

Hardwick Clothes Cites Flexibility as Key to Long Term Success

CUTPLAN Reduces Costs and Streamlines Critical Cutting Process

In an industry that has seen a wholesale shift of production to low-cost regions of the world, Hardwick Clothes remains as one of the few 100% domestic apparel manufacturers. The oldest tailored clothing company in the United States (since 1880), privately-held Hardwick performs all cutting, sewing, and distribution operations at its original Cleveland, Tennessee location. Today, the company employs 350 people and produces up to 4000 coats (suit and sport coats) and 3500 pants (slacks and skirts) per week for Orvis, Casual Male, Honig's, and other private label retailers.

“We had to become very flexible to compete globally”, stated Melvin Davis, Hardwick's General Manager. “This means doing whatever it takes to provide a level of service and responsiveness that our competitors cannot match.”

In support of its commitment to domestic manufacturing, Hardwick has embraced flexibility throughout its operation as a means of providing a premium level of value and service that keep its customers coming back for more. Case in point, Hardwick offers in-stock, same day shipping for 90% of its customer orders. Comprising 179 unique product styles, 256 colors, and a wide range of fabrics and sizes, the broad range of SKU's requires the company to hold more than 100,000 units in inventory to meet this level of service. This extensive product mix also translates into an average order size of only 2.5 units.

The small order size naturally creates significant challenges in the cutting process, where fabric is typically spread and cut at heights of only 3 to 5 ply. Hardwick has invested significant time and money in automating and streamlining this process, including investments in four Gerber automated cutting and three EuroPro semi-automatic spreaders which have helped to speed the process and reduce labor costs. Only 14 people are now required to perform all fabric spreading and cutting operations for the company.

With fabric costs averaging \$10 per yard (some as much as \$75/yard), Hardwick began using CUTPLAN from AMS in 1989 to optimize material utilization and balance their spreading and cutting costs. Once orders are grouped by like colors, trim, and components, the software calculates a precise spread plan that is used to produce each order using the least amount of fabric, the highest cutting height, and the least amount of bundles and marker sectioning.

CUTPLAN also automates the creation of marker orders, searching its database to determine which existing markers can be reused and ordering new markers only when necessary. With well over 150 markers required each week, Hardwick saves considerable time and cost as CUTPLAN routinely fills 75% of this need from existing markers that require no or only minor modifications. Most information needed to operate CUTPLAN is automatically collected through interfaces with other computer systems such as the Gerber AccuMark CAD system in use at Hardwick. This eliminates reentry of data and

eliminates related errors.

After more than 15 years in use, the results are unmistakable. CUTPLAN consistently saves Hardwick an average of 3% in overall fabric costs. CUTPLAN has also enabled the company to reduce its marker making staff by three full time employees through improved reuse of existing markers and elimination of manual data input. And Hardwick also benefits from a time and flexibility perspective. Manual cut planning is time-consuming and lacks the thoroughness that the CUTPLAN software solution brings to the process. The benefits are especially remarkable in Hardwick's low-ply, multi-color, odd numbers environment where manually finding efficient combinations is highly challenging due to time, information, and processing constraints.

"We have always felt that the custom configuration approach that AMS uses with CUTPLAN gives us the best results possible", noted Davis. "We have tested other cut planning software packages over the years, but we always find that they simply cannot come close to the results we get with CUTPLAN. AMS continues to provide us with the specific capabilities and custom configuration we need to best optimize our cutting process and enhance our flexibility."

Highlights:

- Hardwick is oldest tailored clothing company in the US
- Employs 350; produces 4000 coats and 3500 pants per week
- Offers in-stock, same day shipping for 90% of orders
- 179 product styles, 256 colors, and wide range of fabrics/sizes
- Average order size only 2.5 units
- Began using CUTPLAN in 1989
- CUTPLAN fills 75% of marker requirements from inventory
- Consistently saves an average of 3% in overall fabric costs