

Superior Uniform Embraces Sourcing and Technology to Deliver Value

CUTPLAN Saves Fabric and Time, Automates In-House and Supplier Fabric Processing

Just as in the consumer fashion market, commercial uniform buyers are demanding greater value: increased product variety, better quality, and competitive prices. As one of the largest US uniform marketers, Superior Uniform Group, Inc. (AMEX: SGC) has established aggressive global sourcing and technology initiatives to insure its ability to deliver on these and other customers needs.

Founded in 1920, Superior Uniform manufactures and markets a wide range of uniforms, image apparel and accessories through its Signature marketing brands – Fashion Seal®, Fashion Seal Healthcare™, Martin's®, Worklon®, Sope Creek® and UniVogue™. The Seminole, Florida-based company posted 2005 sales of \$133 million while servicing the healthcare, hospitality, food services, retail, public service, entertainment, commercial, transportation, cleanroom, corporate identity and resortwear markets.

While maintaining one domestic manufacturing plant in Eudora, Arkansas, Superior imports the majority of its products from independent contractors in El Salvador and Honduras with whom they have enjoyed a 20 year business relationship. More recently, the company has begun importing some products from Asia. Superior believes that employing manufacturing techniques that are not limited by geographical location allows it to offer a wide range of affordable, high quality products as well as enabling the flexibility needed to offer important lead-time options to its customers.

Embracing the philosophy of progressive thinking, Superior places a major emphasis on cutting edge technology in their business. By example, the company has in recent years implemented a SAP business system, an advanced warehouse and distribution system, and sophisticated inventory management tools. As the business changed and manufacturing shifted to offshore suppliers, one important technology solution adopted over 15 years ago remains central to Superior's ability to maintain control over a key time and cost factor in their business.

With fabric consumption of approximately \$40 million per year, Superior continues to rely on AMS' CUTPLAN software solution to maintain tight control over their strategically important raw material costs and associated process times. "We began using CUTPLAN in 1991", noted Jeff Endick, Manager of Manufacturing Services at Superior. "Even though most of the cutting is now outsourced to a centralized cutting department in El Salvador, we continue to provide the same marking and cut planning services to them as we do for our domestic operation. This allows us to maintain important controls and provides our supplier with complete instructions on how to optimize fabric utilization and process time."

The plant work orders that Superior provides includes the required markers as produced on the Microdynamics CAD system, electronic cut data to drive their Gerber CNC

cutters, and a precise spreading and cutting plan generated in CUTPLAN. These instructions are essential to achieving the most efficient balance of fabric utilization as well as saving time and money in the spreading and cutting operation. In fact, CUTPLAN saves both Superior and its suppliers time and money, which ultimately results in a more competitive product to the end customer.

“What first attracted us to CUTPLAN was its ability to manage a library of existing marker information”, added Endick. “In the old days, we used keypunch cards as a way of manually storing marker information. We literally sorted through the stacks of cards to determine which markers could be reused rather than creating new ones. With more than 30,000 markers in stock, it was a time consuming and challenging task at best.”

Today, the cut planning challenge is even greater given the wider range of products, increasingly smaller order sizes that range from 48 to 7200 pieces, and the multitude of available fabrics. All this variety creates for significant challenges in executing efficiently in the cutting room, especially in determining which orders can be combined for better flow and efficiency. Not only has CUTPLAN provided the needed visibility into available markers, it has helped Superior save big on fabric consumption, reduce overhead, and streamline their entire fabric processing process.

According to Endick, “With CUTPLAN and the improved methods that we have developed around it, we have increased our standard marker efficiency from 82.1% to 87.4% - a savings of 5.3% in overall fabric costs. Because it is customized to our specific needs, CUTPLAN also saves us time in both in-house planning and in-plant spreading and cutting operations. In-house alone, we have been able to reduce data entry and clerical staff by 2 to 3 people because of the automation that CUTPLAN has brought us. This comes through the integration that CUTPLAN has with our Microdynamics CAD system which eliminates the need for manual data entry in cut planning. Of the 800 markers Superior sends out to cutting rooms each week, 600 are newly created by a staff of only 1.25 marker makers. The automated material utilization reporting in CUTPLAN also allows us to see where we are going and to push even harder.”

Highlights:

- Superior Uniform posted sales of \$133 million in 2005
- Aggressive global sourcing and technology initiatives
- Imports products from El Salvador and Honduras
- Fabric consumption of \$40 million per year
- Began using CUTPLAN in 1991
- CUTPLAN saves both Superior and its suppliers time and money
- Achieved savings of 5.3% in overall fabric costs
- Reduced data entry and clerical staff by 2 to 3 people