Bright Lights, Big Retail Innovation: PI Apparel Event Debrief

by Amy Kenly

Over 150 people representing some of the largest retailers and brands gathered at the PI Apparel event in New York City in June to network and share stories around innovation, product development and product lifecycle management (PLM). The retail, footwear and apparel (RFA) industry is at an inflection point – one we've seen in the past in other industries like automotive, industrial manufacturing and high-tech – where PLM has evolved to offer industry-specific features and benefits. At the same time, the industry is buzzing with new opportunities like wearable technology and 3D design tools.

How will RFA companies respond? Here are some of our key takeaways from the event.

Focus on Product Development Optimization

Retailers and brands are looking for new ways to improve end-to-end product development processes, increase visibility to data, and improve communication with the supply chain – all while finding time to innovate and develop products that customers really want. RFA companies know that the only way to succeed in today's ultra-competitive environment is to focus on on-trend products and successful market launches. A lot of the conversation was focused around how to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the product development process.

Get Serious About PLM Transformation

The majority of the sessions at PI Apparel focused on stories of PLM success. We learned how PLM can help maintain a competitive edge, facilitate fast fashion, save thousands of development hours, double efficiency, deliver seamless global communications, and align supplier strategy. With all of these examples of success, and all the PLM buzz during networking times, it became clear that now is the time to look at transforming end-to-end product development via PLM and related technology.

Don't Forget About Your People

With all the talk about process improvement and technology, it can be easy to forget the most important part of any large scale transformation initiative – the people. Many of the presenters cited user adoption, commitment to change, communication, and changing old mind sets and work habits as some of their biggest challenges. And for good reason – building trust in the idea of a single source of truth for product development, especially across a global supply chain, is extremely difficult. Keeping things fresh after an implementation is important too. Companies that have been successful with this have strong support teams, set honest expectations, and keep users engaged. As with any transformation, there will be bumps in the road. Companies must be prepared to switch gears to support the changing needs of the business.

What were your big learnings from PI Apparel this year?

Originally published on July 9th, 2015

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