With global competition raging, the ever-demanding consumer and online retail sales booming, getting trend-sensitive and innovative products to market in a timely manner is more critical than ever to remain competitive. To keep up with the accelerated pace of fashion demands, new key industry players have emerged; challenging the whole idea of season and collection. While fashion houses traditionally presented two collections per year, the fast-fashion model offers up to 18 collections a year and new product deliveries several times a week, if not daily.

The fast-fashion business model relies on 4 key factors; on-trend clothing, affordable prices, frequent assortment changes and a highly responsive supply chain, all presenting major challenges for companies. Renewing different collections at a frantic pace and at a lower cost puts enormous pressure on fast fashion companies. Not only are consumers hungry for more, they are asking for fashionable and sustainable clothing despite the rise in material transportation and labor costs. E-commerce and fierce competition coming from emerging countries like China, have also become major concerns.
Fast fashion companies have to manage new products, rolling products and updated products simultaneously. Yet, managing the product mix of the new, the fashion forward and basics all at once require specific processes and technologies. This means teams must be flexible and agile; or lean. Fast fashion companies need support to develop different collections and products at the same time.

These companies succeed by creating runway inspired looks to keep consumers coming back for more. Many fast fashion companies have also adopted a marketing strategy that consists of partnering with designers and celebrities, to launch capsule collections, selling “cheap chic” to attract young fashion lovers.

While fast fashion companies frequently need to renew their product offer, they cannot sacrifice brand equity. Design and fit are just as important as producing just-in-time collections, which means speeding up the design process. “Fashionable clothes at the best price” has even become a motto in fast fashion.

New territories like Brazil, Mexico, Russia or Eastern Europe or South East Asia also represent a fit and size challenge for fashion companies. To penetrate these emerging countries and markets, fast fashion companies need to produce clothing adapted to different morphologies and climates.

Product assortment plans are critical for companies to manage their product mix and the number of styles produced within a given time frame and budget. Including a collection management tool in the development process can help support teams give an updated overview of the overall plan.

Technology can also provide companies flexibility to optimize the process of store replenishment by drastically reducing the time between initial product design to in-store delivery.

A PLM solution provides better visibility and control over schedules, resources and costs when handling thousands of small collections at once. Fast fashion companies can thus be highly responsive with their supply chain in order to support frequent new product assortments. With this collaborative platform, teams can share accurate data with all those involved in development process – including suppliers, favoring early decision making, no matter where extended teams are located.

Developing new products requires a longer process than producing updated products because additional design iterations and samples are generally needed. This is where effective product development and 3D can make a difference. With advanced virtual prototyping and 3D technology, product developers can directly check sizing and fit in real time to ensure the quality of a product.