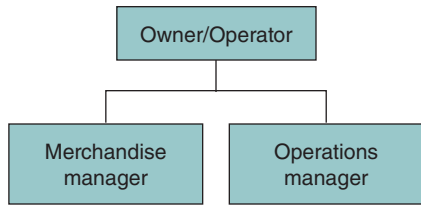
Many career opportunities exist in retailing for people who are interested in textiles and fashion. It is necessary to plan, buy, and sell a steady flow of merchandise as efficiently and profitably as possible. Hours might be long, but the excitement of working with new merchandise, as well as receiving a discount on purchases, are fringe benefits. As retailing has become more competitive, companies are hiring employees with higher levels of education and skills. Individuals who enjoy working with people and understand the needs and wants of consumers are the most likely to succeed. Those with technology skills will gain the highest success.

Retail jobs are available in all geographic locations, with large and small stores, mail-order operations, TV, and e-retailers. The growth in the number of retail jobs has slowed, however, because of industry consolidation and the use of new technology that has automated some retail tasks. Many opportunities still exist, especially with retail websites and off-price chains. A good way to start is with part-time or summer retail jobs during your school years or a work-study program. People without experience must be willing to start at the bottom. Those with education and training can move up more quickly and to higher levels. The chances for advancement are good for talented, hard-working people, who are computer savvy.

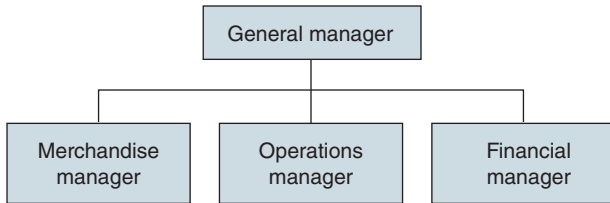
Retailing has many levels of employment and degrees of responsibility. The division of job duties varies among different companies. Generally, the

smaller the retailer, the greater the variety of job responsibilities and tasks performed by an employee. One or two people might do all of the planning, buying, receiving, pricing, advertising, displaying, selling, bookkeeping, and janitorial chores.

Small Store Structures



Two-functional organization



Three-functional organization

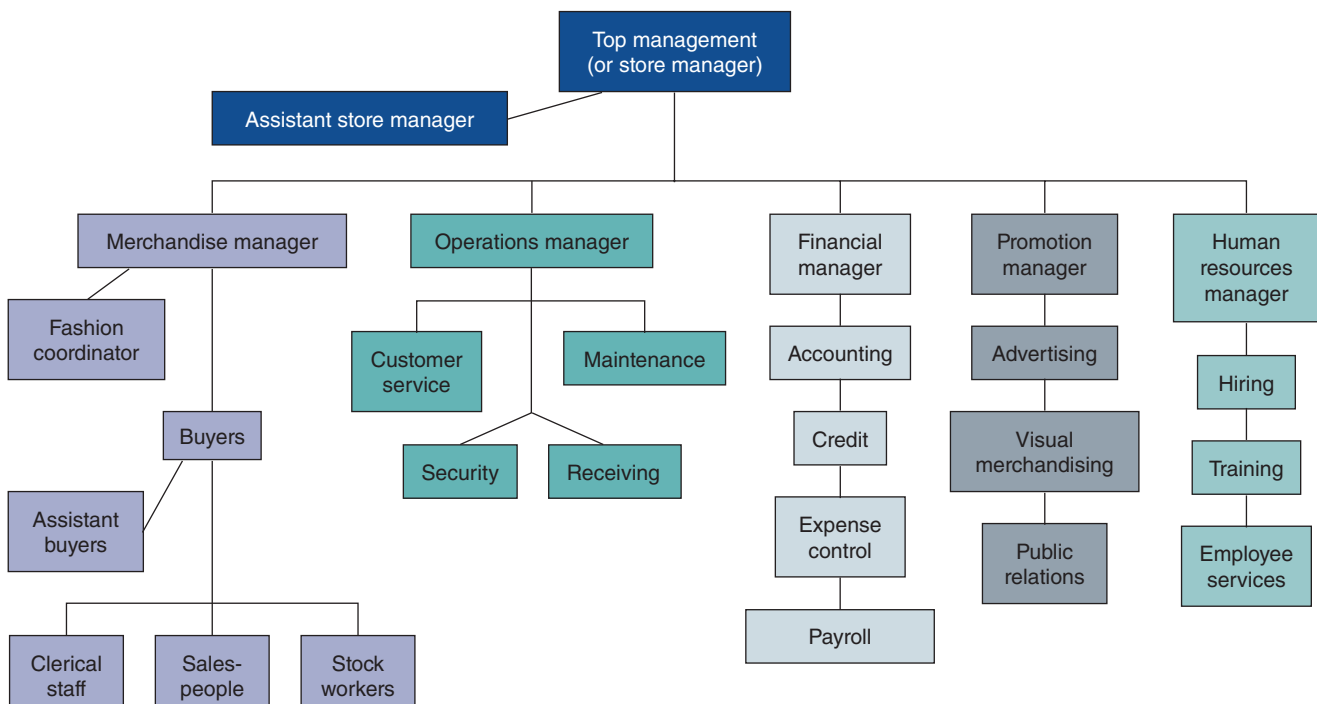
Mary G. Wolfe

As an owner/operator or mom and pop store becomes larger, it begins to specialize slightly into merchandise and operations divisions. With more growth, the company adds a manager to oversee financial matters, resulting in a three-functional form.

As retail companies become larger, the owner/operator may hire managers to assist with business. A *two-functional organization* has one manager employed to oversee all merchandising duties and another manager in charge of operations. As growth occurs, the company hires more salespeople. Eventually, the company adds a financial manager for a *three-functional organization*. With continued growth, a company would probably hire a promotion manager.

In large retail companies, specialized tasks are assigned to different employees, with each concentrating his or her efforts on only those certain tasks. Additionally, there are supervisory and executive levels. The following shows a typical organizational chart for a large retail company. In addition to fashion personnel, large retail companies need a legal staff, real estate experts, information technology staff, store planners and designers, auditors, maintenance workers, and other types of employees.

Large Store Organization



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A large retail company has many layers of jobs with each employee performing only specific duties. In addition, the typical organization chart varies from firm to firm.

Chain retailers have jobs at centralized headquarters in divisions, such as merchandise (buying and product development), operations, distribution, promotion, human resources, information systems, and real estate. Individual store managers, away from the headquarters location, have selling, customer service, security, and facility responsibilities. Multichannel retailers have jobs in their store, catalog, and website divisions. With ongoing changes in retailing and implementation of new business models, organizational structures are more flexible now than with the past traditional structures.

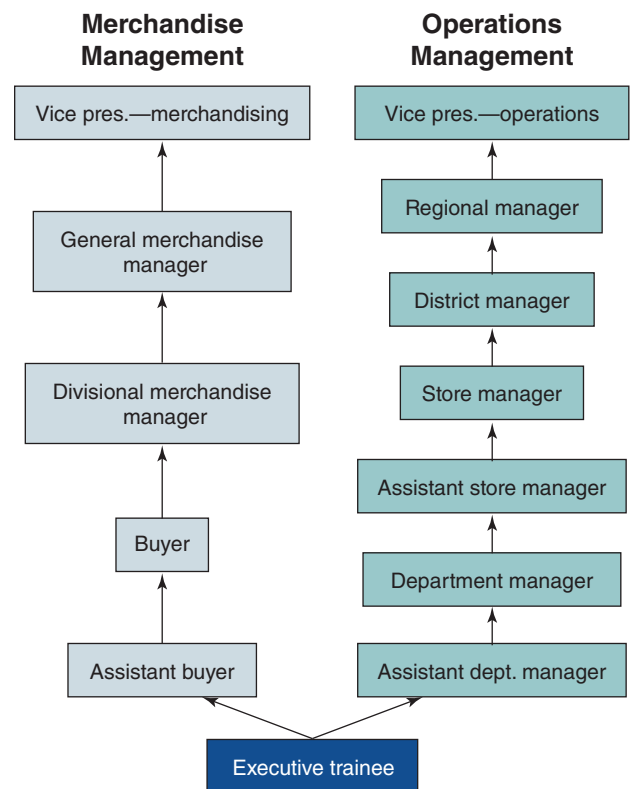
People who want to pursue a career in fashion retailing should be outgoing, well organized, and able to handle figures and details well. They need energy and stamina, and the ability to move and think quickly. They must be able to get along well with others, and work under stress. Likewise, excellent grooming and a sense of fashion are important. Good leadership abilities and self-confidence enable advancement.

A professional retail career requires a postsecondary program in fashion merchandising. Courses include product planning and development, marketing, sales promotion, fashion buying, merchandise math, and consumer motivation. Other subjects studied are retail operations, business law, computer science, and small store management. A knowledge of textiles, garment construction, advertising, economics, accounting, and psychology is also a recommendation. Retail selling experience is very valuable.

Most large retailers offer management-training programs for those with college degrees. In large retail organizations, there are two main career paths for professional employees. One is the *merchandise management track*, concerned with merchandise planning and buying. The other is the *operations management track*, concerned with sales force management and retail site operations. Employees start both of these as executive trainees, after finishing their formal educations.

Executive (management) trainee candidates interview for management track careers shortly before they graduate from college. Retail managers select them carefully for their limited openings. These candidates must be serious about having retailing as a career and willing to learn the business from the ground up. Executive-trainee programs exist with all large retailers. The organized programs last between six months and two years.

Executive trainees learn about the company's branches, selling departments, nonselling jobs, cost control, and promotional techniques. They receive training in the areas of supervising and motivating salespeople, sales techniques, customer service, and merchandise classification and presentation. They also learn about pricing, time management, and reports and statistical analysis. Executive trainees receive a low salary during the training period, but may emerge as head of



Mary G. Wolfe

With a centralized organization, managers move up the merchandise career path or the operations track, depending on their interests, aptitudes, and skills.

stock, an assistant department manager, or an assistant buyer with medium pay. In several more years, depending on job performance, a candidate might advance to a buyer or other merchandising job, or become a department or store manager in the operations track.

Retail Sales Positions

The largest numbers of employees in most retail companies are involved with direct selling. *Retail salespeople*, often called *sales associates*, sell goods directly to customers. There are opportunities in every geographic location, with job openings resulting from turnover of employees. Retail sales tasks may happen on the selling floor of a store via computer or on the phone. Some people spend their entire careers in direct sales, while others move up to higher-level merchandising or store management jobs. Retailers often use the sales associate job as an entry-level position to evaluate employees for future advancement.

Salespeople are valuable retail employees. They meet the public and represent the company and its image to the outside world. In addition to good grooming, it is necessary for retail employees to get along with everyone, and always be courteous and pleasant. They must know every aspect of the company's merchandise and be quick to understand what customers do or do not want. Sales associates of upscale retailers are often advised to wear the company's clothing. They must have good communication skills and the ability to show, explain, and recommend merchandise in an enticing and enthusiastic way.

An expectation of sales associates in ready-to-wear departments may be to assemble various fashion looks for customers. They must find appropriate styles and sizes, show customers into the fitting rooms, and check with them periodically to see if the customer needs another size or style. They must also ensure the merchandise stays in good condition. Replenishing displays after selling merchandise is also a requirement.

Salespeople may assist in stock counts and suggest reorders of fast-selling items. They must be able to use the scanning and cash register equipment, compute sales tax, and handle cash, checks, or credit card transactions. They must have basic math skills and be able to give the right change, and be able to package the purchases neatly. They may also have to accept returns and refund money. Honesty, patience, and reliability are required.

Retail sales work can be tiring, with most of the time spent walking or standing. Good health and physical endurance are requirements. The job is sometimes available part-time or during holidays, summers, and school breaks. A high school diploma may be necessary for a permanent job.

New salespeople receive in-store training about procedures with credit and debit transactions, checkout computers, exchanges, and refunds. They are informed about stock arrangements and how to deal with specific situations that might occur. They get advice about what *to* say and *not* say to customers. Then, they work with an experienced salesperson until they are proficient with all tasks.

The pay for apparel sales work is generally low to medium. It may be based on an hourly wage, commission, or a combination of the two. Most salespeople must work some weekends, evenings, and holidays. Longer hours may be necessary during busy times, such as holiday seasons, special sales, and inventory time. A big advantage is the employee discount, offered by most employers, on merchandise bought from the company. Other benefits for full-time employees include paid vacation time, sick days, and insurance. The pleasant working surroundings are usually well lit, air-conditioned, and clean.

Sales work provides an excellent background for almost any higher-level job dealing with fashion. The training value of selling experience should not be underestimated. With good performance, a salesperson may advance to assistant buyer or head of stock. Higher positions usually require a college degree. All jobs that interface with customers are very important.

A *checkout cashier* does not sell, but rings up customer purchases, collects and records payments, makes change, and bags the items. This may be a high school graduate who has been trained by the retailer to use the checkout equipment—electronic cash register, credit card technology, security tag removal tool, etc. This entry-level job is readily available in self-service retail stores throughout the country, and is a good way to gain experience. Pay is low and requires a great deal of standing. Checkout cashiers must be honest and trustworthy. They must be thorough in performing their duties, and be friendly.

The Merchandise Management Career Track

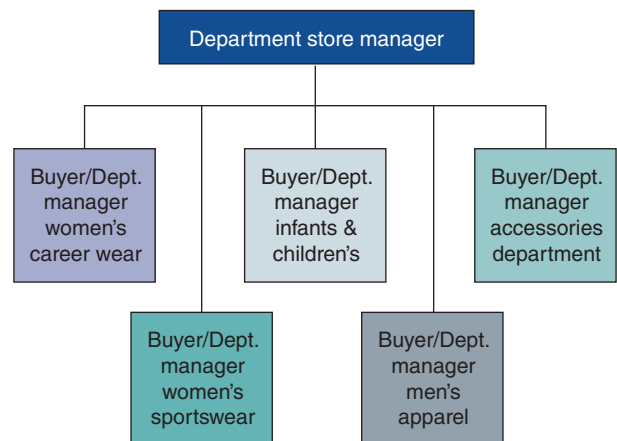
The merchandise management career track moves executive trainees to assistant buyer, buyer, and up through merchandise management positions. These jobs deal directly with decisions about the merchandise lines that are selected and sold in the stores where these employees spend their careers.

Retail Buyers

A retail buyer selects and buys the mix of goods a retail company sells. The job varies with different sizes and types of retail organizations. It is considered to be true merchandising.

In the traditional department store format, a *departmental buyer* plans and purchases goods for only his or her own department. He or she is also responsible for the sales and profits of the department. The buyer is the boss of the department's salespeople, and in smaller stores is the department manager. The buyer often has an office where he or she makes decisions about vendors, merchandise orders and delivery, ongoing inventory levels, sales and financial accounts, and other business matters.

Traditional Department Store Structure



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With the traditional department store structure, each buyer may be in charge of the merchandise, salespeople, finances, and all other activities of his or her department.

Departmental buyers instruct salespeople about new merchandise at meetings. They train employees to sell the goods using the best possible techniques. They decide when and how much to reduce the price of goods that are not selling well. They supervise the handling of complaints about merchandise and sometimes do direct selling on the floor to keep in touch with the views of customers. There are few departmental buyers anymore, because many independent department stores have closed or were purchased by large retail corporations.

Today's huge retail organizations have centralized the procedures of both buying merchandise and distributing goods to their retail sites. They use many *classification buyers*, also called *central buyers*, who specialize in only one category of goods. These buyers plan, choose, purchase, price, and promote one classification for all the branches in a chain or large retail organization. The classification might be women's sweaters, men's suits, or infant goods. The buyer becomes an expert in that category.

Most classification buyers work at a central headquarters buying office of the retail company. They may visit all major markets in the U.S., as well as Europe and Asia. Just like other types of buyers, they locate new and exciting sources of merchandise, make merchandise selections, and place orders. They reorder the goods that sell well; however, they are not responsible for publicizing or selling the merchandise. Thus, in large retail companies, the buying and selling functions are separate; however, the classification buyer does disseminate trend and other information to individual branches. Department managers (discussed later) oversee the selling and other tasks at these sites.

The Buying Job

The principles of buying are the same regardless of the type of merchandise being purchased or the organizational structure, including e-tailers. A buyer who understands the job should be able to adapt quickly to buying different price lines or types of merchandise. To do purchasing, all types of buyers must locate reliable vendors of goods. They go to market several times a year to visit manufacturers' showrooms in major cities or apparel marts. They might travel internationally to source unusual items from overseas manufacturers at good prices. Sometimes, they receive assistance from resident buyers in market cities they visit. Other times, sales representatives from manufacturers call on buyers at their offices. Buyers do a great deal of research, planning, and record keeping. With experience, responsibilities increase as buyers progress to more important classifications.

The retail buying procedure is changing. Collaboration and long-term partnerships between retailers and vendors have streamlined some of the buying duties. Mid-season decisions to reorder or not to reorder are based on electronic data collected about sales. Computer-based replenishment systems automatically record, analyze, and act on sales trends, short-term profit opportunities, and inventory levels. Buyers are spending less time interacting with retail customers, and doing more market planning and merchandise specifying.

Additionally, more retailers are stocking and selling private label merchandise, which involves product development or specification buying.

Buyers sometimes become *product managers*, responsible for developing, coordinating, executing, and delivering private label corporate programs for retail branded goods that will be sold through all channels of their company. They might become *product sourcers* who identify, research, open, and develop production sourcing areas and vendors that meet their company's long-term product supply needs. These individuals may do apparel sourcing from Europe, Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean, Central or South America, or the U.S.

College graduates in apparel design or apparel production might start their retail-related careers as *product development trainees* or certified technical designers at a central buying office of a large retail company. Beginning duties might include gathering fashion trend information, doing some overseas communications, and handling order follow-up details. Additionally, more complex duties include working with product development managers and buyers to coordinate styles, prepare specs, locate resources, approve samples, deal with clients, and negotiate deliveries. The final products must meet buyers' expectations of quality, price point, and timing.

All buyers must make sure the delivery of orders from vendors is on time and ready to sell, often arriving in floor-ready condition. Buyers authorize payment for goods, or issue instructions for returns, if defective. They make pricing decisions, see that items are properly marked, and deal with paperwork, computer data, and merchandising finances. They also help promote, display, and advertise the merchandise. Top-level buyers develop an enormous range of contacts with fashion writers, manufacturers, fabric companies, designers, and buying offices.

Buyers put in long, irregular hours, and work some weekends and holidays. They may get only short amounts of time off. The work is competitive, stimulating, exacting, and done under pressure; however, there is opportunity for travel to the fashion centers of the U.S. and world. There is satisfaction, too, when a company makes record sales with items the buyer chose or helped to develop. Buyers try to outdo the success of competitors as well as their own records from previous years. With success, a buyer can move to a larger department or a more important classification of goods. Eventually, he or she can move up the merchandise management ladder. Retail companies usually pick their top executives from the best buyers.

Buyers' Qualifications

Buyers should love fashion and have good taste to anticipate what styles and prices their customers will find acceptable. They must keep up with fashion trends to know when something is increasing in popularity or has peaked. They must have originality and good ideas of how to promote and



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Product development and design has become a very important function for retail buying with those employees overseeing all aspects of a private label line, coordinating the styles, fabrics, and quality with the company's standards and image.

sell merchandise. Buyers must also have good grooming and flair with their personal appearance, always dressing attractively and appropriately.

Buyers must have technical knowledge about the merchandise, as well as a keen business sense. They must be creative and able to organize their work and that of others. They must be outgoing, self-confident, and able to unite their workers into a cooperative team. Buyers must also have patience and tact to deal with manufacturer's representatives, coworkers, and customers.

Retail insiders say that buyers need strong feet and a sense of humor! Actually, they do need enthusiasm and dedication to their work, with good emotional and physical health. They need lots of energy and the ability to remain unruffled when working closely, under pressure, with many people. They need mature judgment and openness to other people's opinions. They must also be able to communicate well with many people, taking and giving directions efficiently and clearly.

Buyers must be good with figures and details to evaluate sales, margins, markdowns, and inventories. They must know what style numbers have been ordered and what items have been sold. Computer skills are essential, to interpret and react to trends indicated by the data.

Buyers are paid medium to good salaries that relate to their abilities and responsibilities. Fringe benefits include a discount on the company's merchandise, paid vacation time, and other fringe benefits.

To become a buyer, it is best to have a college degree in merchandising, fashion, or business. Experience, hard work, and proven talent are required. Most buyers are promoted from assistant buyer. Some have worked for fashion magazines before going into retail work. Others have had responsible jobs with fabric or apparel manufacturers.

Assistant and Associate Buyers

An *assistant buyer* is an entry-level job for a college graduate, usually after completing the management-training program. Assistant retail buyers learn the buying job by helping to present merchandise to retail staffs at sales meetings and assisting with displays and advertising. They keep track of sales and inventories at branch stores, coordinating transfers of merchandise when needed. Sometimes, they go to market with the buyer to help select merchandise.

Assistant buyers help trace items during shipment, return unsatisfactory goods, and place reorders. They do clerical work for buyers, calculate markdowns, fill out reports, and step in during the buyer's absence. In these ways, they learn the buying techniques and sources of goods. Sometimes, an *associate buyer*, who has higher-level responsibilities, holds a position between assistant buyer and buyer. An associate buyer might do some merchandise development, marketing, and financial management for specific categories of goods.

Extremely large firms also have the job of *buyer's clerical*, a lower-level job that involves keeping accurate records, scheduling appointments, communicating by phone or electronics, and doing follow-up work. Assistant buyers, associate buyers, and buyer's clericals must be organized and have the ability

to carry out jobs accurately and quickly. They must communicate well, get along with everyone, and remain calm under pressure. Pay is low to medium.

Resident Buying Office Buyers

Resident buying office (RBO) buyers help their member retail firms do a better buying job, but have no responsibilities over retail sales or profits. They research wholesale markets and report on trends through written fashion news bulletins. Sometimes, they present merchandise clinics or previews of items of one or more leading resources. They recommend suppliers, arrange appointments, and get samples for buyers to see before making purchasing decisions. They may visit vendors in the market with member buyers. If requested, RBO buyers make some buying decisions for their members, as well as placing reorders. They follow up on deliveries, adjustments, and complaints about merchandise.

RBO buyers should have excellent communication skills. They must be able to handle work under pressure and manage several tasks at the same time. They must have a highly developed sense of fashion, both personally and professionally. RBO buyers work regular weekday hours during most of the year, but have a hectic schedule during market weeks. Their offices are located in major fashion cities.

Merchandise Managers

A *merchandise manager* coordinates and manages the merchandise of a group of classification buyers or retail departments. Merchandise managers compete with each other for larger sales and profits, and try to beat their own previous records so their parts of the business grow and prosper. They search out new and different sources of items and try to be creative in developing new merchandise ideas or special retail departments.

Merchandise managers usually receive promotions after proving their hard work and abilities in lower jobs for a long time. Retail buyers often receive promotions to these positions. The managers act as consultants and teachers by sharing knowledge and ideas with employees under them. They must gain and keep the respect of employees at all levels in the company, with patience, diplomacy, and enthusiasm. The responsibility, prestige, and pay are high.

Since some feel the efficient central buying system is not responsive to various customers or individual geographic locations, many retailers have moved to category management for higher sales and profits. *Category managers* are management employees who use data and analytics for strategic decision making to choose goods that satisfy customer needs in specific locations. As entrepreneurial retail buyers, they turn data into information and actionable plans to oversee business units that customize merchandise and service for individual retailers, to better satisfy those local



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The category management process involves managing categories of goods as business units and customizing them by location, to satisfy customer needs.

needs. They focus on product category results for higher company sales and profits, rather than just procuring general brands. It is sometimes hard for traditional buyers to change to the ways of category management, since the job involves more strategic planning and analytical analysis of electronic data.

In large companies, merchandise managers and category managers work directly under the divisional merchandise manager. In smaller retail organizations, these jobs are the same as the divisional merchandise manager. A *divisional merchandise manager (DMM)* supervises a group of buyers and/or coordinates the merchandise of several related departments, divisions, or stores to maximize profits. A *division* is a segment of the business, divided according to customer or merchandise types. Examples are women's ready-to-wear or men's casual wear.

Divisional merchandise managers serve as liaisons between upper management and buyers in presenting and interpreting the company merchandising policies. These managers have probably been successful buyers for many years. They advise buyers about budget control, and work out problems with vendors and confer with them about market conditions. They oversee merchandise distribution to their group, plan new departments for stores, and implement plans requested by higher management.

In most retail organizations, all divisional merchandise managers report to a *general merchandise manager (GMM)*. This high executive is responsible for the total retail merchandising operation. The GMM is management's link to the divisional merchandise managers and buyers. In smaller organizations, the GMM is the *vice president of merchandising*. In large firms, the GMM reports to the vice president of merchandising. The GMM represents the top merchandising management in determining, interpreting, and executing merchandising policies. General merchandise managers guide those below them to achieve the best profits for the company.

Fashion Director

A retail company's *fashion director* makes sure that all buyers, fashion departments, web divisions, and stores of a large retail business are up to date on the latest trends. Just as in the textile industry, fashion directors combine what fashion forecasters say with their own tastes, ideas, and instincts to provide advice about buying or product development. They inform buyers and merchandise managers about new fashions, and tie the merchandise of retail departments together to create a fashion whole. They make sure the company's fashion image is projected to the public. When featuring a color or style of apparel, accessories must be available, too, for complete wardrobe selections. Sometimes, fashion directors also run training seminars to update sales personnel. They do not work with budgeting or inventory control.

Fashion directors also assist with promotions of the goods, assembling and harmonizing what goes on display. The fashion director suggests a theme for each season to the display manager, with garment and accessories chosen accordingly. He or she also gives direction for publicity and advertisements, to emphasize the right goods in the best ways. When presenting fashion shows, the retailer's fashion director usually supervises the preparations and serves

as commentator, pointing out fashion news to the audience. This person tries to make retail employees and customers excited about the new fashions.

Retail fashion directors cover worldwide fashion centers to acquire fashion information in advance. They attend trade shows to see new ideas and investigate product research and development. Then they develop buying and selling strategies for all parts of the complete *fashion story*, and transmit that to the employees who buy, promote, and sell the goods. This is time-consuming, demanding, glamorous, and challenging. It requires long hours with considerable pressure. Yet, the excitement of this executive position has stiff competition—with many aspiring retail people seeking this position.

To be a fashion director, you must be familiar with fashion cycles and understand what affects consumer acceptance or rejection. A highly developed fashion sense is required, as well as an awareness of style lines that leading designers will be using. You must know the contents of all fashion magazines—both American and overseas sources. You must be aware of changing social patterns, and be resourceful and flexible.

Fashion directors must have poise, good grooming, enthusiasm, and creativity. They must be able to schedule their time well and make sound decisions, while adapting to many situations. They must be able to work tactfully with others and be comfortable and confident about speaking to large audiences. Most have had lots of successful retail experience, and they are still selling at the executive level. They may have moved up from assistant fashion director or buyer.

An *assistant fashion director* helps the fashion director with details. He or she sets up appointments, makes phone calls, books models, and runs errands. The assistant helps put on fashion shows, write fashion bulletins, and observe and promote market trends, such as through social media. This scarce, competitive job is only available in large retail firms. Excellent grooming and a keen sense of fashion are required. Poise, self-confidence, and a good speaking voice are also important.



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An assistant fashion director helps the fashion director with details, such as monitoring social media and possibly producing a fashion blog that promotes trends of the retail company.

The Operations Management Career Track

Operations employees do not buy or manage merchandise. Instead, they manage the physical operations of running stores, catalog printing and mailings, and set-up and maintenance of websites.

For the retail operations management track, an executive trainee would first become an assistant department manager. An *assistant department manager* helps the department manager run the area smoothly. He or she might arrange merchandise on the selling floor, manage markdowns, and transfer

merchandise. This person may also try to spend a great deal of time on the selling floor to determine customer preferences before moving up to a department manager.

A *department manager* runs a department or group of departments (*group department manager*) according to the framework of the company's overall plan. This person is the liaison between the buyer and the sales staff, providing feedback about sales and inventory. The department manager sees that goods are arranged well on the selling floor, merchandise counts are accurate, and reorders are made when needed for the assigned area. He or she trains and supervises the salespeople, opens and closes the registers, does employee scheduling, and handles customer complaints.

Department managers try to maximize volume and profit, while maintaining their company's reputation for quality and customer service. This competitive position usually reports to the store manager or assistant store manager. Previous experience in sales and lower management jobs is desirable. The salary is most often in the medium range.

Assistant store managers help in all phases of store operations, including sales, display, inventory control, and accounting. These positions are often available with specialty chains.

A *store manager* is the top person in charge of every aspect of one store's operations. Through subordinate managers, he or she organizes and directs the stocking and selling of goods, and the hiring, training, and scheduling of workers. Store managers are in charge of overall customer service, promotional activities, financial accounts, and community relations. They negotiate contracts for services, such as security and maintenance. They must solve any large or storewide problems, but also receive the credit when things go well. They give instructions and guidance to those who report to them about expected results and procedures.

Store managers must have initiative, lots of energy, and leadership abilities to deal with many people in a friendly, yet firm, manner. They should have a good memory, communication skills, and business sense. They need an outgoing personality and fashionable appearance. Store managers may have to relocate if transferred to different geographic locations. They sometimes work evenings, weekends, and holidays; however, with dependable and well-trained personnel, the store should run smoothly without their constant presence. The salary is medium or good, especially with bonuses for profitable results. The manager generally receives this position after serving as a successful assistant store manager.

For department store organizations that are growing ever larger because of consolidation, the job of *branch coordinator* is becoming more important. This person oversees all the branches to ensure that their stock, selling techniques, and general operations coordinate with retailer's corporate policies. An individual gains this executive position after much retail and management experience.

At a higher level, specialty store chains would promote a successful store manager to *district manager*, responsible for growth and volume of possibly up to a dozen stores. Above the district manager is a *regional manager*, who oversees several districts. The regional manager might have responsibility for up to 75 or 80 stores. He or she reports to the vice president of stores.

Average annual salaries for retail merchandise and operations management personnel differ. Merchandising jobs generally pay higher salaries than operations management, but also require more fashion aptitude, flair, and decision-making pressure. Large corporations pay executives more than small companies because they have more responsibilities and make complex decisions.

Other Retail Employees

There are many other important tasks that must be accomplished to help retail stores operate smoothly and efficiently. One area of responsibility is stock keeping.

Stock-keeping Employees

In general, stock keeping involves receiving goods, protecting them, and controlling their movements. After stock arrives, some goes onto the selling floor and extra stock is kept behind the scenes in the stockroom.

- *Receiving* tasks include checking incoming goods against the numbers of each item ordered, assessing quality, making any necessary adjustments, checking or attaching tags, and authorizing payment of invoices.
- *Protecting* involves securing and properly storing and placing the merchandise for sale to prevent shoplifting, internal theft, and damage.
- *Controlling* the goods includes sales analysis to evaluate which items are selling rapidly or slowly, transferring merchandise between the retailer's sites, and handling returned items.

A *stock clerk* is an entry-level position for someone without college training. People in this job receive merchandise from delivery trucks that bring the apparel to the site. They open containers, unpack items, and compare delivery records with the actual goods that are received. They check the condition of items and file a report if they find any damage or soiling. Then, the stock clerk enters new stock items into computerized stock control lists, often by scanning bar codes on the cartons and/or the items.

Stock clerks prepare the merchandise for selling, with price tags or hangers if needed. Then, the merchandise is taken to the correct selling locations and stockroom records are updated accordingly. Stock clerks may also place the items on shelves or racks in the sales area to keep all displays neatly filled. They help count items during inventory time and send back returned merchandise to the manufacturer. They must always know what is on hand and be able to locate it. Stock clerks also fill special orders and keep the stockroom in the proper order.

The job of stock clerk is methodical, with careful, quick, and accurate handling of merchandise. It can be physically tiring because it involves much lifting, bending, and pushing. It requires good health, stamina, and fine eyesight, as well as dependability, a helpful attitude, and legible handwriting. A knowledge of math, filing, and computer systems is helpful; however, no higher education beyond high school is necessary. The retail company

provides training in their procedures, records, and forms. Hours are regular, and wages are low; however, regular benefits are often provided and there is usually an employee discount on purchases.

The *head of stock* is the employee in charge of the merchandise for a given department or area. He or she keeps stock on the selling floor in good order, maintains merchandise in reserve, and monitors inventory levels. This job is sometimes equated to assistant departmental buyer. It is an entry-level position for a college graduate, or someone who was promoted from stock clerk or salesperson. The head of stock reports to the department manager or buyer.

Large retailers have *distribution planners* (or *distribution managers*) at their central or regional distribution centers who keep track of the thousands of units of merchandise through computerized records. Breakdowns of each style are done by sizes and colors for distribution among their branch or chain stores, or shown in mail-order catalogs or on the company's website. Distribution planners communicate with buyers and merchandise coordinators to allocate various needed items of stock, and immediately update records of all movements of goods. This is an entry-level job for a college graduate of business or merchandising. Strong knowledge of fashion, math, and data analysis is required. Higher jobs are *distribution center manager* and *corporate director of distribution planning*.

Additional Retail Jobs

There are many other important jobs with retailers. You will learn more about visual merchandisers and digital commerce specialists later—both of which are very important to retailing and are increasing in demand.

Training supervisors give orientation classes in large retail companies, to new salespeople. Training supervisors might also teach current salespeople about new equipment or procedures. Sometimes, they stress new fashion colors, styles, and promotional plans. Training supervisors also help plan and run the company's executive training programs. Smaller companies may combine these duties with another supervisory job.

Training supervisors receive medium or good salaries. A college degree may be required, and retail experience is necessary. Training supervisors must be self-confident, organized, and businesslike. They must be able to meet people easily and communicate ideas clearly. The job combines office work, teaching, and promotional activities.

Loss prevention managers protect company assets and improve profitability by developing and implementing security and safety programs for employees, customers, and merchandise. They are responsible for preventing theft, vandalism, accidents, and injury. They must be able to communicate effectively and work well with retail and law enforcement personnel. They must be discrete, act professionally, and maintain confidentiality at all times. Along with a college degree, attention to detail, acute observation, and analytical skills are essential.

As in other industries, retail companies also need the following employees:

- *Marketing*: Specialized marketing jobs include a company's *director of marketing* and *marketing associates*. They work together as an internal

marketing team rather than directly with retail merchandise or customers. Marketing associates do administrative tasks, such as identifying new revenue opportunities, analyzing gathered consumer behavior data, and coordinating with advertising materials, campaigns, and events. These employees must have good computer and communication skills, and be able to keep organized records. They must prepare regular sales forecasting reports, create effective marketing reports, and monitor competitors' marketing activities.

- *Human resources (personnel) director*: This manager oversees the hiring and benefits of employees. Sometimes, this person must also dismiss an employee who has done an unsatisfactory job, is unreliable, or has been dishonest. The human resources director has probably not advanced through direct selling jobs, but must know what tasks are done and what qualifications each job requires.
- *Customer service managers*: These people serve as intermediaries between their retail company and its customers. They handle complaints, special orders, and home delivery. They also oversee courtesy needs, such as credit purchases, gift-wrapping, returns, and exchanges. They investigate and try to solve problems that consumers have with the company or its merchandise, to keep customers happy. They make sure each salesperson treats shoppers fairly. They also keep records of all matters, and guard customers against illegal business practices. The manager must have experience with the retailer, talent for dealing effectively with all kinds of people, and the ability to solve problems. The salary is medium or good.
- *Alterations experts*: Retailers that do not send out their alteration work employ alterations experts. These people take in, let out, and reshape garments that do not fit the purchasing customer properly. This employee must be proficient at all garment fit/adjustment techniques and sewing procedures. They may learn such skills from high school or technical school courses, plus lots of sewing experience. The pay is low to medium.
- *Garment fitters*: If an outside alteration service is used, a garment fitter may be available to mark or pin changes wherever they are required. The garment fitter records the alterations and attaches specific instructions to the garment.
- *Comparison and secret shoppers*: These employees compare the prices, services, and displays and advertisements of competitors with that of their own company. They note the amount of merchandise and its fashion level. They make purchases within their company (without the salesclerk knowing they are an employee) and from other retailers to evaluate sales and service techniques. They keep company managers informed to help anticipate and eliminate problems, and expand good programs.

Sometimes, this is part-time employment or a temporary job. There are limited positions available, and pay is quite low. No higher education is necessary, but some retail experience is desirable to evaluate selling techniques, merchandise quality, and price value. Comparison and secret shoppers should be able to communicate clearly and be organized enough to evaluate their findings into meaningful conclusions.



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Personal shoppers are very important to select items for busy career people and those who need outfits for special events but do not have time to shop for themselves.

- *Personal shoppers:* Also called fashion consultants, these employees select merchandise in response to customers' mail, text, e-mail, or phone requests. At other times, these style guides accompany customers in a store to offer fashion advice and help them choose the best items for their needs. Thus, personal shoppers must be familiar with current fashion trends and the standards of dress for various professions and lifestyles. They must have a pleasant, tactful personality, as well as the ability to listen and respond to requests. Education beyond high school may not be required, but extensive retail experience and a flair for fashion are necessary.
- *Quality assurance testers:* These employees evaluate if merchandise meets a firm's established quality standards. Only a few large companies maintain their own product testing laboratories.

Promotion Careers

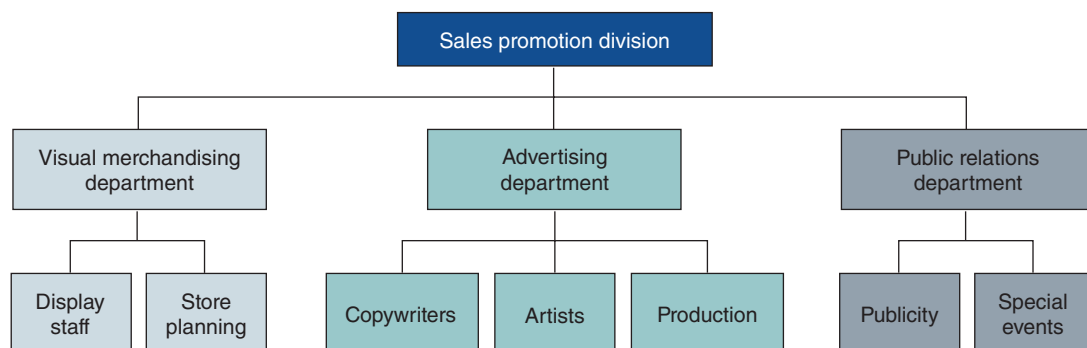
Just imagine! If you had a career in fashion promotion, you would be able to show the excitement of new trends to the public! Fashion promotion is the indirect selling function of merchandising. It includes modeling, photography, fashion writing, illustration, audiovisual work, and website design. It creates market demand among the general buying public for the latest garments and accessories. For retailers, it builds the company's fashion image, increases store traffic, fosters goodwill with the community, and sells merchandise.

A network of supporting auxiliary businesses to the fashion industries do fashion promotion. Promotion activities are used to some degree by all fashion firms. Sales promotion functions of large retail companies are often divided into visual merchandising, advertising, and public relations departments.

Communicating Fashion

Fashion promotion work communicates the latest in fashion merchandise to business people and consumers. Many exciting, challenging, and rewarding jobs are available in these career areas.

Retail Sales Promotion Organization



Mary G. Wolfe

Many specialized jobs are required for retail promotional activities. They all work together in a coordinated team effort.

Modeling

As you know, fashion models wear garments and accessories to show how they look when being worn. Modeling is a combination of advertising and performing. The model must stand, turn, and walk to demonstrate the features of the clothing. Models also pose for photographs.

Several types of modeling jobs exist. *Runway models* work in front of live audiences at collection showings, restaurants, retail stores, community events, seminars, on television, or at trade shows or conventions. They receive pay by the hour or for each show in which they perform.

Some models work in design areas and showrooms of designers or manufacturers. *Fit models* do the mannequin-type work, and aid fashion designers by wearing and commenting on the fit of designs before approval and mass production. They try on design samples to finalize the fit and design for production and management approval of items in the new line. During sales presentations, they model the finished garments to sell the line to retail buyers. These models are hired to fit the proportions of the company's clothing. They work full-time, regular hours, and receive salaries and company benefits. Companies may hire extra part-time models during the buying seasons.

Photographic models pose in front of cameras for pictures used in press releases or advertisements of manufacturers and other firms. Their photographs may appear in fashion magazines, trade publications, newspapers, and pattern catalogs. They also model for mail-order catalogs, direct-mail fliers, garment packaging, billboards, and websites. Photographic models are paid by the hour, day, or assignment.

Photographic models must be photogenic and responsive to direction. They must be able to convey pleasure, surprise, or other feelings. They may work long hours in hard-to-hold poses under bright lights. Slimness may be important since photos can make the model's body look heavier than it really is. Typical models are young and tall, and most are in their 20s. There is also a growing demand for older or curvy models, or models with disabilities, representing how people really are. Some very young models are needed to model children's clothes.

Because of the desire for youth, a modeling career may only last a short time. For female models, the average working time is about 10 years. The few top international supermodels may then put their names on clothing and accessory lines, TV shows, book deals, and other profitable projects. For male models, average working time is about 20 years. Models should realize they might have to go into another line of work in the future. Modeling can be a stepping-stone to other apparel, entertainment, or fame recognition careers.

Because of pressure to maintain a certain image for modeling, eating disorders and drug use sometime develop. These are extremely damaging to the body, energy level, and ability to work. They harm the chances to be a model. To maintain their health and fitness, models should get plenty of sleep, eat balanced meals, and exercise regularly. They must be ready for a job at any time, and able to adapt to unusual schedules. Models need perfect grooming, a fashion sense, and good posture and appearance. They must have physical stamina, as well as determination and patience. They should have poise,

style, and flair to move effectively in the clothes they wear. They also need self-confidence and pleasant, outgoing personalities.

Professional modeling is very competitive, demanding work. It can be glamorous, however, employment is often unpredictable and earnings can be irregular. Fees increase as a model becomes more experienced and better known.

To go into modeling, you might want to consider enrolling in an accredited modeling school. There you would learn techniques of how to stand, pose, and move properly. You would study posture, speech, hairstyles, and makeup. Additional training or experience in dance, drama, art, fashion design, and retail sales is also helpful, but none of this guarantees a modeling career. Make sure the school has a job placement service before you decide to attend. Thoroughly read any contracts you are asked to sign.

A modeling employment agency arranges job opportunities and interviews for models. Often, modeling agencies also train models. Registering with a modeling agency requires several enlarged, unretouched photos that show you in various poses. One should be full-length, one close up, and at least one smiling. You will fill out an application form listing your name, address, age, height without shoes, weight, and body measurements.

Although New York City has the greatest number of modeling jobs, they are also available in most other major cities. Large businesses generally hire models through agencies; however, you may apply directly to advertising agencies, retail companies, or apparel manufacturers. In each case, include photographs and a résumé, listing training, experience, and personal specifications.

Fashion Photography

Fashion photographers take moving and still pictures that show fashionable clothes and accessories looking their best. They also try to express moods through the settings and compositions of their photos. They use creative props and interesting backgrounds. Photographers use digital equipment, may take pictures of fashion apparel on live models, or still shots of fashion merchandise.

When using a model, a fashion photographer often tries to make the picture look like the model is in motion. The model moves and poses for many pictures. After viewing onscreen, the photographer chooses the best ones.

Photography is one of the most flexible forms of artistic expression in fashion communication. Photo studios, advertising agencies, publications, and large retailers all hire photographers. Their work may require some travel. They may work as salaried employees or as self-employed freelancers. Only top talent receives top pay.

A fashion photographer should have an interest in all art forms, fashion trends, and people. Besides talent and imagination, photographers must have sound technical training. They must know lighting techniques, effects with black-and-white and color images, and how to use professional cameras and digital equipment. Knowledge of editing and finishing procedures and computer image production is also a requirement.

Fashion photographers need to take photography classes after high school to learn the technical aspects of photography. They should also study fashion display and advertising design. Photographers must prepare a portfolio to show prospective employers the types and quality of work they are capable of doing.

Assistant photographers are apprentices getting on-the-job experience under professional photographers. They test the lighting, take sample photos, and help prepare sets and props for backgrounds. When they have proven their technical abilities, they also work with the equipment to produce the finished images.

Photo stylists book models, accessorize apparel, obtain props, pin up hems, iron garments, and pick up and return merchandise. They work in photography studios, advertising agencies, or as freelancers. They must understand both fashion and photography, and may work long hours during demanding times. They need enthusiasm, stamina, flexibility, resourcefulness, a high tolerance for stress, and a strong sense of style and color.

Fashion Writing

Fashion journalists write, edit, and pass along fashion information through the mass media. They may work fashion magazines, newspapers, websites, and sometimes for trade journals. Fashion authors might also write books on topics, such as wardrobe planning, colors for individuals, fictionalized fashion novels, or fashion-related textbooks.

A *fashion reporter* or *fashion editor* for a newspaper may write a daily or weekly column, or periodic feature stories. He or she may write about fashions seen at important social and cultural events. Some fashion writers do freelance work part-time from home, or write their own fashion blogs. For monthly magazines, full-time writers usually do more than one article, which often features several fashion photos or illustrations.

Media kits from manufacturers, advertisers, or trade organizations sometimes provide sources of information for fashion journalists. Media kits contain photos, along with descriptions or short articles about a company's latest designs. Generally, fashion writers write their articles based on their own research. They gather material from personal interviews, phone calls, and fashion events. Some fashion news items come via the Internet.

A writer often covers a specific subject area, such as fabrics, accessories, knitwear, or couture designers. Sometimes, the writer serves as a technical consultant to other staff members, photographers, and advertising people. Writers may travel to market centers to see the latest fashions during fashion press weeks. They must keep in touch with key people in textile production, fashion design, and apparel manufacturing.

Fashion writers must be creative and write precisely, while under pressure to meet deadlines. They must research and explain the latest interesting and useful information to the proper audience. Their writing must always be clear and thorough.

Members of the fashion press must have a flair for writing and a keen sense of fashion. They must keep up with changes in the industry and have

the ability to spot newsworthy trends or feature material. They must be able to organize their time and work well alone. They must also be outgoing to arrange and conduct interviews. Writers must be able to think and act quickly, to obtain as much information as possible from each interview.

Becoming a fashion writer requires a college degree in journalism, combined with merchandising, apparel, and advertising courses. Computer skills are essential. You should also read fashion publications to analyze the styles of various writers. When you apply to publications that allot space to fashion, become familiar with the magazine, newspaper, or website beforehand. Take appropriate samples of your writing with you or submit them online if requested. This will point out your specific qualifications that blend well with that publication.

Beginning salaries in fashion journalism are low or medium, with increases for education, experience, and ability. Fringe benefits vary among employers. Working hours may be irregular, depending on events to cover and deadlines. The work is exciting and offers challenges and variety; however, lots of competition exists for a limited number of jobs, most of which are located in large cities.

Copywriters

Copywriters compose the word messages that describe items for promotion in various media. They write the information as editorial text, or as blurbs that accompany photographs or illustrations. Often, they must describe fashion items accurately with as few words as possible, such as for mail-order catalogs, websites, advertisements, or publicity materials. Copywriters work from essential information they receive, such as description, price, fabric credits, or stores or websites where available.

Copywriters should be creative, mature, and able to translate ideas into words quickly and under pressure. They must be thorough, flexible, and able to spot trends and identify resources. They also need good computer skills. A degree in English, advertising, or journalism, with a fashion emphasis, helps to develop these attributes. Trade schools also offer training in advertising and communications. When applying for a job, a copywriter should have a portfolio with examples of his or her written copy.

Editors

Editors usually supervise fashion writers and copywriters. They might be in charge of one or more departments of a publication, such as fabrics or accessories. They should have extensive experience in their fields of expertise. They are administrators, as well as journalists, who set policies and give assignments. They sometimes supervise photography sessions. Editors are responsible for the accurate and creative presentation of all information to the correct readership audience. Eventually, an editor might advance to become editor-in-chief of a fashion magazine.

The activities of fashion editors vary according to the importance that each publication and its readers attach to fashion information. For large publications, the fashion editor works with a fashion staff that might include photographers, illustrators, and writers. The editor is the publication's authority



Alena Veza/Shutterstock.com

Anna Wintour, Editor-in-chief of Vogue U.S. magazine, attends all important designer collection showings around the world and decides what content should be featured in the magazine that she heads.

on all aspects of fashion and apparel. He or she interprets fashion news, influences the acceptance of fashions, and advises manufacturers about the fashion interests of the publication's readers.

Editors must have imagination, integrity, vision, and administrative skills. They should be confident and alert at important social events. In addition to flair and proven ability, they must have a business mind, know the apparel industries, and have excellent organizational skills. Editing is hard work; however, most editors have high prestige and high to extremely high pay, depending on the job level and publication.

Fashion Illustration

Fashion illustrators draw garments that others have designed and produced, showing complete accessorized outfits. Illustrators try to show the good points of apparel to promote and sell the fashions. Retail companies, advertising agencies, and pattern companies mainly employ fashion illustrators. Some fashion publications, design or display studios, and forecasting or buying offices also hire fashion illustrators. Textile and apparel manufacturers also employ fashion illustrators or sketchers.

Most fashion drawing is now done by *digital illustrators* who use tablets with a digital pen or drawing tool, with different options of CAD hardware and software that enable the user to make free-hand drawings digitally. Each tablet has a pressure-sensitive surface that can provide soft to bold lines and thin to wide lines, as well as shading. With training, digital illustration quickly comes to feel natural to the artist, as long as he or she already has developed drawing talent. Drawings can be changed, saved, printed, or sent electronically to others who need to view them.

Fashion illustrators who work for a pattern company give emphasis to seams and trimming details of the apparel. This gives the sewer an idea of the construction required. For fashion magazines or trade publications, the illustrator might point out trends or garment features the fashion writers are describing. For retailing and advertising uses, the illustrator might add exotic background touches to catch the attention of viewers and tempt them to buy what they see. Illustrations done for forecasters show trend predictions. Buying office illustrators draw the latest fashions available from manufacturers and wholesalers, to show their member retailers. Those employed by textile firms illustrate fashionable uses for their company's line of fabrics. In manufacturing firms, the drawings often record a season's line.

To be a fashion illustrator, you must be artistic and have knowledge of fabrics and fashions. You need flair, initiative, and determination, and ability to work quickly under the pressure of deadlines. You should keep up with current art and fashion news through trade publications, magazines, art and costume exhibits, fashion shows, and displays.

Competition for illustration jobs is keen, with most opportunities being in big cities. When seeking a fashion illustration job, you will need a portfolio with examples of your best work. Your illustrations should be of interest to the type of employer you contact. The salary for these jobs is generally

medium, but depends on the person's talent, as well as the size or type of firm. Illustrators usually work regular hours.

To succeed in this field, you should further develop your natural artistic talent at a technical school or college. In these programs, art courses concentrate on understanding and drawing the human figure. There is also training in advertising design, all art media, the use of art studio equipment, and computer illustration. Many people develop their own distinctive styles of illustrating. Some become freelance illustrators after gaining on-the-job experience and making many good contacts. Freelance work can be more challenging, satisfying, and profitable than staff work, but is usually less steady.

Audiovisual Work

Fashion-related *audiovisual work* involves television, multimedia presentations, websites, and radio. Job activities for those behind the camera include planning programs, writing scripts, getting props, and producing the presentations. These workers must have knowledge of fashion as well as all areas of communications. They must be able to write descriptive, informational dialogue quickly and accurately, and present ideas clearly and simply.

Other jobs are available for those who are in front of the camera or who appear in the presentations. They must be confident and outgoing, while sounding natural and sincere. They should have a pleasing voice and appearance.

The audio and visual productions may be local or national commercials, promotional fashion videos, interviews with designers and runway footage from collection showings, telecommunications shopping programs, or entertainment talk shows with fashion themes. The productions might be used to sell products, educate consumers or students, train or update industry people, or strictly for entertainment.

For audiovisual work, you must have good organizational skills and be detail-oriented. You must deal with tight schedules, frequent deadlines, long rehearsals, and irregular schedules. To be successful, you should be able to meet and get along with people under all circumstances and work with poise and self-confidence. It helps to stay up-to-date on new fashion trends.

A degree in audiovisual communications is a recommendation for this work. Courses in writing, speech, drama, and the use of digital equipment and the latest technology are especially necessary. You may also enter this field through experience in fashion, advertising, or journalism. Employment might be with a broadcast station, an advertising agency, a marketing firm, a video production company, or an Internet website.

Digital Commerce

Digital commerce specialists build customer-facing presentations that feature their company's marketing and sales information, recommend improvements for new electronic releases to customers, and do all other digital promotional activities to maximize internal and external communications. In some companies, the head of this function has the title of *director of e-commerce*. It

requires organizational, communication, and creativity skills combined with always keeping up with and using the latest technology.

Information technology (IT) employees work in the digital commerce (or e-commerce) field as specialized programmers and software engineers. Almost all retailers have their own websites, since promotion on the Internet is very important.

Website designers plan, design, create, and continually update the company's sites. They must try to explain points succinctly and show merchandise well, especially in ways that do not take too long to load on mobile devices. Surveys indicate that mobile shoppers will abandon apps or websites that do not load within a few seconds. The website must also allow for fast and easy ordering, or shoppers will click off. If working for omnichannel retailers, web designers must be able to tie all functions and channels of the company together electronically. Sometimes, promotional *pop-ups* are prepared to appear on different sites, to draw consumer attention, and all areas of social media have IT importance.

At retail companies, IT employees must select, buy, install, and maintain the computer systems used by all personnel for the many different tasks accomplished. Small retailers usually hire outside experts for website design. Large companies have their own staff to design their web pages, insert images and videos, program links into the system, and take care of other details.

Since this field is in demand, pay can be high for website designers. A college degree in computer science is a recommendation. Artistic talent and organizational skills are also necessary. The work is stimulating for the right type of person.

Visual Merchandising

Visual merchandisers plan and implement the visual merchandising strategy, creating appealing and eye-catching displays throughout a retail site. This includes producing floor plans, signs, interior displays, window displays, and special promotional displays that advance the image and products of the retailers. The intention of visual merchandising is to show customers what merchandise is available and how items can be combined and accessorized. Each retail wall, counter, rack, or display should be spectacular to encourage consumers to select and buy merchandise. If retailers do not have their own visual merchandising department, they can contract with a freelance service to do their displays at scheduled times. Large chain organizations draw up visual merchandising plans at their central headquarters and send them with needed props, signage, and instructions to local store managers for implementation.

The work of a visual merchandiser helps to increase sales by getting shoppers' attention and providing a wonderful shopping experience. Visual merchandisers must be able to work within a budget, communicate with buying personnel and suppliers, and oversee the production of displays. They must be knowledgeable about lifestyle and design trends, and be able to design and execute displays that promote seasonal themes, new products, and special

events, as well as have proficiency in using digital design tools. A college degree in visual or fashion merchandising is usually required for this management job. The pay for individual store visual merchandisers is good. *Visual merchandising assistants* receive medium pay.

Display managers (also called visual managers) are head employees of retail display staffs who oversee all display work, often working for retail stores. When planning displays, they consult with the company's buyers and merchandise managers, and advertising and public relations people. Like other merchandisers, they must know what to feature, to whom, and why and when to present it. They might emphasize holiday seasons, a new color, a fashion trend, or a community event. They prepare rough sketches, outline ideas, and make digital drawings or models for the display staff to follow, staying within a certain budget. They sometimes arrange for television monitors to show videotapes for customers to view in particular locations.

Display designers (also called display stylists) and *window dressers* (also called window trimmers) do the interior displays and windows. These designers must understand techniques with lighting and props. They must have a good imagination and know how to use design elements and principles. Knowledge of carpentry and sewing is helpful, as well as merchandising, accessorizing, lettering, and painting.

You can learn the visual merchandising skills of presenting merchandise in the most appealing ways in display design programs at career/technical schools and colleges. Schools with curriculums in visual merchandising supplement their design theory courses with the practice of actually creating interior and window displays. An apprenticeship with a display designer, window dresser, or manager usually follows education.



Kzenon/Shutterstock.com

To become a display designer, education is usually needed beyond high school, as well as time spent as an apprentice.

Fashion Advertising

People in fashion advertising try to attract and inform audiences to encourage them to buy products. They may work for retail companies, manufacturers, advertising agencies, or publications. To succeed, people in advertising must know the merchandise, as well as effective approaches to reach the right customers. They must formulate and follow complete advertising programs for products. There is a variety of jobs available in fashion advertising. Most jobs require enthusiasm, creativity, aggressiveness, and sharp digital skills.

Advertising Director

Advertising directors work for retail firms, supervising their companies' ad departments and publications. Similar jobs with manufacturing firms are called *marketing specialists*. Other advertising directors oversee projects and campaigns for publications and the various client accounts of advertising

agencies. All of them direct the planning and budgets of advertising and promotional campaigns. This job includes selecting the media and timing of print, broadcast, and online advertisements, overseeing the preparation of the ads, as well as supervising the creation of selling aids, labels, signs, and other advertising materials.

A retail advertising director coordinates the design and distribution of all of a retailer's newspaper ads, catalogs, online advertising, and other direct-mail pieces. He or she helps plan promotions, keeps track of each advertising buyer's budget, and supervises the art department.

The advertising director of a publication, such as a fashion magazine, is in charge of selling and arranging ad space in the publication. He or she interacts with the account executives at advertising agencies. This person also works with the advertising directors of individual firms to coordinate their advertising in the publication.

Advertising directors must have good organizational skills and administrative abilities to meet all deadlines. They need self-confidence, persuasiveness, and the ability to communicate well. They must be imaginative, alert, ambitious, and able to deal with creative people. Besides enthusiasm and physical stamina, they must have the ability to originate and develop ideas that are sound and practical, yet new and unusual. They must be capable of doing market research, media analysis, and mass communications planning.

Advertising directors usually have college degrees in liberal arts, including journalism, marketing, or advertising. They have taken courses in psychology, fashion, business, English, printing, photography, and art. They stay current with the latest advertising technology. This position requires both education and experience, with either an advertising agency or fashion promotion department. Advertising directors earn very high salaries, but work hard for their pay and status.

Account Executive

An advertising agency employee in charge of selling to and handling specific advertising accounts is an *account executive*. This person is the liaison between the ad agency and clients. Clients may be medium to large textile or apparel manufacturers, and small to medium retailers. Many large retailers have their own in-house advertising departments.

Account executives work closely with merchandising and marketing people from the businesses they represent. Some advertising agencies are devoted entirely to apparel, while other agencies have a fashion advisor on their staff.

Often ad agency account executives continue to represent the same businesses year after year. They relate the client's message to the creative staff, explaining client ideas and objectives, and spelling out exactly what the print or broadcast communications should communicate. They supervise and coordinate the development of total corporate advertising campaigns consisting of a series of ads and/or other promotional products. Usually, a campaign has a theme, with all advertising corresponding to it. The aim of these ads is to reach as many customers of the business and potential new customers as possible.

To maintain good working relationships with clients, account executives need to be personable, diplomatic, and sincere. They must be innovative, and up-to-date on the fashion news of the businesses they represent. They must be aware of consumer desires, able to identify target audiences, and know where to place ads to create the greatest impact.

Media Buyers

Media buyers select and buy the best media for clients' ads. They handle arrangements for broadcasting commercials on radio and TV, publishing ads in newspapers, magazines, and on the Internet, or mailing promotional materials directly to the public. Media buyers receive visits from media salespeople who try to convince them that their station or publication is the most effective. Media buyers bargain for the lowest rates and make deals for good advertising broadcast times and the best positions in publications for their clients.

Art Director

Art directors are sometimes called *advertising designers*. Ad agencies and retail firms generally employ art directors. Only a few art directors are employed by buying offices, textile producers, apparel manufacturers, and trade organizations.

Art directors conceptualize the ads for newspapers, magazines, direct-mail flyers, radio, television, signs, outdoor media, and websites. They try to design the best advertising for the budgeted price. In addition to advertisements, they also design *collateral materials*, which include brochures, annual reports, packaging, hangtags, and other corporate image projects. The collateral materials often accompany products for sale, giving important information, sometimes required by law, while they catch the customer's eye to help sell the product.

There is stiff competition in advertising design. Job titles and responsibilities differ, depending on the size of the agency or firm, and on the types of projects with which they work. Salaries, fees, or commissions also vary widely. Completion of creative work often occurs under the pressure of deadlines, with long hours and limited time off.

To become an art director, college or technical school education is a requirement after high school. Courses include basic design, drawing, painting, lettering, photography, typography, advertising, and promotion. These schools have the latest computer design and printing technology, as well as well-equipped television and radio labs to learn audiovisual skills. Computer graphics and computerized layout skills are universally required in the advertising field.

Other Advertising Design Jobs

Graphic designers, also called *graphic artists*, come up with the visual representation for advertisements and collateral materials, based on the ideas of the art director and copywriter. When they have clearly illustrated the ideas and gained approval from the art director, they must obtain agreement from

the clients. Finally, the graphic designer or junior members of the staff prepare the finished work generally with computer design programs.

Entry-level jobs that can lead to graphic design positions include layout artist. *Layout artists* design the layouts for ads. They specify the typefaces and do sample renderings that show what the finished ads will look like when they are printed.

People seeking art positions in fashion advertising should be able to work quickly, under pressure, to meet deadlines. They must be good at details and have the ability to follow instructions and take criticism. They must have excellent computer design skills. Most employers require applicants to have a degree in advertising design, art, or illustration. A portfolio is a requirement, showing creativity and precision in doing advertising layouts. Since it is challenging to get an entry-level job in large advertising agencies, college graduates have a better chance of starting in a small agency. There is less pay and glamour, but the opportunities to work and learn are good and provide the experience needed to qualify later for a better job with a major agency or retail company.

Public Relations

Public relations (PR) includes publicity and special events. *Public relations agents*, or *publicists*, are company employees or independent publicity consultants hired to help companies project their public image. They are advocates for their employers. They tell the story of a firm or its products through various media. They analyze public attitudes about their company and execute programs of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.

PR people also try to anticipate problems a company may have with the buying public. They handle complaints against the corporation. Public relations agents try to gain public information media space with newsworthiness, presenting their company and its products better than the competition.

Publicists strive to get free editorial mention and photographs in publications, “plugs” on broadcasts, and favorable remarks in public speeches. They tell about products at meetings, conferences, and conventions, or arrange speaking engagements for company officials. They also try to acquire endorsements from, or tie-ins with schools and universities, sport teams, celebrities, or special events. Publicists prepare and send out press releases, or stage special events worthy of media attention, such as fashion shows. They produce and present videos, posters, movies, booklets, and promotional/educational kits. They publish and distribute newsletters, reports, and bulletins to teachers, researchers, retail buyers, students, and consumers.

Public relations (PR) firms or public relations departments of manufacturers, retail firms, and trade associations employ creative people. Large retail companies have their own public relations departments. In chain organizations, headquarters PR departments plan these activities and coordinate with local stores. Small retailers may hire independent public relations agencies to oversee important news or events.

Public relations agents must have lots of imagination and be able to speak and write clearly and persuasively since they are seeking free, positive publicity. They need a thorough understanding of their products and skill to find or create news value to promote them. They must be able to anticipate and predict trends, and must be familiar with all kinds of advertising media and selling techniques and know how to schedule their time wisely. Public relations agents must be convincing, yet tactful, and have confidence and drive. Speaking in front of groups and knowing how to use visuals well are essential skills. Public relations agents should enjoy some traveling; have social poise, and a pleasing voice and appearance.

Most PR employees work in large cities and have college degrees. Publicity assignments often evolve from copywriting jobs. A background in English, journalism, communications, or liberal arts is helpful.

A portfolio of publicity campaigns is necessary when applying for a public relations job. Pay is high after achieving experience and success.

Entrepreneurship and Other Fashion- Related Careers

In addition to the employment areas you have already reviewed, there are additional interesting career paths that relate to fashion. You may want to have your own business. If so, you can develop many types of activities into a business. You may want to be associated with the home sewing industry, theatrical costuming, or clothing care and preservation. Perhaps a career in education suits your career goals.



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An apparel entrepreneur might start with a small line of items in a certain niche and expand to a larger line and mass production as the sales volume increases.

Entrepreneurship

Do you think you might want to go into business for yourself someday? An *entrepreneur* is a person who organizes, launches, and directs a new business venture and assumes the financial risks and uncertainties of the enterprise. An entrepreneur might run a business from his or her home, an office, or a store. The business might focus on retail sales, provide a service, or produce a line of goods. Successful entrepreneurs are able to turn innovation, flexibility, and creativity into a functioning business operation.

Independent small businesses make up a rapidly growing area for U.S. employment. More than half of all working Americans acquire employment in small businesses. Small companies can often meet the particular needs of a market better than large companies can. Some small businesses operate as franchises of established corporations. Entrepreneurs also buy existing small businesses in hopes of making them better and stronger. Many entrepreneurs start new, independent businesses.

For new businesses to become profitable, it usually takes at least two years. Owners must be able to sustain themselves through this start-up time. Many receive great satisfaction from a venture that becomes a success. Most of the well-known businesses of today started as small companies. Conversely,

many new businesses fail each year. Most business failures are due to lack of experience, poor planning, and inadequate capital.

Personal Traits to Succeed as an Entrepreneur

Entrepreneurship is not for everyone. The responsibility of self-employment requires self-confidence, ambition, and drive. The owner must be good at time management and have discipline to schedule work and meet deadlines. Entrepreneurs must make the best possible use of their human, material, and financial resources. Long work hours are often required, and thoughts about the business usually linger after hours. There may be no opportunity to take time off for a vacation. Sometimes, entrepreneurs must hire and train employees, and delegate work. Before generating income, the entrepreneur may have to rent a site, and purchase equipment, supplies, and inventory. To inform potential customers about the business, the entrepreneur must carry out advertising or other types of marketing.

Successful entrepreneurs have certain qualities in common. Most entrepreneurs are highly motivated and optimistic. They believe in themselves and their business. They are competitive self-starters with the energy and initiative to see the necessary tasks and do them. Creativity is typical of entrepreneurs as they come up with new products, services, or sales techniques. Small business owners are also willing to take risks, or they would not hazard losing their investment, self-esteem, and community standing with a new business venture. They must be realistic about the potential of their business idea.

Entrepreneurs should be able to set goals and execute plans that will enable them to reach their goals. Small business owners must be flexible and adaptable to new ideas, since circumstances may steer the business in an unplanned direction. They must also be decisive—able to make decisions and to act on them. Their time, interest, persuasive people skills, and dedication are what make the business successful.

Factors to Consider When Starting Your Own Business

Potential entrepreneurs should consider many factors when deciding to start a new business. It is advisable that they have work experience with the type of product or service they hope to offer in their own company. Entrepreneurs can obtain more preparation by taking business courses and specialized continuing education classes. Community colleges offer classes in the evenings to help entrepreneurs get started.

To start your own business, seek information from your local chamber of commerce. In addition, the *Small Business Administration (SBA)* is a government agency that offers helpful counseling, workshops, videos, and free publications. It has regional business development centers around the country. Economic development offices and experienced business mentors in the nonprofit *SCORE* can also give advice.

Potential entrepreneurs should ask themselves the following questions before starting a business. They may also want to conduct market research to identify potential customers and assess the market need for the business.

Some Questions to Ask Before Starting a Business

- What is the specific definition of my business?
- What is my target market?
- What image do I want to project?
- Will the business satisfy a real need in the market?
- Is the demand growing for my goods or services?
- How will I promote my business?
- How will I price my products?
- Do I have the education, experience, and drive necessary to succeed in this field?
- What resources are available for any special help I may need (courses, workshops, consultants, etc.)?
- What organizations should I join that can offer professional advice and assistance?
- Do I have a network of helpful industry contacts?
- Who are my competitors? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- What are the opportunities I should build on and the threats I must counteract?
- Where is the best location for my business and why?
- How and where will I get the capital I need to finance the venture?
- Am I willing to put in lots of long hours and hard work, possibly at the expense of my personal time?

Ask yourself questions such as these before deciding to start a business on your own.

As you know, entrepreneurs must develop a *business plan* that defines the idea (purpose), operations, and financial forecast of their proposed company. It should describe the business and specify the products, market opportunities, competition, and strategy for the venture. Business plans help entrepreneurs crystallize their thinking about the marketing and financial aspects of their ventures. A business plan is a requirement to apply for a business loan from lending institutions. The entrepreneur should also contact a lawyer to help set up the supporting documents for the business structure. An accountant can give advice to establish a financial record-keeping system. An insurance agent is necessary for business insurance.

Entrepreneurs must understand all aspects of their businesses. They should have the knowledge and skills to buy the right supplies, keep complete financial records, and manage people in a way that they can be highly productive. They should know where to seek specific types of help when needed, such as from a consultant, agency, or trade organization. Entrepreneurs need to project a professional image with well-designed business cards and letterhead stationery. They must set up business bank accounts and provide their own pension funds, health insurance, and other benefits. They must also understand taxes and government regulations. See the following.

Legalities to Check Before Starting a Business

License Requirements

State or local general business registration fees and special licenses are often a requirement to make, sell, or provide certain goods or services. Contact your local city hall, Economic Development Office, or Small Business Administration for information.

Zoning Ordinances

To control land use, most communities designate certain areas for residential homes and other areas for commercial or industrial use. Businesses usually cannot be located in a residential zone. Additionally, commercial zones may be further restricted to certain types of businesses, such as offices, light industry, or heavy manufacturing. This assures orderly growth plus adequate roads and government services. For zoning information, check with your local Planning Commission.

Operating Requirements

Special regulations, such as being open on Sundays, trash pickup, number and width of entrances and exits, sign placement, etc., may exist. Check these requirements out at your local city hall.

Sales Tax

Many states have a sales tax on certain categories of items that businesses sell directly to consumers. If your goods or services are within one of these categories, you must collect the tax from your customers and pay it to the state. Check with your County Clerk's Office about sales tax procedures.

Labeling

If you plan to manufacture apparel items, even on a small scale, certain information must be included on permanent, sewn-in labels. A business lawyer, library, and Internet reference materials, or the Federal Trade Commission can provide you with specific details about labels.

Registering a Business Name

You can register the name of your business if no one has already registered it for his or her use. This protects the name for your use only. Consult a business lawyer or contact your County Clerk's Office.

These are just some of the requirements entrepreneurs must take care of before going into business.

Entrepreneurial Opportunities

Many entrepreneurial opportunities exist that can be operated from a home, store, factory, or warehouse. Small boutiques or specialized stores can be found anywhere there are consumers. You might want to open a dressmaking or tailoring shop, or an apparel production business. A trading company is a possibility, or an online or a mail-order business. Freelancing and consulting are other options. Technology enables small business owners to keep in touch with suppliers and customers, and a company website is necessary.

A Home-Based Business

More and more people are working from their homes. For instance, you might use a knitting machine to produce individualized sweaters or a monogramming machine to personalize shirts and jackets. You could sew specialized items to sell at craft shows, on consignment in retail shops, or through a

traveling sales representative who visits retail shops. You could also sell a line of apparel or accessories from your home or through a home party system. Writing fashion articles for publications or your own personal blog is another opportunity for a home-based business.

There are some advantages to operating a home-based business. By working out of your home, you are not committed to a commercial lease for any amount of time. You have no commuting time or parking expenses. You may not need a business wardrobe. A home-based business might allow you to combine family and income-producing responsibilities. You can run a load of family laundry or put dinner into the oven and continue working. Your children might even gain training in business methods.

A home-based business also has tax advantages, since you may be able to allocate a portion of your home expenses to the business. Seek information about this from an accountant, tax expert, or by reading publications for small businesses. It is also important to keep careful records of legal and professional fees, supplies, business publications, and business-related travel. Educational expenses might also be deductible.

There are also disadvantages with a home-based business. Family matters can be distracting and disrupt your job. It may be too easy to work evenings and weekends without taking time off to relax. Clients may intrude on your personal time or not take your business seriously because it is at your home. Additionally, neighbors may object to having a business near them.

Independent Sales Representative

For this job, you could have an office at home, but make calls out of the home. Independent sales representatives (reps) often handle several different product lines for many small manufacturers that are not large enough to have their own sales staffs, selling several small manufacturers' lines that are not in competition with each other; however, the retail accounts to which they sell the items should be the same. For instance, a self-employed rep in menswear might sell a line of shirts from one producer, slacks from another, neckties from another, and sweaters from another—all to men's apparel retailers. If one line does not sell well, the rep can still make commission income by representing the other lines. Additionally, a rep can drop and replace a bad line with other merchandise as needed.

Owning a Retail Shop

Though there are many giant retail firms, the vast majority of stores are small and privately owned. There are various ways to become the owner of a retail shop. You can buy a business that is already in operation or buy a partnership in it. Another way to become a store owner is to start a new retail business on your own. Some people choose to buy a franchise. A franchise may cost more initially, but there is less risk involved since the parent firm provides some guidance, protection, and promotional assistance. In addition, the franchise name may be well established.

In almost all cases, the new business owner will likely need to acquire a loan from a bank or other source to cover start-up costs. *Start-up costs* are the initial expenses involved in starting a new business venture. See the following for some typical start-up costs for a retail business.

Retail Store Start-Up Costs

- Renting or purchasing physical space
- Completing renovations to suit the space to the business (walls, doors, dressing rooms, receiving area, etc.)
- Acquiring furnishings (counters, racks, display props, checkout computer system, etc.)
- Purchasing the original inventory so there is something to sell
- Hiring employees and paying wages
- Developing advertising and other promotions to announce the opening of the store to consumers
- Paying operating expenses, such as heating, air conditioning, and electricity, and other overhead expenses
- Setting aside funds for unexpected emergencies and delays

To open a new retail business, an entrepreneur must cover all these expenses before there are any sales revenues available.

Small shop owners often employ one or two other people to help operate the store. As the owner of the new business, you must be willing and able to do whatever tasks necessary to operate the business. This might include locating sources for merchandise, buying the merchandise, receiving the goods, determining pricing, and marking the merchandise. You would have to offer credit and personal services to customers, arrange displays, and do all the paperwork. You might also do selling, promotion, store operations, and janitorial duties! You may not have any personal income until the store becomes well established with satisfied customers.

Owners of retail shops must cater to their target market with the proper merchandise and image. They must know their competition and carry goods that meet a need or are in demand. They must know how to control costs and build sales to achieve a profit. In addition, they should have good relations with people in the community. See the following for more recommendations.

Expertise Needed to Own a Small Retail Shop

Owners of small retail shops must know how to

- Organize and analyze financial data to improve business performance
- Establish and maintain good vendor relationships
- Develop seasonal merchandise plans and time inventory for the “fashion calendar”
- Maximize buying dollars while getting appropriate merchandise for target customers
- Assure proper inventory levels with good sales/stock ratios
- Overcome slow or nondeliveries of merchandise
- Obtain and use the latest technology, such as inventory control and checkout systems
- Build good credit ratings with financial institutions

Entrepreneurs can gain knowledge in these areas through reading, attending courses and seminars, and having work experience in similar businesses.

A Dressmaking or Tailoring Shop

Dressmakers/tailors are expert sewers who make custom garments or do apparel alterations and repairs. Sometimes, they specialize in wedding gowns or tailored suits. Independent fashion designers might produce a small number of items to sell or create custom designs for specific clients. Other sewers may do alterations for individuals, specialty clothing shops, dry cleaners, or department stores.

Starting a dressmaking/tailoring shop can require a relatively small investment; however, it may become harder to make a good living doing this in the future with body scanners enabling manufacturers to make customized garments. Rather than working from a rented storefront, tailoring may be better as home-based work, especially for someone with young children.

Dressmakers/tailors should have a fashion sense to help clients choose flattering styles and appropriate fabrics. They must understand form, proportion, fit, and color. They should also enjoy sewing and be able to work with speed and accuracy. Good eye-hand coordination is necessary, as well as finger dexterity.

Dressmakers/tailors take customers' measurements, construct garments, check fit, and do all required finishing. They might follow a commercial pattern, modify a pattern, or create a garment from a sketch or picture. The skills of pattern making, draping, and professional techniques of clothing construction are required. They must be neat, accurate, patient, and tactful with people.

Career or technical school courses in fashion design, pattern making, clothing construction, and textiles are helpful for people preparing to be dressmakers or tailors. Sometimes, adult education courses offer *sewing for profit* workshops. Some people master this trade through apprenticeships. A helpful trade group is the *Custom Tailors & Designers Association (CTDA)*, which offers certifications for master tailor/designer, master custom designer, or master customer clothier. The best preparation is to study textiles and clothing in college, with business courses taken as electives.

An Apparel Producer

Another entrepreneurial opportunity is to start an apparel production firm. Someone with design ideas or product development skills may want to produce his or her own apparel designs. The designer begins by creating samples with which to sell the designs. He or she may use a cottage industry arrangement for manufacturing. A *cottage industry* uses the labor of individuals working in their homes with their own equipment to manufacture goods. This arrangement offers low overhead costs and lots of flexibility, but must adhere to government labor laws. Another option is to hire contract factories to produce the designs.

From the production side of business, you could start your own contract factory to make other peoples' designs. Capital is required for cutting and sewing equipment, building rent, utilities, and wages and training for workers. Sometimes, there is demand for specialized production, such as sewing appliqués or embroidery onto garments. In such a case, a manufacturing entrepreneur can very successfully fill this niche.

Small apparel manufacturers often have the advantage of being able to act quickly to take advantage of sudden fashion shifts. They often set the fashion pace for the industry because they create more fashion-forward designs. With the right marketing, profits can go up quickly; however, a single season with a bad line can wipe out a small, undercapitalized firm.

Apparel production entrepreneurs are often people with design talent, as well as experience with large firms, who want to go out on their own. They should be acquainted with retail buyers, fashion editors, suppliers, and contractors. Personal appearances in stores that carry their goods can help promote their lines and gain customer feedback for improvements. Editorial mention in fashion articles can give their labels a big boost.

Once again, a bachelor's degree in textiles and clothing or an associate degree in fashion design is desirable for business success. Small business centers, technical schools, and community centers offer courses in how to start new businesses. Students learn how to develop a sales force, manage personnel, and work with contractors. They also learn various finance methods relating to sales and production. Industry leaders and consultants, with guest speakers in specific fields of expertise, teach various workshops.

A Trading Company

You may want to start a company that imports or exports fashion goods. Most trading companies specialize in a certain product category, such as silk apparel from China or leather handbags from Israel.

One or two people who have some warehouse space and a small office may run a trading company. To start this type of a business, product line expertise is required. Contacts with international suppliers and domestic retailers are necessary. Business owners do a great deal of traveling, with the costs being business expenses.

A Mail-Order or E-tail Business

Many entrepreneurs have started mail-order and/or online businesses selling fashion goods. They may manufacture their own fashion products or source from elsewhere. Mail-order businesses place ads where people who might use their products will see them, or they send out promotional materials to a select group of people from a mailing list. E-tailers promote their websites and use key merchandise words that make the best use of search engine optimization (SEO).

Inventory planning for a mail-order or e-tail business can be tricky. There is no sure way of knowing how many orders the business will receive. You could be overwhelmed with orders you cannot fill fast enough. Conversely, if you build up an inventory anticipating large orders that do not materialize, you could be stuck with unsold products. The printing and postage costs for catalogs and website setup and maintenance can also add up quickly.

A mail-order company must have warehouse space for inventory, but the location is not of prime importance. Mail-order businesses often rent post office or business center mailboxes instead of using their street addresses. A toll-free telephone number, and usually a website, encourage customers to place orders, so hiring order-taking employees is necessary.

Running a mail-order or e-tail business requires organizational abilities and a talent for selecting products that people will want enough to make the effort of ordering. The market for the products must be identifiable and easy to reach. The prices must attract customers, while providing a realistic profit. Ideally, mail-order and e-tail items should be fairly lightweight and easy to package and ship.

Owners of these businesses must obey Federal Trade Commission and shipping regulations. Products and prices cannot be misrepresented, and wearing apparel must have proper labeling. All products must be safe for consumers to use. Additionally, if a business cannot fill orders within 30 days of receipt, the business must contact the customers and give them the opportunity to cancel with a refund or accept later shipment.

Freelancing and Consulting

Freelancing is the selling of expert skills to accomplish particular tasks. There are many freelance opportunities related to fashion. For instance, freelance fashion designers sell their designs to manufacturers. Illustrators make drawings of manufacturers' lines for market-week order materials. Freelance photographers take pictures of modeled garments for promotional materials. Promotion specialists prepare advertising campaigns for producers and retailers. Some freelancers do window displays, store planning, and fashion show presentations. Others do personal shopping for individuals or secret (mystery) shopping for retail companies.

Consulting is selling a person's expert ideas and advice as a service business. Consulting opportunities related to fashion can involve selling advice about financial improvements, production efficiency, or improved ways of marketing a company's products. A consultant can offer his or her expertise for sales training programs, public relations campaigns, and other ways to improve business effectiveness. Image consultants, or personal stylists, work with consumers, advising them on personal images, wardrobe coordination, and accessorizing. Wedding consultants and color analysis consultants are also in demand.

Freelancers and consultants may work independently on individual, short-term jobs or on a contractual basis for several clients. Their jobs end when each assignment is completed. They generally have few inventory requirements. Freelancers and consultants usually distribute advertising materials to announce and promote the service. Successful experience is necessary, however, to establish credentials as an expert. Freelancers and consultants also have websites that explain their services. They often charge high hourly fees, depending on their expertise. This compensates for their preparation time for which they are not paid. In addition, they may not work 40 hours a week, 52 weeks per year. Some charge a daily fee rather than an hourly fee.

Evening courses offer instruction in establishing freelance or consulting businesses. They teach people how to promote themselves and their talents, develop client lists, and minimize financial risks. These courses also discuss methods for building financially rewarding businesses. Information from websites and books can also be helpful.

Other Fashion-Related Careers

You may be interested in other fashion-related careers that require some different aptitudes and skills than the careers already described. For instance, there are many opportunities in the home sewing industry, or the creative excitement of theatrical costuming. Does work in the fields of clothing care or preservation sound interesting to you? Rewarding careers in education also provide good income, self-esteem, and personal satisfaction.

The Home Sewing Industry

Businesses in the *home sewing industry* deal with consumer sewing machines, notions, fabrics, and patterns. There are fabric stores, books, magazines, radio and TV shows, advertisements, online videos, websites, and mail-order catalogs aimed at home sewers and professional dressmakers. All of these firms need fashion-oriented personnel.

Fabric store salespeople have similar duties to other retail salespeople. In addition, they must have a thorough understanding of fibers, fabric construction and finishes, care of textiles, and sewing procedures. Salespeople must be able to interpret information from pattern envelopes. They measure and cut fabrics for customers and help customers select notions (thread, buttons, etc.).

Employment with Commercial Pattern Companies

Employees of commercial pattern companies design, produce, package, and sell the patterns that home sewers purchase. These people combine their artistic talents and technical expertise as a team. Most of the design and manufacturing work utilizes computers and, with this technology, combines some jobs.

Many of the jobs with pattern companies are similar to related positions in apparel manufacturing and fashion promotion.

- *Pattern company marketing employees* collect consumer statistics and use them to guide design and production decisions.
- *Fashion directors* seek out and interpret the latest trends about silhouettes, colors, fabrics, and accessories.
- *Merchandising directors* figure out what the company's customers will want in patterns and try to anticipate sales.

Then *designers* create garments within the many pattern categories offered. Designers might specialize in such areas as dresses, sportswear, or children's patterns. Can you tell which three of the following jobs are done via CAD?

- *Patternmakers* make patterns for the new designs, and *seamstresses* construct samples.
- *Fit models* try on the samples to check fit, drape, and movability to gain approval from the design staff and management.
- *Pattern graders* make larger and smaller versions of the pattern pieces for each design.

- *Checkers* look over patterns to see if notches line up, facings match their corresponding garment parts, and that other cutting and sewing markings are properly included.
- *Markers* calculate pattern layouts and fabric yardage requirements.

While the pattern work is being done, the following is taking place:

- *Fabric editors* obtain samples of the latest fabrics for the company's fabric library and for specific designs.
- *Accessories editors* research and obtain the latest styles of buttons, jewelry, shoes, scarves, and belts for the accessories room. They use these items to create finished ensembles for illustrations and photographs.

Pattern companies must also produce pattern guide sheets and envelopes.

- *Technical writers* create clear sewing directions that are easy to read and follow. These writers combine journalism skills with knowledge of sewing construction, fabrics, notions, and patterns.
- *Diagram artists* create the technical drawings to accompany the written directions on the guide sheet.
- *Illustrators* make a finished fashion drawing of each design for the pattern envelope and the company's catalog that is used in fabric stores.
- *Layout designers* assemble the guide sheet copy and diagrams, as well as the pattern envelope layout, for printing.
- Finally, the finished pattern pieces and guide sheets are mechanically folded and fed into the proper envelopes. Pattern catalogs are also produced and distributed.

Sales and promotion employees include home-office staff members and field staff people who call on accounts in geographic territories.

- *Website designers* show all pattern images and written descriptions on the pattern company's website.
- *Retail coordinators* are fashion and promotional liaisons between pattern companies and retail fabric stores.
- *Public relations employees* provide press releases and publicity for the media.
- *Educational representatives* prepare teaching materials, such as booklets, posters, and videos. They must have top construction skills to answer questions about sewing problems that customers ask them.

Theatrical Costuming

Theatrical costuming is creating wardrobes for performers in operas, ballets, stage plays, movies, advertisements, television shows, and parades. A costumer might work for a theater company, movie or television studio, or costume shop. Some costumers are freelance designers hired to work with the wardrobing staff for certain shows.

Theatrical costumers work from scripts to appropriately clothe the characters in the production. Costumers need to know how to portray moods and desired effects with apparel. They must be able to create appropriate attire

for specific income levels, cultures, and time periods. Theatrical costumers design outfits that look right under various lighting conditions and with different props. They must also work within certain limitations, such as the size of the stage or budgetary restrictions.

An entry-level job is that of a costume technician, also called a wardrobe helper. *Costume technicians* organize the costumes and accessories for a production by character and scene. They help with research to make sure the designs are authentic, and do shopping and other footwork to collect everything that is necessary. They help the actors dress for the production, and they care for the wardrobes between performances. They also do repair work on the costumes before, during, and after performances.

With experience and proven flair, a wardrobe helper might work up to *wardrobe designer*. The rewards for this head of the costume department are high pay and industry recognition. Wardrobe designers receive name recognition in the credit lines of movies or programs of stage productions. As with other types of fashion designing, only a few people make it to the top of the field. There are important contributions and enjoyable careers, however, for those at all levels of theatrical costuming.

To do theatrical costuming, you need creativity and a thorough knowledge of lighting, staging, and special effects. You also need a solid background in art, design, and history. The ability to work with emotional and artistic performers is also an asset. Fashion school training and an apprenticeship usually provide a good range of skills, including sketching, pattern making, draping, and sewing.

Clothing Care

Clothing care is a leading service industry with many small and privately owned commercial laundries and dry-cleaning establishments. Jobs in them require a high school education and training under skilled workers.

In a dry cleaning or laundry business, employees receive items for cleaning from customers, attach identity tags, and inspect for pocket contents and stains. Other employees operate the dry-cleaning or laundering equipment and do pressing and other finishing. A dry cleaner may hire a sewing employee to do repairs and alterations. Some of these jobs require a well-groomed appearance and courteousness. Others require technical skills and mechanical ability. The work requires accuracy and concentration in order to maintain high standards. All employees must have knowledge of textiles, clothing construction, dyes, spot removal, and cleaning agents.

Clothing Preservation

Textile/apparel preservation gives special attention to the long-term care of fabrics and clothing. Such apparel items include wedding gowns that are to be saved as future family heirlooms or antique clothing for museum collections.



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A costume technician prepares costumes in the backstage wardrobe room before a rehearsal of the musical, *The Little Mermaid*.

Soil that could prematurely age and damage the fabrics is removed first from garments. Then, the preservationist wraps the garments in *archival*, acid-free paper and places them in boxes that protect them from strain, discoloration or fading, and insects such as moths.

Costume curators (or conservators) locate, identify, and determine the age of textiles, apparel, and accessories from the past. Electronic scanning microscopes are used to determine the age and condition of fibers and threads

used in constructing the items. Conservators repair broken and frayed areas, and then carefully clean the items and store them flat, often in special cabinets with many drawers for each garment to lay by itself. The rooms have controlled temperature and humidity. Curators also keep items in darkness or under low lights without ultraviolet rays to preserve fabrics.

Costume curators care for historic (*vintage*) costume collections of museums, libraries, and universities. They must have a thorough knowledge of the apparel of past eras and other cultures. Curators prepare exhibits that display the historic garments. Inaugural gowns and other ceremonial apparel are often included in historic collections. Everyday clothes of long ago are quite rare, but often tell a lot more about what life was like in former times than special garments do.

Costume scholars collect and catalog old and new fashion drawings, clippings, slides, photos, films, and books. They have access to detailed information that can date, describe, authenticate, and classify old apparel. These costume scholars help people find specific information by researching written materials about various aspects of clothing. Sometimes, they assist the wardrobe designer for an historic film. They might also give lectures showing illustrations of historic costumes and describing their influence on modern fashions and textiles.

Costume curators generally have college degrees in science, textiles and clothing, or art history. Many have advanced degrees. Apprenticeship training or graduation from an art conservation-training program is a recommendation. The work can be stimulating and personally and professionally rewarding, but patience is required in doing the research.

Education

Fashion educators give instruction in school clothing and fashion merchandising classes and adult education courses. Apparel educators demonstrate products and procedures, and share knowledge and enthusiasm with their students. When teaching fashion concepts, the educator might assume the role of designer, stylist, or fashion director. Educators may be required to make purchasing decisions about textbooks, sewing machines, mannequins, and other equipment and supplies.



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This grouping of historic apparel prepared by a costume curator shows Russian shoes, hats, scarf, shirts, and other items from the early twentieth century.

Classroom Instructor

Fashion and apparel classes are taught in family and consumer sciences departments in junior and senior high schools. Subjects may include textiles, fashion, design, grooming, clothing selection and care, sewing construction, and apparel-related careers. Many high schools have fashion merchandising or marketing classes.

Classroom instructors in career/technical schools provide training that can lead the students directly to gainful employment. They teach courses in commercial clothing construction, alterations and repair, pattern making, modeling, art, and retailing. Technical school instructors may also teach fashion design, illustration, retailing, apparel production, photography, and other fashion subjects. College and university professors teach such courses as textile science, tailoring, merchandising, display, education, fashion journalism, and promotion.

Teaching provides a routine with variety. Instructional plans follow a master curriculum, but the specific content of courses can vary. Teachers continually learn more about their subject matter as they read and study to stay up-to-date. They have some flexibility and freedom in their work to teach their courses to best meet the needs of their students.

Instructors must like to work with and help people. They need good communication skills to explain facts, give directions, demonstrate procedures, answer questions, and discuss ideas. They must be flexible, fair, patient, and able to provide constructive criticism in a tactful manner. Instructors need much energy to do a good job.

Public school teachers need at least a college bachelor's degree, but many have a master's degree. Instructors in career/technical schools have work experience and job expertise in the areas in which they teach. To teach in college, a master's degree is required and a doctorate is preferred.

Most teaching jobs have good fringe benefits and retirement programs. The pay for teachers is good, but usually not as high as similar work in private industry; however, the amount of vacation time is a bonus. Instructors can use that time to conduct personal business, enjoy hobbies, travel, or pursue further studies. Those instructors who have children have more time to spend with them during school closures for holidays and in the summers. Though the official workday for teachers ends in mid-afternoon, they often must grade papers or prepare lessons after school hours. College instructors have shorter teaching hours; however, they have other duties in professional areas, advising students, and conducting research and writing.

Extension Agent

Extension agents are staff members of land-grant universities who work as county agents to farmers and many as family and consumer scientists in all counties in the United States, including both urban and rural areas. They teach apparel, nutrition, consumer economics and other homemaking skills to groups such as 4-H clubs, community organizations, and senior citizen groups. Extension agents develop programs and workshops based on the needs of the people in their respective counties. Sometimes, extension agents

work with individuals on a one-to-one basis. States often have an extension agent who is a clothing specialist, and who is also a university staff member.

Extension agents speak to groups, attend meetings, counsel about available resources, and plan and put on demonstrations. They write newspaper columns and educational materials, and provide information online. Radio and television stations often ask extension agents to appear on programs where they share their knowledge with listeners and viewers. Because of their many responsibilities, they spend much time traveling within their territories.

Extension agents' salaries are similar to those of instructors. They usually have longer work hours and shorter vacations than classroom instructors, but have more freedom to plan their own work. Usually, extension agents feel deep satisfaction from working closely with the people in their communities. Personal qualities and skills needed by extension agents include:

- exceptional organizational skills
- resourcefulness and imagination
- superior problem-solving skills
- ability to get along with all types of people
- ability to communicate well through all media forms
- desire to improve people's knowledge, skills, and lives

Adult and Consumer Education

Adult education courses are special-interest classes for adults that are taught at local schools or community centers. These class offerings are usually at night since most of the adult students work during the day. Classes related to clothing and fashion that might be offered include pattern alterations, basic clothing construction, tailoring, sewing with new fabrics, or making certain craft items. The teachers usually have developed the skills they teach through work experience, and this is often a part-time or extra job for them. Some are high school or career/technical school instructors during the regular workday.

Consumer education combines teaching with business promotion. This is frequently a full-time professional position with manufactured goods companies. These professionals are often called educational representatives because they promote their firms' products by teaching about them. Educational representatives

- instruct dealers and consumers about sewing machines, patterns, notions, textiles, laundry equipment, or other products
- hold in-store classes
- give demonstrations at trade shows
- prepare and distribute educational and promotional materials about the use and care of their products
- provide an important link between their companies and consumers

A consumer educator employed by a fabric store might teach specialized sewing classes to the store's clientele. Sewing projects may include vests, quilts, or holiday gifts, and other projects that feature the retailer's products. In a yarn store, one might teach knitting, crocheting, or macramé to promote

the store's goods. The educators often have to prepare instructional flyers and make samples to show. Pay is either a flat fee per session or a percentage of the total fees collected. Sometimes, the educator receives all the fees since the class brings customers into the store. These are often part-time positions with retailers.

Good grooming, poise, and a pleasing personality are important traits for consumer educators. They should be creative and skilled in the area they teach. Good communication skills, self-confidence in front of groups, and loyalty to their firms are also important. Pay varies according to job responsibilities and personal qualifications.

Gaining Success in the Fashion Industry

After studying the many fashion-related careers, perhaps you have a career in mind for yourself. With careful planning and the needed preparation, you should be able to get into the type of work that suits and interests you.

The people who become the most successful in their careers are those who treat change as opportunity. They look for and accept new challenges to make things happen. To learn and grow in your profession, it is important to participate in professional organizations, take advanced courses and seminars, and read trade journals and other publications. Often, someone with less talent can work harder and achieve more than others who do not use their talents to capacity. Sincere enthusiasm for your work is one of the first requirements for success.

Whatever career you choose, you should give it your best effort. Fashion-related jobs require a neat appearance, good grooming, and good health and energy. You need pride, a cooperative manner, and a sense of taste. Confidentiality is also a serious responsibility, to avoid inappropriately revealing new fashion designs, company policies, or research discoveries. To get ahead, you must follow instructions, take suggestions and criticism well, and finish all tasks. Honesty, willingness to do more than you are asked, and perseverance are important traits for success. With dedication and hard work, you, too, can achieve success in the fashion industry.