The fashion industry's commitment to sustainability has never been made more clear. Maje intends to offer its customers a transparent supply chain for 100% of its products within three years. This strategy is in line with its objective to have at least 60% of its products made with at least half of more environmentally friendly materials. To help it achieve their goal of transparency, the brand as well as the entire SMCP group which generates more than one billion euros in sales, has entrusted the French start-up, Fairly Made.
This challenge does not seem to intimidate the young, fast-growing company. It has recently expanded its premises in Paris’ sustainable fashion hub, La Caserne, in the city’s 10th district, and additionally works with six LVMH-owned brands. Whether they are contemporary fashion brands, luxury giants or independent labels, Fairly Made, founded by Laure Betsch and Camille Le Gal in 2018, promises to provide a methodology to its roster of clients.

The start-up was created to support brands in their buying habits and to help them evolve environmentally and socially. The founders have had work experience in the buying departments of large companies such as Chanel, H&M, and Louis Vuitton which allowed them to identify the needs of brands prior to embarking on their entrepreneurial adventure.

However, in 2018, environmental issues were only emerging and were not yet taken seriously by the fashion industry. In their early days, Betsch and Le Gal had to spread the word, and this was first done through capsule collections made with a more sustainable approach for fashion and textile industry players. The start-up has the contacts and flexibility to operate quickly and with limited quantities, which notably allowed a brand like Des Petits Hauts to take its first steps towards more responsible sourcing in 2019.

'These transparency issues will become the standard'

"Our mission was to improve the social and environmental impact of the textile industry, to bring about change. The capsules were ideal for this because they allowed for rapid implementation," explained Le Gal. "Now, we are working in depth, with the aim of eventually changing 100% of the collections. These transparency issues will become a standard. New emerging brands must have this issue ingrained in their DNA, and those that are established have a lot of catching up to do."

Fairly Made provides brands with a solution that enables them to trace their entire value chain and evaluate the quality of each of its products according to five criteria: environmental, social, traceability, recyclability and sustainability.

The platform transcribes these results on the product labels via a QR code - Fairly Made
"With eco-certified capsule collections, brands needed concrete solutions and we provided them with certified factories and materials. The brands then asked us to help them with the rest of their supplier base. Suppliers were coming up with suggestions for labels and certifications, but brands didn’t know how to position themselves on these issues. We had the expertise to analyze suppliers and the impact of products. And we positioned ourselves as a trusted third party," said the co-founder.

Fairly Made developed its own platform in partnership with DNVB Asphalte and women's fashion brand Des Petits Hauts. Two industry players with different profiles that have allowed Fairly Made to test its technological solution and its versatility according to the brands' business models.

The solution allows them to collect information on the supplier base and to then start collecting information from these partners.

"On an initial data collection, we centralize all the information that the brands have," explained Betsch.

Some have an ERP (enterprise resource planning) system that has already compiled certain data, others do not. Usually, it's a true driver in understanding how the brands work and where their pressure points are. Very often, they know the tier 1 plant. But then it's an exploration. It's a co-management with the suppliers, because it requires extra work for the suppliers to gather the information. Our statistics tell us that we know 70% more of the supplier base from the second data collection. The brands are at the bottom of the pyramid, which allows them to identify the biggest impacts along the chain and to direct their attention to them. Often we deal with repeat business because it's the highest volume and the suppliers where there are the biggest orders."

The company, which explains that it carries out a diagnostic analysis in less than two months, emphasizes a SaaS solution that is accessible to companies via a monthly subscription so that they can directly understand their data, transformation plan and performance. This solution now accounts for 70% of the company's turnover and it intends to expand its customer portfolio, which currently includes around 50 companies in France and Europe such as M.Moustache, Patou, Balzac, Dior, Cyrillus and TBS.

Fighting against greenwashing and tightening regulations

There appears to be significant potential for growth. While the workload is cumbersome, increasingly more brands see it as a necessary component for their business for two reasons. Firstly, because customers demand to know this information and are wary of greenwashing and secondly, because legislation and regulations are being put in place concerning these matters.

Traceability on four links of the supply chain is becoming mandatory in France, as is environmental labelling, which is expected to be implemented this year. In Europe, regulations must be coordinated to evaluate the environmental footprint of products and communicate it to customers.

Finally, the textile manufacturer will have to ensure their products’ end-of-life. Brands and distributors faced with this obligation must review their production methods and be fully aware of their material sourcing in order to effectively manage the end-of-life of their products.

“The Covid pandemic has been a catalyst for awareness," said Le Gal. It was a motivating factor indeed. Before, CSR managers were a bit lonely. Now we see that human and financial resources have multiplied. Our role is to make them aware of what is going to happen at the regulatory level. But we are not alarmed because there is good news and France is ahead of the curve on these issues."

In addition to its platform, the company offers tools whereby brands can detail the origin of their products via QR codes on labels or widgets. These tools are of interest to brands to develop their potential and the life of their products on the second hand market.

With a roster of international clients, Fairly Made faces the challenge of rapid growth and the need to recruit developers, textile and materials engineers and new employees. From a dozen people last year, the company is expected to grow to around thirty employees by the end of 2022, with a turnover of several million euros.
After a first financing round last year, the founders are currently preparing a second round of about three million euros this summer to help support the start-up’s expansion. This contribution should also permit the Fairly Made methodology to multiply. The company has expanded from textiles to leather and metalwork and has its sights set on woodwork.

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