

# Fashion goes high-tech

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As the world begins to see India as a growing technological hub and trade restrictions become less restrictive, a new type of technology is making its debut from here -- software that makes the global fashion industry an even smaller place than it was before.

"With the opening up of textile trade restrictions due to World Trade Organization agreements, a big opportunity has presented itself for the fashion industry worldwide," said Jatin Paul, vice president of business development at the World Fashion Exchange Incorporation, based in Gurgaon.

Specializing in collaborative enterprise solutions for the fashion industry, WFX uses Microsoft.NET technology to provide customizable Web-based software solutions in order to manage the life cycle of products from sourcing and development to sales and production.

According to WFX CEO and founder, Drish Paul, the company's software enables for a "real-time" connection, important in flattening world scenario. "The world is getting increasingly smaller and nowadays it is vital to be in constant contact with your business and trading partners and improve the efficiency of your production process," he said.

"Briefly, the fact that the trade restrictions and quotas have been lifted over the past year has the fashion industry realizing that business is no longer restricted by location," said Paul, "clearly the companies that can offer their goods as a cheaper value in a shorter amount of time will

receive more business."

Citing rising demand for software technology provided by WFX since the "explosion" of the fashion industry -- large-scale fashion houses are able to streamline their processes and utilize resources effectively, Paul noted.

Located just outside the bustling Indian capital of New Delhi, Paul originally entered the garment industry as a manufacturer in India 30 years ago, before moving to the Netherlands. Upon returning to India, he began to put his engineering skills to use after buying a small software company through which he began a newer foray into the fashion industry.

Incorporated the United States in 2000, WFX was intended to be a global company, said vice president Vipin Sawhney. With offices based through Europe and South Asia, the research and development facility of the company, established in 2001, is located in Gurgaon. "There have been more benefits than challenges in having our research and development center located in India," in enabling the company to work as a global enterprise, he said.

India has the largest number of CMM Level 5 certified companies, several Indian IT companies listed on the NYSE and Nasdaq stock exchanges, as well as a large number of Fortune 500 companies outsourcing software needs to India.

Effective costs are not the only benefit.

According to Sawhney, resulting benefits also include having a huge pool of talented experienced software engineers to choose from. "We saw a lot of potential here," he said, "it is more cost-effective and we are able to take advantage of (strong educational programs in Information

Technology) by constantly employing top students from reputed colleges who come to WFX with innovative ideas in technology and a solid platform on which to build."

Other advantages of a base in India means that the company is able to offer "lifelong remote assistance" to international clients -- including a 24-hour a day, seven day a week technical service help line.

Developed by on-site software developers, architects and implementation managers, WFX uses Microsoft's .NET software platform -- a component of Microsoft Windows that enables for building and running next generation software applications and web services.

"WFX runs 100 percent of its applications on .NET -- this means that all our solutions are completely integrated through the web and our clients, their suppliers and buyers can access WFX whenever they want, wherever they are," said Jatin Paul, emphasizing the decreased size of the arena which the company likes to see itself play in.

The .NET framework is comprised of "a new layer of software that resides between the client's operating system and the code that developers write," he said, explaining the mechanism by which the software itself allows WFX to minimize development time in which features are installed and modified.

The customizable solutions are tailored to the needs of fashion and apparel -- which include accessories, footwear, luggage and leather goods, as well as furniture and furnishings. Clients number over 300 worldwide, said Paul, and include American operated Liz Claiborne, Reebok South Asia, and Golkadas Exports -- owned by the wealthy industrialist Hinduja family in India.

With future goals that include satisfying customers with software

solutions that "reduce their business costs and increase profitability," Paul has few complaints about his decision to set up WFX's research and development core in North India.

Emphasizing India's growing expertise in companies providing enterprise solutions, WFX sees a rising demand for technological applications not only in the international market, but also domestically.

"We predict India will especially prove to be a great user of technology in the future with forward minded companies adopting the latest state of the art technology," he said, "we are constantly upgrading ourselves to remain ahead of the market -- building for the future."

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