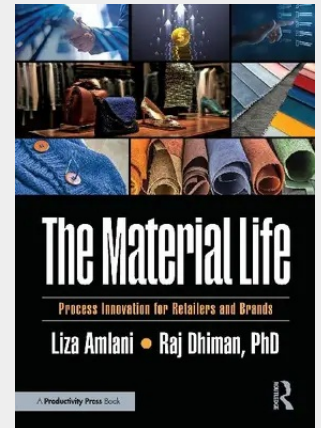


The Material Life

Process Innovation for Retailers and Brands

This book discusses the value of "how" versus "what." Process innovation is the practice of improving how products are made. Many retailers and brands often overemphasize what products are sold. In doing so, they miss out on valuable cost savings and getting products to market faster. This book will demonstrate why investing in the "how" impacts the bottom line. The book also outlines the exact steps brands need to take to improve the "how." Materials make up every product we sell. The term "materials" accounts for patterns, zippers, ties, trims, and more. Yet, most materials are an afterthought in the product creation process. First, we design and then consider what materials to use. Materials teams do not sit alongside design and are often located overseas to be close to mills and factories. Further, materials teams often report to sourcing. As such, they are isolated from design, merchandising, and planning teams. Although this model has been working for years, it allows for inefficiencies to creep in. There is another layer of complexity to consider. The concept-to-market (a.k.a. go-to-market) calendar outlines the time needed to design, assort, produce, and ship products to a distribution center or store. The calendar marks crucial decision-making moments. It is common for brands to have overlapping calendars. That means teams are working on more than one season at a time. As a result, it is very common to find materials teams scrambling to meet short-term deadlines. Many of these deadlines are pushed out, leading to products being late to market. This costs a retailer or brand valuable profits and gross margin. Further, long-term innovation goals are also sacrificed. Outdated mindsets related to the use of technology also hinder progress. Decisions on materials and product assortment cannot be made without a physical sample. This happens even at the highest levels of the world's largest brands. The reliance on physical samples is called "Touch Crutch" or "No Sample, No Sale." Contrast this with advances in technology allowing us to do remote surgery and control spacecraft on earth. As such, retail executives should use digital tools to approve materials and products. Further, there are useful tools available to bank materials into a digital library, saving valuable hours of work. Retailers and brands are constantly seeking out ways to be faster to market. Process innovation is where the gains are made. Many areas within product creation are ripe for improvement. Materials and all things related to them are a rich area of opportunity that is rarely explored. This book provides information, insights, and real-life examples to help brands improve processes and get them faster to market. In doing so, there will be a direct and positive impact to the bottom line.

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