

ADPL

Uses Exenta PLM and ERP to handle surge in knitwear orders and reduced staffing during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Industry

Garment Manufacturing

Challenges

- » Many aspects of design and development were manual and some were paper-based with limited visibility.
- » COVID-19 shutdowns leading to designers working from home.
- » Changing consumer preferences during the pandemic.

Benefits

- » Streamlined processes and brought consistency and real-time visibility across design teams.
- » Automated key processes and continues to improve collaboration among designers under a hybrid work model.
- » Automated tech pack creation and increased overall efficiency.
- » Order volume nearly doubled.

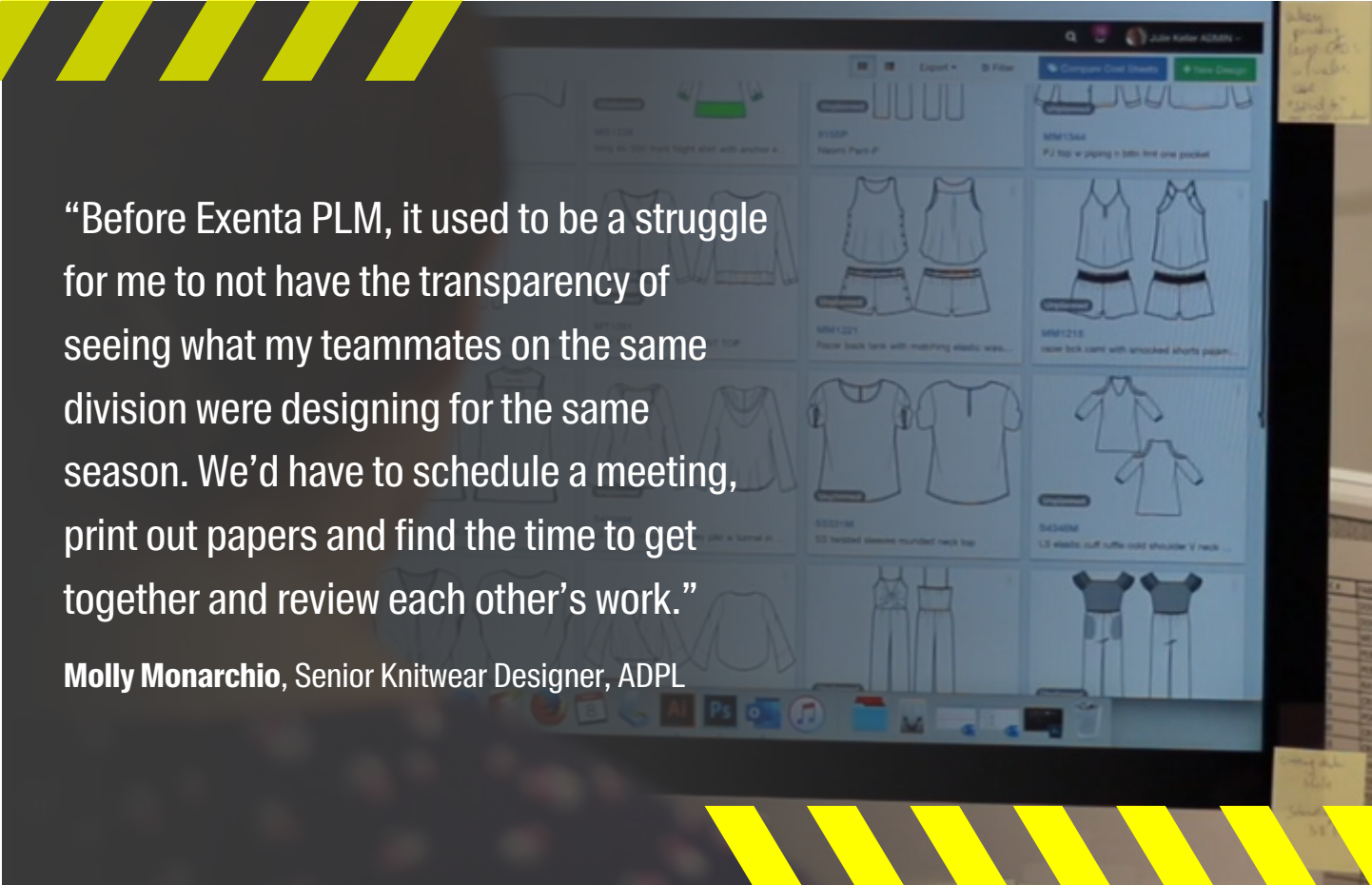


ADPL, LLC is a New York-based fashion company delivering design and execution for Dillard's private label brands. Specializing in women's clothing—particularly dresses—ADPL designs contemporary lines, maternity lines, and even missy lines. Their styles run the gamut from career wear and dresses to t-shirts. Private label brands that ADPL creates for Dillard's include: Antonio Melani, Gianni Bini, Preston & York, and Alex Marie.

Six brand teams operate within the ADPL organization. Four teams concentrate strictly on woven designs. There is one dedicated knitwear design team. The dress line division operates as one design team, but they split efforts between a majority of woven designs and some knitwear. Altogether, the company employs approximately 95 people, including about forty designers, tech designers, and product development professionals.

The Need for a Cloud-Based PLM

ADPL designs fashions for Dillard's and handles the execution of placing orders with production vendors. Molly Monarchio, Senior Knitwear Designer, explains ADPL's operational model: "We [ADPL] own the design and execution of the Dillard's private labeled brands. We pitch colors, we pitch bodies. We work in conjunction with Dillard's buyers in all of these decisions, but we start the conversations. We are responsible for having the overseas factories deliver to nDillard's freight orders overseas. Then Dillard's takes it from there."



“Before Exenta PLM, it used to be a struggle for me to not have the transparency of seeing what my teammates on the same division were designing for the same season. We’d have to schedule a meeting, print out papers and find the time to get together and review each other’s work.”

Molly Monarchio, Senior Knitwear Designer, ADPL

In the past, the design and product development process at ADPL varied from one design team to the next. According to Lorenzo Martin, ADPL’s SVP of Sourcing, Production and Product Development, as the fashion industry moved toward tech packs, ADPL still maintained in-house pattern makers while also starting to create tech packs.

“Some design teams relied more heavily on hand sketches, on paper, while others relied more heavily on technical sketches using Adobe Suite. Additionally, depending on where a design would be developed, some tech packs were written by hand. The format of tech packs also varied between design teams from the layout to the program using tech pack,” Molly added.

In an effort to gain better organization and streamline processes, the company began searching for a Product Lifecycle Management (PLM) solution that would enable their teams to track the development process and also manage production orders sent to factories on behalf of Dillard’s. Tech designers needed to have all of the information in one place. Designers wanted to streamline processes to take away much of the manual updating and recordkeeping and allow them to dedicate more time to design.

The Solution

ADPL selected Exenta's cloud PLM software designed specifically for fashion companies and with the integrated Exenta ERP to manage production orders. Exenta PLM helps to streamline and automate key processes such as line management and design, sample tracking, tech pack development, and sourcing and costing. Because it is a cloud-based solution, design teams can use it anywhere with a secure internet connection. This became critically important during the COVID-19 pandemic, as designers and product managers worked from home and communicated with both buyers at Dillard's and production partners.

Productivity and Rapid Adaptations During Covid-19

Early in the pandemic, having a cloud-based PLM system enabled ADPL to send design teams home to work during mandatory workplace shutdowns. Because all of their files were stored in the cloud, designers were able to continue working from home with good productivity, in spite of the pandemic. One of the surprises during the pandemic was how quickly Dillard's needed changes to its lines in response to changing customer demand. Instead of dressier, woven career wear, customers were ordering much more casual, comfortable knitwear. Even more surprising—orders have been growing throughout the pandemic.

The combination of rapid line shifts, changing demand, and reduced staff capacity could have presented an insurmountable challenge to ADPL's designers had they not been able to work so efficiently in the cloud. The efficiency and automation of PLM helps turbocharge the product lifecycle, reducing the time required to develop a new product or make changes to existing products. As a result, with Exenta PLM, designers were able to keep up with the workload by working hard and working smart. "Reviewing our Gianni Bini division and comparing pre-Covid orders to our first market presentation after the start of COVID, we saw a 189% uptick in knitwear orders on this brand after the start of Covid. These orders had to be handled for production with a design team working at reduced capacity of 40% to as much as 80% during lockdowns" says Monarchio.



“During the pandemic, when we shifted from the office to home, our team size was cut down by 40%. The PLM system definitely made transitioning from office to home much easier as all the information we needed to reference was stored on the PLM cloud... honestly, I really don't know if I would have been able to do the job that I did during Covid-19 lockdown without Exenta PLM.”

Molly Monarchio, Senior Knitwear Designer, ADPL

Faster, Easier Collaboration

Without an integrated PLM system, designers typically spend 30-40% of their time searching for files and information. But Exenta PLM provides designers with a consistent organizational system and shareable, digital files. Having visibility into the designs across the different lines can be a huge benefit to designers.

Not only does Exenta PLM increase transparency between design teams, it also eliminates communication siloes within teams between designers and tech, making it easier to tweak and improve products. Now, the team can set automatic alerts to notify design if tech changes something, rather than having to email callouts. Michelle Heyman, Senior Technical Designer at ADPL states that “designers are able to “ping” me with any changes and additions easily. Inspiration details are attached for each style with links to websites. Sharing information through Exenta PLM is much easier than our old manual ‘pass off’ of sketches”.

The enhanced automation afforded by having a PLM system has enabled ADPL to hire more tech-savvy people onto the production team. Many items that used to exist in physical form in the office are now completely digitized, leading to better transparency and less confusion over versions or misplaced items. Prior to having a PLM system, ADPL used to maintain a sample room and employed a staff of pattern-makers. At that time, there were no tech packs used at ADPL. The patternmaking staff would maintain many books and binders with a history of all the jackets, skirts, and pants they made. Today, all of this information is housed in Exenta PLM, creating a single, searchable index for all prior styles and designs, and eliminating the labor costs associated with the pattern-making team.

In today’s competitive labor market, employee turnover can be an unfortunate—and potentially disruptive—fact of business. The history contained within a PLM system is extremely valuable for maintaining institutional knowledge when designers or tech designers leave the organization. Fabric Buyer, Tyler Ellis, explained how Exenta PLM is the memory-keeper for how past styles were developed.



“Now, everything is in PLM. We are hiring more and more tech designers who are able to use the PLM system and create tech packs, so we don’t have to have on-hand pattern-makers. And anyone can search through the brands, the season, the category. That’s a big help in searching what we’ve done in previous seasons. PLM definitely has eliminated a lot of paper and given us a tool to reference.”

Lorenzo Martin, SVP Sourcing Production and Product Development

Improved Communication

In most organizations, bottlenecks can occur when too much information must be funneled through a few specific people. Exenta PLM ensures that institutional knowledge isn't held by a few people – it's in the system.

Designers save time by using line plans to kick off the design process. They then drop the line plans into Line Sheets and use those to communicate with Dillard's about product attributes. The Line Sheets automate data entry and make it easier to create and track sample requests. PLM provides transparency and history that results in greater efficiency on the production side of the house.

“On the development side, we never had a system that was able to give us what we're getting now. Just being able to see a history alone and being able to create line sheets from PLM has been a great asset. They can generate a line sheet based on the information that's already in there from the development stage. So, that has been a great asset.”

— **Lorenzo Martin**, SVP Sourcing Production and Product Development

Costing Transparency

PLM also produces significant efficiency gains in the costing process. All of the information about costs is housed in the same system, enabling buyers to see a complete breakdown of costs, rather than just a total cost. They can also quickly review past costs for similar projects with the same factory, or even compare cost history between multiple factories. “When we are doing costing, instead of just asking for a total cost, we're able to really get a breakdown in the system and see how much is in packaging, how much is in all these different components. It was a lot more transparent in that way” Monarchio explains.

Improved Vendor Communication

Exenta PLM features integrated comments so designers can communicate amongst themselves, with other employees, and even with customers and vendors without leaving the system. This keeps a record of communications in PLM, rather than a separate email system.

“Everything is in one place from development through production. Communication in the PLM messaging keeps everything together and reduces the e-mail madness for day-to-day follow up—especially sample status for development samples. Also, the communication with sales to get feedback from buyers is easier by PLM message rather than e-mail.”

—**Michelle Heyman**, Senior Technical Designer, ADPL

Design teams can get information overseas more quickly. As things change, designers can go back to the sample request and make changes, giving the factory instant access to those changes. Overseas factories can upload images along with measurements instead of having to print hard copies and mail them back to New York. This became critically important during the pandemic, when many international packages were embargoed and delayed under COVID-19 restrictions. According to Michelle, her team was able to review photos online and approve proceeding on to showroom samples, especially for styles based off previous designs she knew had worked well before.


Automation Frees Time for Design and Creativity

Cloud-based PLM automates many of the data entry and administrative tasks that designers and their assistants previously performed manually. Not only does automation leave more time for creative work, it also helps ensure accuracy and avoid mistakes. Designers are happiest when they are designing. Exenta PLM helps them spend more time doing what they love.

Efficiency Gains Create Cost Savings

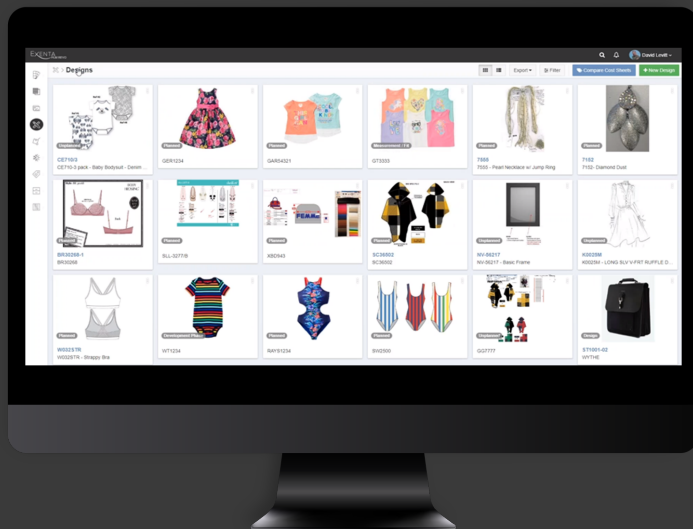
Thanks to the pandemic, nothing was 'normal' during 2020. Therefore, the team at ADPL hasn't completed any formal ROI analysis yet on their investment in Exenta ERP and PLM. But they know that leveraging these technologies generated a large and positive impact during a very challenging year.

The gains in efficiency have already enabled their designers and tech designers to complete more work. Efficiency is also opening up additional cost savings in terms of either reducing head count or the ability to grow in the future without hiring new employees.



“The organizational power that PLM provides is my favorite part. Before PLM, assistants were responsible for all of the organization, but now a lot of their time is freed up. They have greater ability to help you design and to take ownership over new things. Sharing the responsibility definitely allows for more time to design while keeping everything more organized than it ever has been.”

Molly Monarchio, Senior Knitwear Designer, ADPL



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