

Clutch It:

An Example of an Apparel Product Development Model Used for Hard-Line Accessories

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Product development (PD) is the process that an organization uses to transform market opportunities and technical possibilities into resourceful information for commercial production (Clark & Fujimoto, 1991). Product developers innovate both soft-lines and hard-lines, such as apparel and accessories. The term PD is sometimes mistakenly used interchangeably with design; however, in many cases PD encompasses design and development. Although, proposed for the development of apparel, this product developer adopted the *No-Interval Coherently Phased Product Development Model for Apparel* (May-Plumlee & Little, 1999) for the prototype development of hard-line accessories, specifically acrylic clutches. The four steps of the process include: (a) marketing, (b) merchandising, (c) design & development and (d) production. A fifth step of sales and evaluation was added by the product developer to provide information for further development of prototypes. The purpose of this presentation is to describe the product development process of prototypes for two acrylic clutches. (Figure 1).

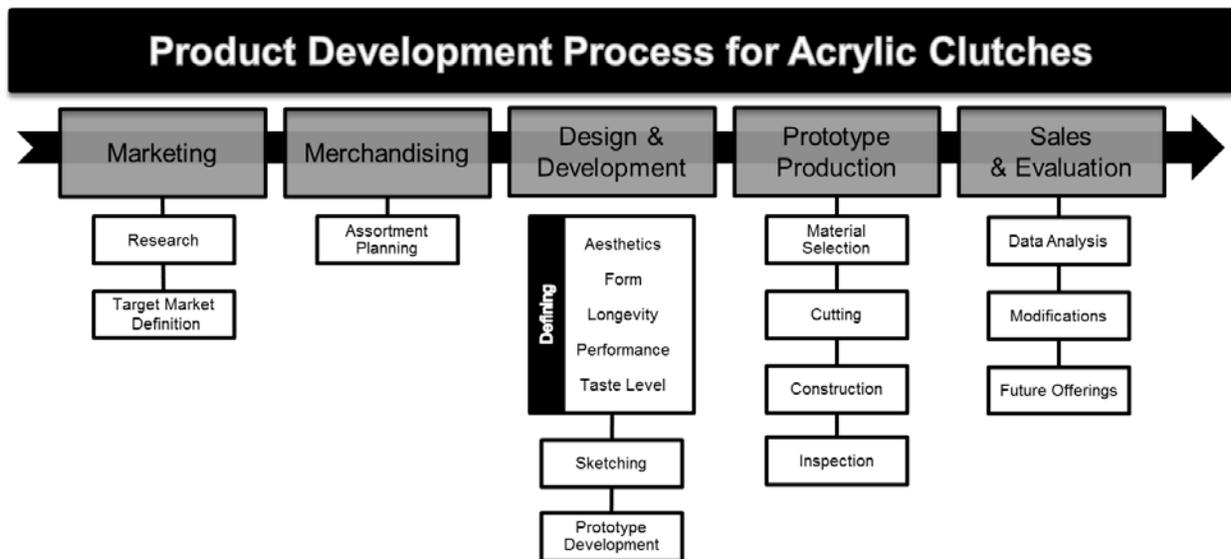


Figure 1. Product development process for acrylic clutches adopted from *No-Interval Coherently Phased Product Development Model for Apparel* (May-Plumlee & Little, 1999)

Product Development Steps

Research initiating the development of apparel and accessories lines tends to be seasonal process, based on sales figures (May-Plumlee and Little, 1999) and is the foundation of the *marketing*

step. The information gathered through an online review of the acrylic clutch market was used for arriving at the product concept, thus guiding the development of these prototypes. Based on the market research, these clutches were targeted to 25-35 year old females who prefer elegant, creative and statement pieces.

In the *merchandising* step, assortment planning was completed to project the quantity, colors and sizes for each clutch to be prototyped to prepare for eventual production and sales. The *design and development* step included defining the aesthetics, form, longevity, and the performance of the acrylic clutches. After these characteristics were determined, four sketches of both the clear and the black clutches were created. Tacking back to the information obtained from the research process in the marketing step, final styles were chosen to move into prototype development. The goal was to create geometric forms that are timeless, usable and durable.

The *production* step entailed material selection, cutting, construction and inspection of the final prototypes. The construction of the prototypes was outsourced to local company who specializes in producing acrylic display cases for the retail environment. The product developer, herself, inserted magnetic screws to the upper corners of each clutch to allow for opening and closing. Upon completion, each clutch was inspected to determine flaws and to maintain the level of quality expected for the target market and projected price points.

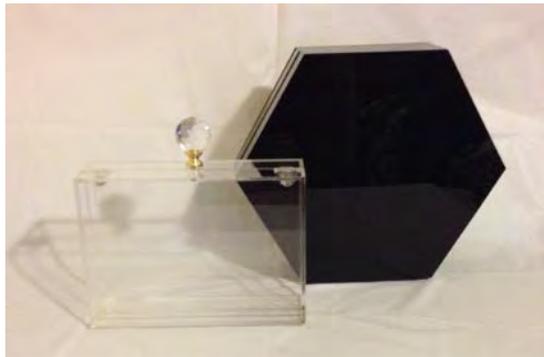


Figure 2. Acrylic clear and black hexagon clutch prototypes

*Sales and evaluation* involved mass production of the prototypes, opening an online retailer and marketing through social networks. Quantitative data from sales were used to evaluate the success of the products, potential modifications, and future product offerings. The significance of this project is the adaption of an apparel PD model for non-apparel products.

#### References

- Clark, K.B., Fujimoto, T. (1991). *Product development performance: Strategy, organization, and management in the world auto industry*. Cambridge, Harvard Business School Press.
- May-Plumlee, T.E., & Little, T.J. (1998). No-interval coherently phased product development model. *International Journal of Clothing Science and Technology*. 10(5), 342-364.