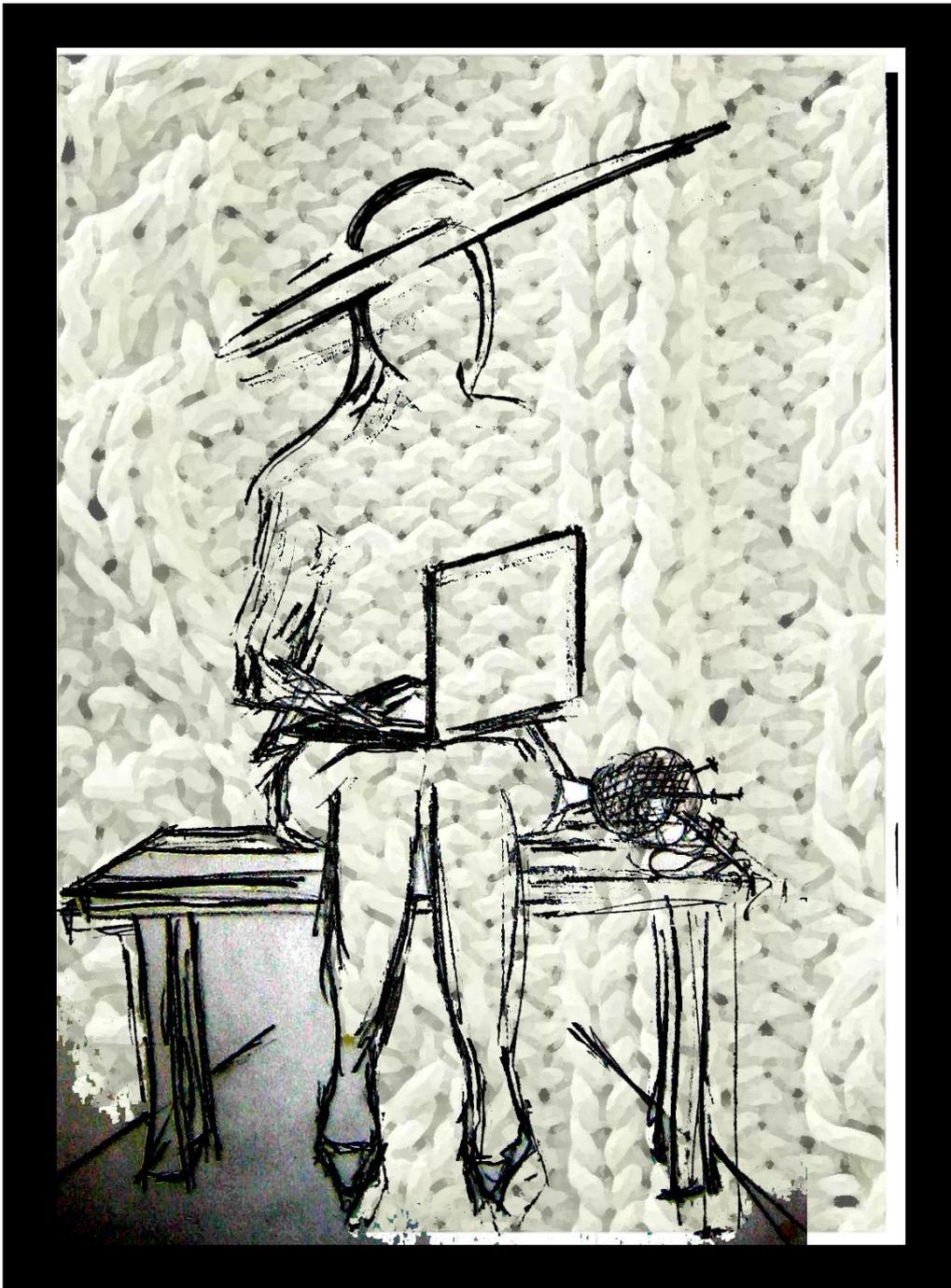


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Knit on Demand

Customized knitwear reaching new dimensions

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This thesis project has been developed during the spring semester in 2010 as the final examination for the Degree of Master in Applied Textile Management at the Swedish School of Textiles.

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Abstract

The fashion market has since the very beginning been characterized by high variety, emotions and desires. The development of the industry however has arrived at a present reality where an overflow of such characteristics has resulted in a challenging volatility and fragmentation. The companies on this playground are facing hard competition, time and costs pressure and an ever informed and demanding end customer.

In addition to the nature of the fashion industry itself, there are a presence of further external variables that affects both individuals as the companies; financial crises, un-employment, natural catastrophes and terror, to mention a few. New trends indicate an increasing desire of authentic products that are produced in a sustainable way by respecting both human resources as natural. Whether this fact is a concrete result from the external realities may be discussed. What is more certain however is that mass production and “short time for low cost” is getting questioned as individuals are increasingly caring for what stands behind a brand name and a product.

In this context, the strategic approach of customisation finds it relevance and opportunity in gaining market space. By producing more precisely or exactly what each customer desires, such strategic implementation enables to respond to each individuals whilst presenting competitive advantages on the challenging market situation. No un-necessary production and efficient and lean supply and demand chain management, results in a win-win situation where company and customer together creates what is worth and only what is needed.

This strategic approach lies as a foundation concept behind Knit on Demand: a project that was initiated at the Swedish School of Textiles in spring 2006. A group of students were challenged to study the feasibility behind the commercialisation of customized knitwear. Already in an early stage two parties got involved in the project; the knitwear producer Ivanhoe AB in Gällstad and the retailer Som Concept in Stockholm. After attentive researches and analyzes, the partners arrived at the intended launch in early 2009, from which phase sales started to run in the store Som Concept. Knit on Demand had now reached a more concrete level of a business idea and is per today prepared to face new dimensions as a player on the Swedish fashion market. In order to do so successively, a solid marketing concept is required as not only the external reality is fierce but the end customers are concerned of those variables and there through more demanding than ever.

The purpose of this specific thesis project was to develop a marketing concept to be implemented in the creation of a Knit on Demand web site.

Literature studies, interviews with involved parties and benchmark analysis, contributed with concrete and valuable information, from which the thesis framework was carried out.

By considering above mentioned external realities and by analyzing more closely the strategic approach of customisation, of fashion marketing and of Knit on Demand itself, a marketing concept was build up. From such foundation, creative solutions were developed and are presented in the final part of this very report.

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1 Introduction

In this introductory chapter the background, the problem, the scope and the process of the thesis will be presented. Along with such information, the focus of the project; Knit on Demand, will be described briefly for an immediate comprehension of the main actor.

1.1 Background – The present situation

Knit on Demand finds its position on the Swedish fashion market. As in most developed countries today, this market is facing many challenges contemporary. Leaving the 20th century behind where politics, music, social events and haut couturiers influenced the development of the industry, what are left of that today are mostly creative inspiration and the high level of communication around fashion that started with the birth of the industry. Overwhelming messages from leading brands, time and cost efficiencies and a strong competitive arena are some of the issues that have resulted in a fragmented and volatile market situation. Furthermore, the fashion item itself is not only a physical product but is surrounded with intangible values that the customers feel connected or not to, and from which they communicate a certain identity.

More recent realities show additional facts to the fashion “phenomenon” where mass producers and big brand names are both challenged by customizers. Instead of achieving advantage through low cost strategies or through image and a famous logo, a customizer can offer a different kind of added value. In fact, as individuals are more attentive, more informed and asks more of a company and its product before purchasing, there are good opportunities in achieving noticeable competitive advantage through customisation.

The reasons to these facts are most probably vary, but some of the most significant features that influences are the technology development, the internet and all the information and connection it can provide, a hard reality where financial crises, terror, war and natural catastrophes continues to affects the world’s inhabitants. These aspects are challenging both the everyday men as the companies on the field trying to serve them, thus today values are different, and so are the requirements.

In short, to manage a company in above described reality is all but easy and for small dimensioned and new companies the challenges are many, but so are also the opportunities.

1.2 Knit on Demand

Knit on Demand and the idea behind its customized knitted sweaters, was born as a project between the Textile School of Borås, the knitwear producer Ivanhoe in Gällstad and later on the retailer Som Concept in Stockholm. In an initial stage in 2006, university students established a well detailed concept and studied all aspects from design and production to logistics. When having confirmed the feasibility of bringing the project into a business idea, launching the commercialisation became the next objective. Since August 2009 sales are running at the retailer Som Concept.

Of major importance within the philosophy lays the focus of the customer, transparency, local production, environmental and human concern by producing only what is ordered and highlighting the people involved throughout the entire value chain. Knit on Demand desires to focus on caring about both the customers as the environment contemporary. But not only, being one of its kind in Sweden, the product itself stand for innovation in the domestic fashion industry, by involving the consumer in the production of once personalized knitted sweater. In sum, Knit on Demand means producing according to demand whilst actually involving the customers in the creative development process. One may here withdraw the positive effects not only concerning the level of service towards the end consumer but also the lean approach it stands for: minimized waist, a low requirement of stock keeping units (SKU) and few transportations. Sustainable thinking is this way a red thread within Knit on Demand (J. Larsson, 2009).

1.3 Research question and scope

The challenging market situation, the strong competition combined with present situation of being in a launching face, has brought the Knit on Demand team in requiring a well established marketing plan. The development of such task represents the objective of the thesis and the main questions the assignment results;

- How can the end consumer be reached and how can Knit on Demand grow on a fragmented and volatile fashion market on a relatively small geographic area like Sweden?
- How can Knit on Demand compete with both customisation brands as well as fashion brands on the Swedish fashion market?
- How can the business concept be launched; the philosophy, the product and customization in an efficient manner?
- How can the focus of authenticity and customer relationship be preserved in communication and future point of sales?

A common aspect in above problems resulted, with a closer look, to be the internet. It was therefore possible to tighten down the four questions and concentrate on one focus from which the thesis outline was developed;

- *How can a customizer like Knit on Demand be marketed via the internet?*

The expectation from Knit on Demand team was the establishment of a marketing concept that can enable a successful launch of the product. The scope of this specific thesis project was to develop a proposal of a Knit on Demand web site. The result also had to be part of that significant concept that should create a base for marketing and used in additional communicative features.

The results gives a tangible answer on how the already established business idea can be concluded and give Knit on Demand the opportunity to go from being a project to become a participant as a company on the Swedish fashion market.

1.4 Method

The matured knowledge in the thesis was meant to constitute a wide ground as possible within several fundamentals in order to develop the requested web site in a well targeted manner.

The knowledge was created by several empiric studies:

- Collecting of all available informative data on the project Knit on Demand;

Available information about Knit on Demand from previous student's reports, the Swedish School of Textiles web site and news paper articles, were studied. Not all of the sources were later used in the thesis as references specifically but provided a primary and necessary personal insight in what the business idea and the product is and stands for.

- Discussion based interviews with all the involved parties;

The first interview provided a wide comprehension in the present situation and the future requirements from all parties. It was held with Jonas Larsson at the Swedish School of Textiles, who is one of the drivers behind Knit on Demand. Within the discussions, the thesis affirmation from Knit on Demand's side were concretized. The second interview was held in occasion with a visit at the producer Ivanhoe in Gällstad, where the production responsible, Ulf Göthager, shared information and requirements from their side. To get an even wider perspective a second visit was organized, this time at the retailer Som Concept in Stockholm. Lotta Hjelte, one of the store's responsible, was interviewed regarding customer feedback, ordering procedure and their future requirements as a retailer.

- Literature and scientific articles gave further information in the included topics.

Empiric data was studied in forms of literature and scientific articles, mostly concentrated on customisation as a strategic approach but also on the world's present characteristics that influences the companies on the market.

Further information about marketing and communication aspects gave additional ground for the studies. These data meant to give a wider knowledge about the surrounded features of customisation, of the fashion market and of the determinant social environment.

- Case studies that created a ground for benchmark analyses.

Within the literature frame work, case studies on relevant companies (NikeId, Tailor Store and Sandra Backlund) created a ground for benchmark analyses. These companies are well established in their segment and represents therefore "role models" from whose success stories one can extract important information. Such an analysis enables a more critical way of understanding the competitive arena and how to target the final result in an even stronger manner.

Models and concepts were used as tools and as a basis for analysing Knit on Demand's future reality and created a wider platform for analyses. Four main blocks in the thesis were the

ground for the theory section, and is divided in; models of customisation, theories of the markets situation, approaches for competitive advantages and finally a review of marketing concepts.

1.5 Thesis process and report outline

As a basic structure of the treated areas lies three perspectives; What is Knit on Demand today, what is required for tomorrow and finally how can it be developed.

In order to arrive at the purpose of the thesis and the established goal, above mentioned researches were organized in four main steps where the different topics were treated along the thesis development. The relative chapters in the written report are distributed accordingly and are presented as follows;

The first part, chapter 2, focuses on the strategic approach of customisation where one can extract the parallel reality of Knit on Demand as a customizer. This information was important to study since offering a customized product is a relatively new approach on the fashion market as it is today, and can also take shape in different way depending on product and company structure. Secondly a brief presentation regarding the communicational aspects of the present Knit on Demand is offered that together with the previous studies enabled to get a complete comprehension about the spectrum of Knit on Demand.

In chapter 3, the interviews with the involved parties Ivanhoe and Som Concept are presented to complete the “internal” reality of Knit on Demand. The “external” reality on the other hand is in sequence introduced more specifically, focusing on customer characteristics of today, the importance of sustainability and authenticity. With this frame and structure, one can see the present reality of Knit on Demand from two perspectives.

Within the fourth part of the research project, a further step is taken in understanding what can be done in the future, by presenting the requirements from the involved parties. This information is followed by the aspects of competitive advantage in order to more closely comprehend how the requirements fits within the frame of the present product and “company” structure. Here, the case studies of NikeId and Tailor Store are analyzed.

The next part, chapter 5, is presenting more closely how internal, external and required situations may be looked at from a marketing perspective and therefore answering more specifically what can and should be developed in order to answer different requirements. Such analyses enable to understand what is needed in the content of the result in order to be successful on the market. Here, the third case study, Sandra Backlund, is presented.

In the final part of the thesis project the key points in the marketing concept is presented, together with the actual creative solutions as a result from researches and analyzes. Future opportunities are further discussed in order to comprehend how the proposed web site can be developed with time. Finally, an additional discursive part is presented and followed by a brief conclusion of the project and its result.

2 Knit on Demand from customisation to communication

This chapter presents information about the approach of customisation and its relation to Knit on Demand. In the final part is also provided how the product has been communicated up until today. The aim with this section is to arrive at a complete frame about the present situation of Knit on Demand and achieve the first thoughts about future opportunities.

2.1 The strategic approach of customisation

In today's volatile and fragmented market situations, businesses are constraint to put the consumer in focus where demand driven strategies today are almost a necessity rather than an option (A. Harrison & R. van Hoek 2008). Furthermore, after years of mass communication and overwhelming offers within industries, the more and more unpredictable consumers are now looking for products and services that may offer them only and exactly what they really desire and need.

In this reality, customization of products and services finds its clear fundament. However, it is a complex strategic implementation since costumer demand is more than vary and the costs can no longer be considered as in economies of scale realities. Furthermore, the product features, available options, information flow and production characteristics results in a more complex system than those for mass production. The moving away from such efficiencies of scale, demand driven approaches need new methods that for examples enable a strong contact with the end costumer through personal assistance and feedback. What makes it work however is the costumers' willingness to pay a higher price or to wait a longer time for that specific product, made only for them (M.L. Fisher, 1997).

Marshall L. Fisher (1997) discuss the most appropriate supply and demand chain for *innovative* and *functional* products where the first category requires a more responsive production and supply process than a functional product. A fashion product is an innovative product as it is characterized by volatile demand and short life cycles being offered in new versions season after season. A customisation strategy implemented on an innovative product offers possibilities to succeed through reduction of inventory and reduction of demand uncertainty for example. Mass customization implementations enables companies to create a demand driven strategy, however the challenge is to find the most appropriate solution for that specific company where costumer demand, design, technology, logistics and costs are gathered harmoniously.

Whilst on one hand tailor made garments has been an option for the conscious fashion consumer since hundreds of years, the updated concept of mass customization has in recent years reached important levels in the fashion industry as well as in others. This is due to the ability to use high technology solutions for information flow and production, but also, as mentioned, the motivation to please the ever more demanding end-consumers by providing exactly what they desires. This fact shows that customisation might represent an important change for the fashion industry in the future (Articlet, 2009).

In order to better understand the concept of customisation and its different approaches, a further theory can be useful for analyses and later permit to relate to the specific case of Knit on Demand. Gilmore and Pine (1997) developed a four approaches theory that they consider obligatory to revise when entering the market of mass customization: *collaborative*, *adaptive*, *cosmetic* and *transparent*.

The *collaborative approach* may also be referred to as mass customization. The main characteristic is that the customizer work closely with the costumer. Specific customer needs are matched with the company's features from which in a final step, the customized product is developed. This represents an approach for products where consumers require a high level of assistance from the company and enables there through the company to offer a strong relationship and a perfectly unique product for specific desires. Referring such approach to the fashion industry, a typical example of this is tailor-made clothing.

The *adaptive approach* on the other hand, is based on a slightly "lighter" level of customisation where the company offer a *standard* that is adaptable according to consumers' altering demand according to different assets. This is an approach that may be connected to Knit on Demand, that will be further discussed in below paragraphs.

The *cosmetic approach* may instead be explained as a personalization of the presentation of the product, where the consumers/clients receives a product containing their specific requirements but that in an initial stage is based on standards for all costumers.

The last approach, *transparent customization*, is an appropriate model for companies whose costumers needs are easily predictable and where they may personalise the product from a standard according to how they interpret the consumers' behaviour. The result is that the customizer not necessarily sells the product as customized. An example of this approach is eyewear where the product is presented similarly to every customer and where only the glass is customized according to specific customer needs.

When choosing the right approach, a company should consider the product complexity and variation and the understanding of the consumer demand. All these facts surround the core of customization concepts which is that of added value.

Except from the customization of a product it is further noticeable that also the presentation and the communication may be customized which widens the possibilities within these theories. Below figure (Figure 1) illustrates how Gilmore and Pine (1997) explains these possibilities according to the four approaches.

In the fashion industry today, as these strategies are increasingly used, not only the collaborative approach, but also new versions such as adaptive approaches are more and more common. Especially in the case of basic clothing with the possibility to customize only one or few adaptive features, mostly connected to the design of the product. The famous NikeId is a good example of this and will be discussed specifically further on (See chapter 4).

Gilmore and Pine further state the possibility in using two or more of the four approaches, perhaps according to service or according to customers. This enables the company to meet specific customer needs even more attentively at different levels; from product to service related matters around the product, and there through reinforcing the value whilst satisfying a high variety of needs.

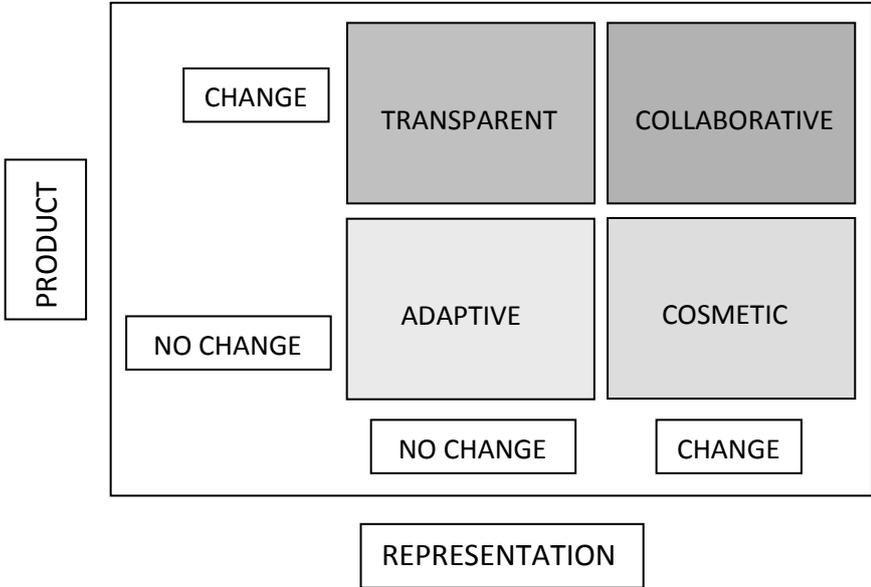


Figure 1: The Four Approaches to Customization (Gilmore & Pine, 1997).

In the past companies were constrained to choose a mass production approach or a mass customisation approach as they represent two opposites in terms of machinery and craftsmanship for example. Today, however, the knowledge and the developed knowhow make it possible to combine the two. Through continuous improvement, a company is able to offer a quality product whilst achieving a low cost as that of mass production approaches. On the other hand, mass customisation approaches enable companies to continuously take a step further by offering a high quality product available in high variety whilst achieving low cost realities (Pine et al., 1993).

Pine et al. (1993) has developed four requirements for the feasibility and the advantage that may be achieved of mass customisation and is presented as follows;

- 1/ The process from revealing the customer desires to the actual starting point of the creation of the product must be *instantaneous*. From defining the product – to translate the product into process – to finally produce in a rapid way.
- 2/ A part from initial investments, the linkages within the customisation process must be rather *costless*, in order to add as little cost as possible to the finished product.
- 3/ The relationship with the customer and the coordination of the creation of the product must be *seamless*, meaning a transparent company overall.

4/ There is a requirement of creating instant teams in strongly connected networks for each customer that are *frictionless* and that is possible through technological solutions for information flow and communication within the entire process.

Even though technology is important in any industry and for all production processes, when it comes to mass customisation the actual contact with the customer is inevitable in order to improve with time. There through, by selling a product directly in store after involving the customers themselves makes it possible to improve not only the product features but also the existing linkages and technologies used in the company structure and system.

Transparency, technology and close contact with the customer but also within the entire company value chain, are crucial in this matter.

2.2 Customisation of Knit on Demand

When relating the ideas and requirements from above mentioned references to Knit on Demand, initially it can be stated that the specific level of customisation is as classified the *adaptive* approach. The customized knitted sweater is based on a pre designed model that sequentially is individualized according to the customer's personal size and preferences in design.

The supply and demand chain, and there through the foundation strategic approach of customisation has, as mentioned previously, been analyzed attentively in the initial stage of Knit on Demand that has resulted in a value chain well thought through and in line with above mentioned ideas. A final goal, and one of the main objectives from the very beginning, was that of offering a store space where the knitting machine was part of the interior (J. Larsson, 2009). Such an implementation requires a major investment and is therefore still considered a future goal for when sales numbers may allow it. From this information it is possible to withdraw that if sales number were higher, the lower the lead time from order to ready-made garment will be, since one knitting machine would be fully dedicated to Knit on Demand orders.

Regarding further aspects of Knit on Demand production, the requirements discussed by Marshall L. Fisher (1997) are fulfilled, even if not yet maximized. Furthermore, lower demand uncertainty creates a reinforced stability for Knit on Demand as production is made to order and no stock is required. In short, the supply and demand chain aspects of the customized knitted sweaters represent a stable base for Knit on Demand that may enable the product to grow as a demand driven innovative product.

As further stated by Marshall L. Fisher (1997) the customers who are attracted to a customized product are willing to pay a higher price or wait a longer time to receive the product, because it is made especially for them. Relating such idea to Knit on Demand the price range is placed in between a market average (1200 SEK to 2000 SEK) and is therefore not higher although the sweaters are customized. The delivery is though a certain fact in this point, not having the possibility to bring the sweater home immediately.

When having a closer look at the actual process, from customers own designing to delivery, the development of the customized Knit on Demand sweaters may be explained in a six steps process chain (Figure 2) Information regarding each step will be presented below:

1. Definition of standard model
2. Definition of specific measurements
3. Creative individualization
4. Finalisation of written order
5. Production
6. Delivery

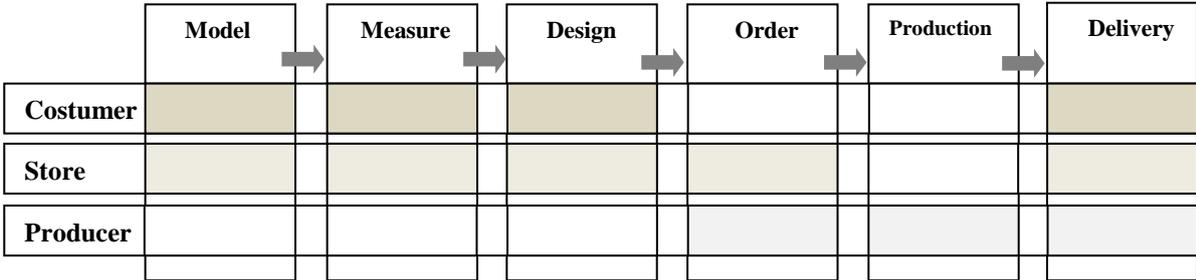


Figure 2: Knit on Demand Process

2.2.1 Definition of standard model

When starting the process of customising Knit on Demand sweater, the costumers tries on pre produced model in the store available in the size range XS-XXL. The costumers are recommended to start with trying on the model in a size that they usually purchase. However, the most appropriate way in finding a perfect fit is to try on also the two sizes below and above that standard size, due to the opportunity in finding exactly where and how the measurements can be modified in the sequential stage of the process.

2.2.2 Definition of specific measurements

After having defined which model and which changes to start the modifications from, the sales person assists in adapting the measurements from the standard sweaters to perfectly fit the costumers’ body and requirements of fit. The possibilities of customization are in this stage focused on the width and the lengths on the body part and the arms.

2.2.3 Creative individualisation

In a next step, the costumers will start the creative process by choosing the kind of collar, colours and eventual details and trimmings, in order to personalize the sweater.

The availability and the relative retail prices by model are as follows;

1195 SEK	Slip over
1395 SEK	V-neck
	Deep V-neck
	Round neck
	Turtle Neck (Extra 100 SEK)
1595 SEK	Cardigan

Two additional options are the choice of stripes, horizontal and vertical (extra 100 SEK), which gives a total of eight base models sweaters.

Further extra cost are added to customisation of the thread colour, in case the customer desires two different or perhaps only one button sewn with a different colour than the others. This extra cost is due to the fact that the machine or the seamstress has to dedicate more time in changing the thread.

Furthermore, the customer may choose to add a special fabric attached to the neckline on the back inside and such a detail would also lead to an extra 100 SEK added to the model's original price.

All models are up until today sold in equal amounts which mean that there are no specific "core product" in the sales pattern (L. Hjelte, 2010). However a slight concentration of preference lay in the V-neck cardigan, V-neck sweater and Round-neck sweaters whilst the model that sells the least is the Slip-over. Most of the sweaters produced so far, have been quite simple where basic design and colours have been dominant.

The manufacturer Ivanhoe prefer to work only with cotton and preferably not with wool for the reason that wool is a more unpredictable material with unstable shrinking and changing and may therefore not guarantee a perfect fit with time (U. Göthager, 2010).

The colours available in store are approximately 12 with some additional options during the season that may be used for smaller details as for example onto the neckline or the hemline. The colours are decided by the retailer that chose from Ivanhoe's seasonal colour chart.

2.2.4 Finalisation of written order

When the customers have finalized the design decisions, the sales person complete the personal order form in which all necessary information is filled in; the customers contact details, sizes and measurements, and the choice of colours and details for that specific purchase. This is saved in a file in case the customer return for future purchasing, and will so find all the information from previous occasion available. The total customisation process takes approximately 15-20 minutes and once refined, the order form is sent via email to the manufacturer in Gällstad. The customer pays half of the total price at the visit, and the second half when receiving the ready-made garment at the retailer.

2.2.5 Production

When the regular production at Ivanhoe can allow the order to be taken care of, the knitting machine is rescheduled according to the customers' specific measurements. The chosen colours are prepared and the knitting process can start. The technique used is the "fully fashioned", which means that the panels of the sweaters (body, arms and cuffs and hemline) are knitted in their final shapes directly and no cutting process afterwards is necessary (J. Larsson, 2009). This technique enables to produce with as less waste as possible which is of big importance from a lean and environmental perspective.

In a sequential stage the sweaters are brought to the seamstresses who sew and finish the garments.

The wholesale price for the Knit on Demand sweaters corresponds to the price of a sample sweater and is 600 SEK. Included in that price however, is also the cost of transportation to the store (in Stockholm) that stands for approximately 70 SEK of the total sum.

2.2.6 Delivery

The delivery takes place within two weeks. The customer is contacted by the retailer when the product is available for pick up in store. In case the customer wish to have the sweater sent directly to the home address, the garments goes directly from the producer Ivanhoe, but in that case the delivery is paid by the customer.

From above step description of the production cycle one may consider that the customization level of Knit on Demand sweaters takes place from measuring the perfect fit and the personally selected details. The customization afterwards lays in colour, motif (such as stripes or different coloured collar), choice of threads on buttons, but most importantly the specific size that the customer requires. Knit on Demand does therefore represents a level of customization similar to that of individualisation or personalization rather than a complete mass customisation since the product is based on a pre engineered model. As Gilmore and Pine describes it; an adaptive customisation.

When analyzing Knit on Demand according to the four requirements for a successful customisation approach (Pine et al.,1993), the key points results as follows:

1/ An instantaneous process;

As specified in the procedure process above, the step from presenting the Knit on Demand product to the finalisation of the customer's order form is completed within 20 minutes. That time cannot be considered excessive, since customers purchasing an individualized product are willing to spend longer time on it (M. L. Fisher, 1997). After this point however, the customers are constraint to wait approximately 14 days before achieving the ready-made garment. For being a customized product that time is most probably not perceived as too long, but it is important however that the lead time is communicated to the customer in the beginning of the process. In short, the process can be explained as rather instantaneous.

2/ A costless linkage within the process

The link within the Knit on Demand process does not provoke any high extra costs except from that of delivery (70 SEK). As the product awareness and sales increases however, additional costs will be revised and include for example promotional activities and communication.

3/ A seamless relationship and coordination

The close relationship is an integral part of Knit on Demand and the customers are personally assisted throughout the customisation process in the store. This is an important issue for all involved parties however, meaning that the Knit on Demand approach can be considered “seamless”.

4/ A frictionless network

The information flow within Knit on Demand is managed via emailing and telephone contact between producer and retailer.

As usual scenarios when companies grow, there is a possibility to develop well designed software that can simplify the communication both up-stream as down-stream the value chain. Such a development can be considered when sales quantities are higher, but what is of greater concern in this specific thesis project however is how the communication of the concept and the relationship with the end customer can be maintained and developed. This aspect will be discussed as the result is presented further on.

In sum, the four requirements above can be summarized as well thought through in the case of Knit on Demand. All approaches are significant to revising when creating the communication via the expected web site, where the business philosophy and relationship requires to be maintained.

2.3 The communication of Knit on Demand

The strategic approach of customisation and the production is as indicated above a major focus of Knit on Demand as a project. But if looking even closer at what the concept of the project entirely is representing, it is necessary to consider also the communicational aspect. Because not only Knit on Demand represents a defined approach, it is also part of an industry where communication is a crucial aspect around the product and the company in its entirety; the fashion industry.

Fashion has since the birth of the industry, been characterized by an enormous content of emotions, perceptions, branding and communication. Not only the product itself is an important factor of creating brand awareness, but of big importance are also the “supporting” features such as advertising, packaging and visual store concepts (A. Hedén & J. McAndrew, 2005).

On today’s Swedish fashion market where Knit on Demand product finds its position, all the present brands are representing something very strong and distinctive, where a widespread brand awareness constantly higher the level of competition. The Swedish fashion consumers

are generally keen in creating ones personal style through clothing, however Swedish fashion is perceived as sophisticated but trend sensitive (Infomat, 2008), and where the product developing brand suppliers all stands for precise brand philosophies and distinctive communication.

Aiming to be positioned on such a market reality, Knit on Demand is so far less communicated compared with the emerging and the established brands on the market, both regarding customizers as product developing brand suppliers. Up until today, the presence at the retailer Som Concept represents together with the School of Textiles in Borås, the only sources of market communication. When more people with time enter at Som Concept most probably the result will be a more wide spread communication via word of mouth among existing and potential customers. The store personnel ensure that the so far existing customer has been more than pleased with the service and the product which most probably will emphasize the future success in communicating Knit on Demand (L. Hjelte, 2010). The effect of word of mouth is a very successful tool of communication that enters perfectly in the digital society of today where Internet and social medias are growing remarkably. Opinions and experiences among people are constantly shared via these means and people generally tend to emphasize a “We-Society” where sharing is more important than living only as an “individual” (S. Carbonaro & C. Votava 2010). Such a fact can stand for an opportunity for Knit on Demand’s future communication, since relationship and transparency plays a crucial role in the business concept and the product.

2.4 Conclusions

Knit on Demand as a customizer represent according to the discussed traditional ideas behind the strategy, a solid ground and well thought through approach and process. The various options of customizing towards the end customers are perceived as positive that stands for a value in a twofold direction; for the involved parties as well as the customers themselves. In fact, the creative options in the customising development give the opportunity to individualize a garment that many times are following a basic line. This, at the same time that the procedure and the production of the Knit on Demand sweaters do not provoke not much waste, nor much time and complications for the companies involved. Such a fact can emphasize the care about both the environment as well as all the human resources involved, including the end customer. As regards the communication, these facts can be translated into a strong concept where relationship, transparency and added value stand for important issues in succeeding as a customizer and are also a focus within the Knit on Demand strategic approach. Communicating such facts in the future can give a possibility in having attention on the fashion market. This information will be further discussed in chapter 5.

3 Internal and external ambience

Above chapter has provided necessary information regarding the Knit on Demand project. In below section the involved parties, Ivanhoe and Som Concept, are presented more closely to arrive at a complete frame about the internal structure and character. Furthermore, additional information regarding external realities is presented in order to give an even deeper insight of the present reality around Knit on Demand.

3.1 The producer: Ivanhoe ¹

The production of the Knit on Demand sweaters is made in Gällstad, an area that used to be the heart of knitwear craftsmanship in Sweden during the beginning of the 20th century. The knitting manufacturer Ivanhoe is one of few manufacturers still active today. Ivanhoe produces, except from Knit on Demand, part of their own functional sportswear lines, offered in an autumn/winter and a spring/summer collections. One part of their production is outsourced to other European manufacturers, with whom they keep a very strong contact. In fact, transparency and relationship are important key words in Ivanhoe's production and business philosophy, both with other manufacturers as with their material suppliers and clients.

Attached to Ivanhoe's production unit there is a multi-brand store, the GY-store that sells a big part of Ivanhoe's collections together with other quality brands such as Henri Lloyd, Oscar Jacobson, O'neil and North Sales.

Knit on Demand sweaters are produced, as mentioned, with the fully fashioned technique. A program is developed in the regular knitting machines which makes production relatively easy to adjust to the Knit on Demand sweaters. Regular size measurements are adapted to the special measurements of the customers, as for example a medium size +6cm width added to the body length. This precision makes it possible to offer a perfectly fitted sweater to the customer with no complicated re-programming of the knitting machine. In fact, not one sweater has been returned so far, something that is promising for future sales.

It is clearly a positive aspect from a financial view that a specific machine is not necessary for the customized sweaters but on the other hand the regular production at Ivanhoe is interrupted as the Knit on Demand sweaters requires changes in the machine settings. This has led to Ivanhoe being forced to put aside the orders from Knit on Demand. Due to the low quantities up until today they cannot interrupt their standard production at any possible moment. In order to be able to dedicate one machine fulltime to the customized garment, the required quantities are approximately eight sweaters / day, as explained by Ulf Göthager at Ivanhoe (2010). He further points out that there is an interest in offering a "mass produced" product in addition to the Knit on Demand sweaters as for example scarves or hats that from a design

¹ The information in this paragraph is based on the interview and discussion with Ulf Göthager, Ivanhoe, 2010-03-30

and colour perspective are similar to the customized sweaters. Such a product extension can create higher sales and facilitate the priority of Knit on Demand.

The lead time settled is maximum 14 days, however, theoretically a sweater could be done in approximately two hours from received order to complete garment. The reason for not doing so is the interruption of the regular production and the logistics. As regards the logistics, deliveries to the store in Stockholm are arranged once a week.

The producer Ivanhoe is an important link in the value chain standing for material management and the production itself, whereby a close relationship has characterized the collaboration from the beginning. As for Knit on Demand, also for Ivanhoe a close contact within their network is highly appreciated, and can therefore guarantee a quality product from raw material to final garment. The cotton yarns for the sweaters are produced in Italy at the company Filartex and in Portugal at the company TMG. These European suppliers are concerned in both quality and environment issues and are certified within it.

The personnel at Ivanhoe, Gällstad, have met an increasing demand and frequent discussions around locally produced garments both with suppliers as with clients in their multi brand shop. This fact emphasizes the importance of the Made in Sweden concept that accompanies the concept behind the Knit on Demand sweaters.

3.2 The retailer: Som Concept²

Since the beginning of the commercialisation of Knit on Demand in 2009, the retailer Som Concept is running the sales of the customized sweaters.

Som Concept is situated in the *PUB house* in Stockholm city centre, and may be categorized as a multi brand shop-in-shop male store. They offer their own Som customized jeans and suits, Knit on Demand sweaters, and total look products for men. Accessories are also important categories for the total sales in the store.

There are three persons serving in the store, and one basic criterion for the store personnel is the ability to take personal customized orders. Therefore, design, sewing and pattern skills represents an extra service from store personnel and creates most likely confidence for the customer interested in customized garments.

In customization, customer contact and feedback is crucial for the development and the improvement of the product and the system. As regards the Knit on Demand sweaters, the customers has been very satisfied with as well the service, the options available and the final result of the product as confirmed by the store personnel. The signals that Som Concept as a retailer wishes to connect to the product are: close production, environmental thinking, an anti “buy-new-and-through-away” consumption, and finally involvement of the customer. In sum similar to the Knit on Demand philosophy. One important observation of the store personnel

² The information in this paragraph is based on the interview and discussion with Lotta Hjelte, Som Concept, 2010-04-09

is that the clientele appreciate these aspects, the relationship and the Made in Sweden production (L. Hjelte, 2010). The customers has perceived a “family” connection to the store, the producer and the product itself, where their own involvement is a very appreciated and that adds remarkable value to the product in its entirety for them.

Furthermore, the store personnel believes that the concept and the business idea behind the customized sweaters, jeans and suits has reached out to the customers as desired, even though it is in a development stage. Knit on Demand has so far had approximately 1-2 interested customers/week, whilst the Som jeans line has had from two to more interested customers/week. Important to notice in this case is that the jeans are presented at Som Concepts web site with the option of customising and purchasing on line that may represent one reason for this fact.

Som Concept sees the Knit on Demand product as unique where the customer represents the focus. As regards the target group, Som Concept does not wish to classify or segment towards a certain kind of consumer. In fact, up until today they have managed to attract a wide range of men from 13 to 70 years old with different lifestyles and product preferences. Some men are interested in the product because of the ability to achieve a perfectly fitted sweater when it comes to size, in case the person is taller than the average and does therefore not match with the markets standard sizes. But there are also a big part of the customers that simply enjoy the fact of customizing a garment, for “fun” so to say. Whilst for a suit that requires many details and specific measurement for a perfect and personal fit, a sweater represent a basic garment to which the customer enjoy adding a personal touch in order to differentiate from others.

As mentioned, Som Concept is mostly focusing on the male segment, but they have found an interest in the offered customized garment also from female customers. However, since most of the products are created from a pre established basic model for men, a perfect fit may not be guaranteed for women. The model that best fits women so far is the Chinos available at the jeans and trousers section. As regards Knit on Demand on the other hand, there is probably a greater chance for a women to find an adequate model to customize being a more basic and more easily an androgyny garment category. The interest from the female segment shows however a general potential for the future to extend the product availability of Knit on Demand and the communication towards women as well.

Lotta Hjelte (2010) explains that Knit on Demand sweaters and the other available products in the store do not compete with each other, even if some are customized and some are not. They rather complement each other and create a portfolio that may satisfy different customers’ demand. The price range is more or less the same as regards the sweaters available in store, whilst perhaps the added perceived value is higher for a customized product. This beneficial aspect represents an opportunity for Knit on Demand that thanks to the personal involvement in the product, perfection in fit and customized design actually may compete majorly with other products in upcoming seasons.

The supply and demand chain, the product and the service at the retailer represents a good ground for Knit on Demand. Som Concept is an important source of communication being in direct contact with both customers as potential customers. As indicated however, as the future goal is to expand as a player on the competitive Swedish fashion market, deeper analysis of the external realities can provide input on opportunities and requirements from the outside;

3.3 The external situation

Today most discussions in all consumption goods industries are focused on the changes we are going through in terms of consumption and demand but most importantly also the necessity in taking actions for a sustainable development of our planet Earth. This concern in particular innovative products such as fashion due to short lifecycles, damage on the environment throughout the production and finishing processes and the many times unethical labour force treatments within the value chain in some countries. The increasing opposition to the mass production system is most probably a result of a wider knowledge about such facts (S. Carbonaro & C. Votava, 2010). The end consumers are not only demanding regarding the product and its features, but are also powerful due to their increasing knowledge and concern regarding how the products are being made. The roots, the materials in the products and the history behind it become more and more important for, in particular, the Swedish consumers. This means that transparency in information regarding the raw material and the human resources behind the product are important to be communicated (Svensk Handel, 2010).

This also regards, I would add, the packaging, that in order to be sustainable need a specific material, design and utility. Because, the consumers generally are increasingly interested in not only how products are produced but also how they are packaged and transported.

Not only is the fashion industry itself ready for change but the external variables are almost forcing companies to think in a new way for the future. People are generally starting to search for authenticity in their actions and purchasing which results in an “anti-direction” to the short life cycles of fashion products where trends are changing constantly (K. Angelin & P. Hansson, 2009).

One may here withdraw the importance in emphasizing on a company’s and its brand’s philosophy rather than focusing on the promotion of the newest product from the last collection. There is a longing for both authenticity as for meaning and value which means that companies need to be and to present themselves with pure transparency. This concerns heavily Knit on Demand that stands for just that attention to sustainability, locally produced garments and transparency.

Svensk Handel (2010) presents in recent researches interesting facts regarding sustainability that instead of developing new products and concepts, existing companies will in the future work together and connect to and with each other in order to niche. It is a kind of “tailoring” the future where eco-thinking stands in focus. Here one may connect also the various services available on line such as for example the music service *Spotify* that is available for as well purchasing as non-purchasing costumers and there through the level of the service will be

determined. With such an approach it is possible to satisfy a wide range of consumers and respond to their demand variety, whilst nurturing the world's material resources.

As mass produced goods has increased in past years, equally the demand for diversity has increased and in this context we have the example of re-designing products, offering vintage clothing for example. But, in such a reality it is also, I assume, where customized products may offer the right product.

One may withdraw that in the future, the customers themselves will play a crucial role in the development of many products and services according to their specific demand, needs and requirements.

3.4 Conclusions

The internal reality of Knit on Demand is in line with what recent researches tells about the changes in the external environment. Important key points to bring forward are the changes in customer requirements and needs of transparency and sustainability.

The partners Ivanhoe and Som Concept are representing a positive part of Knit on Demand where collaboration is favoured and were all parties are open to reinforce the product and work for a growth of the customized knitted sweaters. In the following chapter, further analysis regarding future opportunities will be discussed based on expressed wishes from the involved parties as well as further empiric studies.

4 Requirements for future growth

In this chapter, the requirements from the involved parties are presented in order to get an even deeper insight of possibilities on how meeting the future and obtaining strategic improvement. To further understand how the different requirements fit into the external reality, the aspect of competitive advantage is analyzed. In this section benchmark analysis is presented through case studies of NikeId and Tailor Store.

Being Knit on Demand a product in a launching stage, there are of course several desires and requirements from behalf of all involved parties for the future growth. The Swedish School of Textiles (THS) to begin with, focuses their desires for the moment on marketing, which up until today is less developed than the product aspects and the logistics (J. Larsson, 2010).

The importance of communicating the product and Knit on Demand is therefore an important next step in order to higher the awareness of the product itself. It is furthermore required, as mentioned, to communicate Knit on Demand as a product developing brand supplier in its entirety, and no longer as a project.

However, in order to get a wider spectrum of the requirements to be met, it is also important to analyse the desires from the manufacturer and the present retailer. They are in direct involvement with both the product and the customer and may therefore provide important feedback and information. Starting with the manufacturer Ivanhoe;

4.1 A producer's point of view

The most important information shared by Ivanhoe about what should be done in the future is that in order to keep the project feasible in a long term basis, the sales quantities need to be higher (U. Göthager, 2010). This is very much connected with the fact that communication is missing, since few people so far has been in contact with the customized knitted sweaters, directly and/or visually. Since the very start up of the sales, approximately 30 sweaters in total have been produced and delivered to the store Som Concept. Ivanhoe, that also is a retailer, believes that by offering the Knit on Demand sweaters also in their shop, sales quantities may increase remarkably. This statement is furthermore confirmed as an interesting aspect from the THS team.

Ivanhoe does not possess any special requirements when it comes to the product, the design and its development itself. However they would appreciate adding embroidery or a similar kind of signature to better identify the customized sweaters. Once again; a desire in communicating Knit on Demand. They are though very interested in additional products as for example knitted scarves and hats to widen the product portfolio and complement the knitted sweaters.

Ulf Göthager (2010) believes that in order to attract the consumer, many colours need to be available even though the customer's final decision might be to buy a simple black round neck sweater. This means that the colour card available for customizing must be rather wide, or at least vary. Most of the sold sweaters so far are black and grey, whilst the most particular versions have been striped in stronger colours or detailed with a thread in a contrast colour.

Ivanhoe, as the other parties involved, do not which to focus on a specific target group. Instead, their focus as a manufacturer is put on a perfect fit, on production perfectionism and development and on an increase in sales. From a more commercial perspective Ivanhoe, agrees with Knit on Demand team at THS that transparency in the value chain is an important keyword when communicating the product and creating brand awareness. All individuals involved in the production process should be presented in order to provide transparency to the consumer who then can create a strong relationship with the product in its entirety.

Compared to Ivanhoe's own production, the Knit on Demand sweaters differ mostly in terms of a simple design where the costumers' main appreciation lays in the fact that they may buy a perfectly fitted sweater. As mentioned previously, today Ivanhoe's own production is interrupted when preparing the knitting machine for a customized Knit on Demand sweater. It does not affect majorly, but the optimum scenario is that of being able to dedicate one machine only for Knit on Demand. However, such a decision may be taken only when sales quantities are high enough. One may here see how Ivanhoe manage to have an extended offer, producing both in higher quantities for standard production and simultaneously customized sweaters without asking an excessive retailer price from the customer of Knit on Demand. This fact emphasizes a future growth of Knit on Demand and demonstrates that in the event of higher sales numbers, greater dedication in production is possible to achieve and to develop.

4.2 A retailer's point of view

As the first and most significant retailer so far, Som Concept is trying to reinforce Knit on Demand as it best fits the store's visual aspects and the store's concept itself. One important notice is that in this report the purpose is to develop Knit on Demand as the product developing brand supplier and Som Concept is therefore represented as a retailer. Their wishes and opinions are of big importance since they exclusively are facing the customers for the moment. But when selling Knit on Demand in more point of sales in the future, the presentation and the development of the product must be done in an equal way at all retailers in order not to confuse the end-customer.

When it comes to extension of further product categories, Som Concept would like to offer also thicker sweaters as for example those in wool. But as stated by Ivanhoe, this means a trade off in production of Knit on Demand where a woollen sweater is more difficult to be made with precision in fit. Also a wider spectrum of colours would be appreciated. For now, Som Concept is constraint to follow the resources and the availability at Ivanhoe when it comes to the offer to the end customer.

Future aspect from Som Concept's point of view is to further develop the precision in the information flow upstream the value chain and in lead times.

In sum, the requirements from all the three involved parties are mostly concentrated to higher sales, as typically when launching a new product. Knit on Demand represents an innovation on the targeted Swedish fashion market only by the fact that it offers customized knitted sweaters. Therefore, sequentially in below paragraphs analyses in how customisation may be

used as a competitive advantage will provide a wider base on how to meet involved parties requirements;

4.3 Customization as competitive advantage

To facilitate success and obtaining a competitive advantage through mass customisation, a company must attentively organize the company to achieve, high quality, relatively low cost and high skills in order to manage variety and different customer demand (Pine et al., 1993). By these statements one may understand the importance of a company's adaptability and continuous improvement of their system. The importance of customer's assistance when purchasing also plays a major role in this strategic aspect.

In the case of Knit on Demand and the production at Ivanhoe the possible competitive advantage to the actual approach can be considered potential since there are no investment required in particular machinery. This is positive not only from a company perspective but also for the customer that will be offered a reasonable price accordingly. Perfect fit and a competitive price may be added as part of the value for the customer in this contest.

Today the direct contact with the customer is a crucial part of the product, but with time, a higher amount of contact and promotion via the World Wide Web will be important for the frequent internet user as the customer of today is but also the possible advantage through optimizing the communication within the company organisation.

An interesting analysis to learn from in this perspective is the success behind the Japanese bicycle company NBIC. Suresh Kotha (1995) analyses how NBIC managed to achieve a remarkable competitive advantage in a stagnant market situation by pursuing mass production and mass customisation strategies simultaneously.

NBIC offers three brand names (*Panasonic*, *National* and *Hikari*) and cover there through a large part of the total market shares in its segment. After some flourishing years in the seventies, product standardisation and mass production realities resulted in a stagnant development of the market in the following two decades. As a consequence, a high variety of offer from the competing brands stressed the market where up to 300 models could be offered from one single company. It is from this situation that the idea of mass customized bicycles at NBIC was born. The interesting thing about this case is how NBIC in four months managed to establish a feasible technology system for this approach, and the name of the system was POS, *Panasonic Ordering System*, than enabled NBIC to directly communicate with the customers via their retailers.

Except from the close contact to the customers, what was a crucial key to success behind this production strategy was how NBIC let their skilled workers to rotate between the mass production plant and the mass customisation plant. There through, they were able to constantly improve the systems themselves. This further shows that it is possible to implement a mass production strategy and a mass customization strategy concurrently, and that the broad offer produced under the same roof actually may gain a wide competitive advantage even in a standardized and stagnant market situation. Furthermore, the close contact with the customers enabled the company to constantly improve also the mass

production items since they through direct customer demand in customisation provide important information regarding the markets general preferences, perceptions, trends and development.

What is also of great significance is the focus on a fusion between human resources and their skills, together with technology that enables a strategic flexibility that resulted in development. A further important issue to note is that all the suppliers related to the production of the products were situated in a close area to NBIC production units, which enable a lean concept and, I assume, indicates that acting local may contribute to a company's success, and is particularly important when it comes to producing mass customized products.

Above case shows that if a company has the capability of blending knowledge within the organisation and a high flexibility at a strategic level, most probably the chance of a constant competitive advantage through customisation is high if not certain. Furthermore, the possibility to enter on new market segments not only helps the work of customisation on a production basis, but it also enables the company to cover a greater market share offering both lower ended as higher valued products.

Customisation as a strategic approach may clearly in itself be used as a competitive advantage, from a manufacturer's point of view but also from a brand supplier's point of view. Transparency and lean efficiency combined with the additional benefit of actually customizing once sweaters are important features and aspects that may be highlighted in the future communication and strategy of Knit on Demand.

In sum, Ivanhoe as a manufacturer and retailer may use mass customisation as a competitive advantage in the future as the combination of regular production and customized production is well functioning. Technology and customer contact remains however their primary objective in order to use Knit on Demand as competitive advantage from their side.

Knit on Demand on the other hand, may thanks to a competitive price range achieve a strong perception of high value by being an "affordable" customizer.

The close relationship is valid also here, where technologies via the internet represents the most optimum of tools for such a scope.

In comparison to the case of NBIC, similarities can be withdrawn as it concerns a relatively close production and even more in the possible case of offering Knit on Demand products in the store of Ivanhoe.

4.4 Competing with customisation on the fashion market

Fashion in general has the last years relied heavily on mass production (mostly feasible due to low cost labour force in the Eastern countries) where market leaders such as H&M and Zara represent some of the most successful of this kind. However, the market's overwhelming product flow is in more recent discussions criticised thanks to a fed-up feeling among customers and replaced with a focus on sustainability and opposition to unnecessary consumption (S. Carbonaro & C. Votava, 2010). So, customisation has, as stated previously, find its relevance also on the market place of fashion.

Knit on Demand may be described as a sustainable innovation on the Swedish market. But the Swedish fashion brand represents strong identities, products and brand names. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how to compete in such a situation as a customizer in a launching stage. One of the most significant strategic changes in today's markets is the strong relationship with the customer, especially the one that customizers may offer. Continuous interaction with the end-consumer and more specifically the concentration in providing customer experience, gives companies the possibilities to gain a strong competitive advantage as well in the fashion industry as in others (V. Ramaswamy, 2008). Secondly, this provides the companies with valuable information about customer's preferences and demand through direct feedback that may be used for continuous improvement and value adding in future development. Co-creation of value enables accordingly competitive advantage on the market place.

Two good examples in this matter are NikeId and Tailor Store. Below case studies of those can provide information about how they have succeeded as a customizer on the fashion market;

4.4.1 Case: Nike Id

One of the international sensation stories in fashion customisation is the sportswear brand Nike, that manage to maintain the original product and its relative strategy whilst entering in the market of customized products simultaneously with success.

Nike entered on the market as a customizer with their *NikeId* that allowed the customers to personalize their sneakers by choosing colours and embroidery (for example ones personal initials). Today, Nike offers also the possibility to personalize sportswear with for example colours and prints (nikeid.com, 2010).

The customisation story of Nike started with a social network project, *Joga.com*, that Nike established together with Google in occasion with the 2006 Soccer World Cup. Individuals were able to share their skills and personal information about soccer with videos on the forum on which a winner was selected by the community members once a month. Nike as a sportswear company with major focus on sneakers, was via the network that reached approximately one million participants, able to extract important customer information about opinions and experiences around the sport. Furthermore, on the NikeId website, participants were invited to vote on the best sneakers in a contest about designing the next Nike shoe. In addition to that, customers were able to personalize their own sneakers through a wide range of styles, colour settings and embroidery (V. Ramaswamy, 2008).

Once Nike achieved the orders, there were sent to the production plants where one man followed the pair of shoes through a lean production process where, as the general manager Jay Wilkins stated: "...there is no downtime..." (J. Schlosser, 2004, pp248). A result on a business economical view is that the margins for the NikeId is more or less the same as for the regular production since they charged only 10\$ to 20\$ more to the retail price. Whilst the customer on the other could customize a sneaker and still enjoy the brand name Nike.

The NikeId product sequentially also reached customers that not necessarily were soccer fans but more keen on street lifestyle in general.

The customisation approach created through the collaboration with the consumer a strong competitive advantage and value that was further reinforced by the social networking processes and events.

From a fashion industry perspective, except from production and product aspects, the success lies also in the brand name. Except from the perceived added value to the customer through customization, the brand name itself most probably got an even stronger meaning for their already existing customers.

When comparing the Nike story with Knit on Demand, the NikeId level of customization is more limited being focused on few design aspect. It is therefore connected to what Gilmore and Pine (1997) refers to as Cosmetic approach. The product is represented by a standard model and fit to which one may add personal styling features.

As a youthful and spiritual brand with a strong identity the possibility in customizing has enabled the customers to feel strongly connected to Nike as a lifestyle. It also allowed Nike to achieve a competitive advantage in their existing sports – and street wear segment by offering the possibility to customize a mass produced product. As a result, the individualized product provoked high value both from the company as for the purchasing customer.

4.4.2 Case: Tailor Store

Moving closer to the Swedish market we find the brand Tailor Store Sweden AB, a customizer specialized in shirts (tailorstore.se, 2010). With its e-commerce based retail system, Tailor Store offers a wide range of possibilities in customizing ones shirt. This represents a slightly different situation since Tailor Store is based exclusively on sales via internet.

Except from the core business, they also offer accessories such as boxers, ties, cufflinks, socks, customized polo shirts and additional accessory packages such as a measuring kit.

The shirts and the polo shirts are available for men and women, whilst the other product categories are focused on the male segment.

When looking at internet forums such as *webforum* (webforum.nu, 2010) where individuals may share opinions regarding products and purchasing for example, the average respond and perception to the Tailor Store shirts is the advantage of a good relation between quality and price. Furthermore, the higher quality fabrics are perceived as high quality product whit a perfect fit, whilst the more simple fabrics are perceived as sufficient. From this information a pattern may be drawn that shirts being a classic product is preferred when higher quality can be guaranteed and there through the customisation is more desirable and worth spending on.

A competitive advantage lies in launching an innovation of a product that is almost a commodity, at least for the male segment. But also the competitive price offered by Tailor Store. A shirt is typically formal garment and can via this strategy gain the advantage of being perceived as *tailor made*, with a price of an off-the-shelf shirt. The various options and easy customisation process through the website is another advantage.

Furthermore, from a company perspective, the high cost of traditional retailing through direct operating stores is avoided being an e-commerce company.

The business idea of Tailor Store represents a competitive advantage itself being still quite unique on the Swedish fashion market.

What may one learn from above brand comparison? Common for above Nike and Tailor store is the availability in communicating, customizing and purchasing online. Most probably an important key of success for both parties, as above information shows the importance of involvement via internet that this way acts as an interface.

A further notice is that both customizers are emphasising as well men as women wear equally. This widens the possibilities in higher both sales and brand awareness.

Both companies have managed to involve the customers in cooperation when developing their desired product that creates a strong connection and there through, competitive advantage.

As indicated by the case studies, the cost of being a customizer can be close to that of a mass production with today's technologies but that however creates a perceived higher added value to the customer.

There is an equal reinforcement of both the brand name and the product itself thanks to the value that customization itself can add, but also the information and the online shop available on the web sites. Information creates in this way a stronger effect of interest and of word-of-mouth between customer and potential customers.

4.5 Conclusions

The requirements from the producer Ivanhoe and the retailer Som Concept are mostly concentrated to higher sales and visibility. As expressed by the Knit on Demand team at THS, marketing is required in order to communicate the product and the brand name, something that automatically can satisfy the requirement of the two partners.

The theories behind customisation as a competitive advantage has indicated a similarity to Knit on Demand's situation, where production efficiency, high quality and strong relationships represents some of the most important issues for a customizer.

When summarizing the theories and the above successful cases, the most important key points to bring into future strategic decisions of Knit on Demand are the following:

- Knit on Demand stands for transparency, lean production, and perfect fit
- Knit on Demand represents an affordable customizer which enables the creation of competitive advantage in its specific segment
- Customizers and non-customizers needs internet connection both upstream as downstream the value chain, for a strong relationship gaining both the product and the brand.

The authenticity of Knit on Demand and the relationship with the customers is proved crucial in order to reach the requirements and should therefore remain a focus when marketing Knit on Demand. In order to better understand the important issue of marketing on a volatile market such as fashion, below analyses will provide further aspects, following traditional marketing approaches, on how requirements and market characteristics may be met.

5. The Marketing perspective

In this chapter, several prerequisites within marketing will be discussed in order to complete the present situation and requirements by looking from a marketing perspective. This provides an even closer step towards the creative solution as a result of all gathered studies. Here, the case study of Sandra Backlund is also presented.

5.1 Product lifecycles and - fundamentals

Above analyses resulted in several key points concerning the requirements (higher sales and visibility for example) and the basis for competitive advantage of Knit on Demand. Subsequently, traditional marketing theories will provide how these may be met. Important to notice is that marketing researches, segmentation analyses and similar, already have been developed by the Knit on Demand team as the project was launched. Therefore, the issue for today and tomorrow concerns the development from this point: the linking bridge from product to customer.

Being fashion a particular industry where emotions, value and individuality is more significant than in many other industries, it is important to build something “extra” around the product in order to distinguish on the fragmented market. Knit on Demand does possess that feature by being a “new customized product”.

In marketing terms a recently launched product is facing an *introduction* stage. Typical for this stage is that the company face a non profit reality since the cost of introducing the product to the market is larger than the profits from sales. The key costs are those of presenting the product and providing distributors with product availability. In a next step enters the costs of promoting the product in order to attract the end-customer and to “educate” them about the product and the brand name (P. Kotler & G. Armstrong, 2008). Important to notice here is that this is the traditional marketing theory and does therefore not fully include a strategy such as customisation. It is different because of several reasons as for example;

- 1/ in the different lifecycle stages the cost of production and promotion is referred more likely to a mass production reality, not lean customisation efficiency,
- 2/ the customer himself is part of the product development,
- 3/ no stock is necessary at the retailers since the product is made to order.

However, the theory does tell how promoting the product is essential in the introduction stage and that investing in that is crucial for future growth. This concerns Knit on Demand product since the customers need to understand the concept, the value, how to customize and the company philosophy, being themselves an essential part of its entirety.

The purpose of a successful introduction to the market is that of bringing the product to a growth stage where profits will be able to cover the investments and where a wider market share may be gained. In the case of Knit on Demand, the launching costs to be covered are relatively low from this point of view where the base is already established. In short, communication is necessary and should therefore be, as required, a next focus and priority.

Another, rather traditional but however efficient conceptualisation regarding product marketing is the division of the product itself in three parts in order to understand the

importance of what surrounds the product as a physical object. The first level is the *Core* and refers to the core business, for example the knitted sweaters of Knit on Demand, but can also refer to a specific business idea. The second level is called *Formal* and includes style aspects, the brand name, the packaging and other eventual tangible features such as tags and etiquettes. The *Augmented* level at last, refers to the surrounded features to the product such as guarantee, service, advertisement and promotion (M. Granger & T. Sterling, 2003).

This division shows once again the importance of marketing in creating a complete “world” around a physical fashion product, including both tangible as intangible values that all weights equally.

When connecting these aspects to the different lifecycle phases, it is possible to see the relevance of a strong combination of the three levels in the “critical” introduction stage.

The customers will be educated to the product and the company; what it stands for, which are the benefits and the values. Therefore, the core, the formal and the augmented features seems in this case to have equal importance for the customers’ perception and curiosity.

Secondly, the customers will remember the product and the company through the brand philosophy and style; where they satisfy with the concept? The customers will furthermore come back if the service and the promotion are coherent with their expectations and desires. In short, to bring the product from introduction to growth and further development the product’s and the brand’s complete surrounding features need coherency and efficiency from the introduction stage and further on perform according to expectations in a constant manner.

One can here extract how except from the importance of the product, what surrounds the product decides whether the customers will be loyal and keep interest with time and therefore the success of the company’s strategy. If such rather abstract still complete “atmosphere” determine how a product and company should be presented and communicated, the concept of perception and branding is crucial to analyse more closely;

5.2 Positioning and Branding³

Positioning stands for the customer’s perception of a certain product in relation to the competitors’ similar offer. In order to be perceived in a certain way, companies chose a positing strategy. Such a strategy is based on the concentration on which competitive advantage to communicate. In the case of Knit on Demand, above analyses tells that the customisation, the transparency and the environmental concern may be used in such a purpose and communicated accordingly in order to achieve the desired perception from the customer.

³ As other marketing features such as for example market segmentation, positioning can be affirmed only after attentive market researches. Knit on Demand team has in the initial stage finalized such studies whereby the development of the brand name and required position on the market were created and established. Therefore, in this specific thesis research, positioning and branding is analyzed for developing opportunities, based on present reality and studied information rather than on new market researches. Thus, discussions and assumptions are based on empiric studies.

As stated, an important aspect of the product, its success and the positioning is the brand name. Branding is something that for many years has become crucial for every companies strategy and surrounds the entire concept. In recent years however, branding is getting concentrated to transparency, to communicate the real values for the company and the products, where also environmental and ethical aspects are crucial (Svensk Handel, 2010). In fact, as discussed in previous chapters, the society is moving more and more away from overwhelming communication aimed to sell “much of everything” and replaced by a sincere and value showing way of communicating what a product stands for (K. Angelin & P. Hansson, 2009).

Brand is a name or a sign that identifies, differentiates and creates an image around the product. It may also be presented in a design or a term for example. Knit on Demand has in an initial stage developed a distinguished logo combined with the brand name (Figure 3). It is similar to a stamp and customer feedback has proved that this symbol and the font “Typical Writer”, have successfully communicated identification and authenticity (J. Larsson, 2010). The logo, with the text “Fitted and Knitted in Sweden”, Gällstad and 2009, is furthermore explaining the local production of the Knit on Demand sweaters and the launch of the product in year 2009.

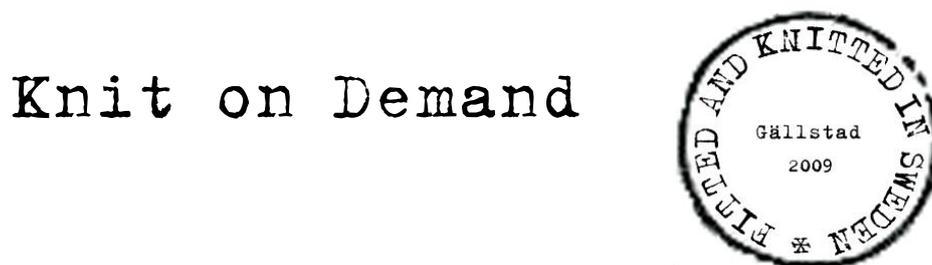


Figure 3; The logotype of Knit on Demand

Important in the fashion industry is the customers' connection and relationship to a specific brand, that determines whether the customer is loyal or not (M. Granger & T. Sterling, 2003). In order to distinguish when it comes to branding and positioning, a crucial aspect is to bring forward the uniqueness of the product. This is in aspect that concerns customized products heavily. In a qualitative research developed by Nikolaus Franke & Martin Schreier (2008) regarding this matter, it was shown that the distinction from others that a mass customized product may deliver represents the main motive of purchasing such a product. Through the product the person feel a strong distinction, from which one may understand that the option of offering a complete uniqueness in terms of for example signing ones personal initials could represent a very important feature for the success of delivering added value to the customer. N. Franke & M. Schreier (2008) states according to such result that people who chose mass customization are people that desire uniqueness. The sense of distinction and individuality in many cases (product or services) is more important than the actual physical benefits of a

customized product. In such a hypothesis the focus of the company should be in proving the option of deliver uniqueness. On the other hand however, in products that does not typically demonstrate ones personality, there is an increased importance of the aesthetic and/or functional assets of it. This concerns Knit on Demand in terms of the perfection in fit that is part of the foundation business idea, where ones personality is shown slightly less through features such as colours, model and eventual embroidery.

In the Swedish knitwear segment today, one finds a huge success as regards the stated uniqueness which is the designer Sandra Backlund. Even though she does not offer customized knitwear, she represents a success story behind uniqueness in knitwear and branding and is worth looking closer to;

5.2.1 Case: Sandra Backlund

Sandra Backlund represents one of the emerging and upcoming new designers on both the Swedish as the international fashion market. The product portfolio is composed exclusively by knitwear (sandrbacklund.com, 2010). With a high level of character, her design has reached an authenticity in the product and there through the brand name itself. In fact, the specialization in knitwear and the high content of artistic approach in the product design has created a strong and diversified brand image on the market in general.

Interesting in the case for Knit on Demand is the fact that Sandra Backlund is part if the same segment and that she successfully has given a high quality fashion approach to both the product as the representation and communication of it. Knitwear has most probably reached a higher focus on the total fashion market thanks to her influence, which is important for the development and attraction of knitwear as a product category.

On the web site, which is one of the brand's important source of communication, clean background colours emphasizes the product as an art object, something that traditionally is perceived as high fashion. Further advertisement is achieved through a successful Facebook page, presence at museum exhibitions, collaboration with international fashion brands of big importance and finally her own fashion shows (S. Strömquist, 2008). It is a specialized product and the authenticity of it is communicated in a clear and precise way; through colour settings, through the face expression of the models and the environment they are in et cetera.

This case represents a successful example of how an authentic product can contribute to a strong brand name that in turn and vice versa will stand for something specific in terms of style. The knitted sweaters that may be perceived as exclusive are close to tailored high fashion items. The product of Sandra Backlund stands this way for a large part of the branding success that leads to communication of uniqueness through the product.

The way she mixture different channels of communication is interesting in how they vary from high fashion show event to social medias. It means that Sandra Backlund manage on one side to learn from customer feedback via direct contact on Facebook, whilst on the other side promote her brand philosophy and distinguished features of her product via fashion shows and web site for example.

Authenticity, a strong brand name and a close relationship are key words that conclude Sandra Backlund but that also indicate possible solutions for success for any brand.

Moving on more specifically to the important issue of communication as essential to the positioning and branding strategy, it is relevant to understand further aspects of what communication means in fashion business and how it may reinforce a brand and its product? First of all, the product and the brand concept have to be translated in the communicative aspects, meaning that the characteristics of the brand itself need to radiate such relevant content. In fashion many aspects are included in this matter as for example the font of the brand name, the design of the logo, the visual environment in the store, the mood and the style language in advertisements et cetera. These features will have to be unified and gather the brand with the product, from which the customers will be educated and from they create their personal perceptions (T. Hines & M. Bruce, 2008). A famous and good example of branding is Chanel that except from the signature design, the communication is represented by clean and luxurious store design, extravagant fashion shows and a spotless advertising highlighting the product carried by a glamorous model. All these milestones are following the Chanel red thread of luxury and of the black and white signature colour.

Except from being crucial from a company perspective to present a clear and strong brand, it is of great importance from the consumers' point of view since the brand connects in a symbolic way with the customer. Brand is of individual importance including social practices indicating that it means much more than simply a purchase of a certain product. When the customer buys a certain brand instead of another, it communicates a certain customer lifestyle and sense of mind, to which individuals connect or disconnects (T. Hines & M. Bruce, 2008).

T. Hines & M. Bruce (2008) refers to theories about corporate identity and concludes them with explaining the phenomenon as: "...a visual statement of who and what a company is.....it must be visible, tangible and all-embracing..." (pp 232).

Branding means except from all the visual aspects also activity and event related actions taken by the company that has to be coherent to the brand and the identity. Sponsorship and event organisation are two examples of this kind. A further aspect that determines whether the perception and customer loyalty will last is except from the satisfaction and coherency in product and branding also related to the service that importantly determines the value perception. This indicates once again the importance of the intangible value that surrounds the branded product. The more complicated or high-priced a product is the higher are the expectations and requirements of the service level. In the case of customisation the service might be referred to the assistance when customising and the delivery as well as post purchase service, -promotion and -contact.

In short, as the brand affect on the product and the perception, so does the brand affect on the image and on the company's profit potential.

Summarizing the importance of marketing it has been discussed how marketing activities and product strategies may reinforce the product and the brand name through various communication activities, including both tangible as intangible features. The success of such

development will give the opportunity to bring the product from a launching stage to a sequential growth rate stage where one finds an increase in consumer awareness. As a base however, prior communication, the product need to be available and visible, in store or via the internet. These statements have been presented in all three case studies, NikeId, Tailor Store and Sandra Backlund. In the case of NikeId the brand name was one of the elements of success as the customized product reinforced the customers' connection to the brand. As regards Tailor Store the involvement with the customer reinforces the brand as well as the product (a classic garment as a shirt) can achieve higher value through the authenticity in customisation. The brand supplier Sandra Backlund on the other hand communicates an authentic product via both tangible as intangible values presenting her artistic products on fashion shows whilst keeping the customers close via internet.

In the case of Knit on Demand, the foundation researches resulted in a concept around Knit on Demand where above facts were concluded in a brand name with a black and white logo to communicate simplicity and to avoid being perceived as a low-ended brand and product. The font and the logo, as mentioned, communicates a local Made-In product, authenticity and originality; all to embrace the customisation concept (J. Larsson, 2010).

This means that other forms of communicating the corporate identity and the product must include such equal elements in a unified way and all visual features that is connected to the brand has to enable distinction from competitors but also relate to the company brand image.

5.3 Conclusions

Information shows that the present requirements from the involved parties of Knit on Demand are concentrated to higher sales and visibility. The concept, the level of customisation and the organisation of the supply and demand chain is well functioning even if under development. What has to be developed further though is the "emotions" around the brand name Knit on Demand and its philosophy. An aspect that according to the analysis is crucial in today's competitive situation on the fashion market.

Such target goal may be met with marketing activities related to communication as discussed in above chapter. The established concept of Knit on Demand may in a developed launching phase be translated into concrete tools of communication and creation of brand awareness. Initially through the requested web site that is. As an important ground stands the fact of being a sustainably conscious customizer, offering involvement and a personalized product for a reasonable price. That represents a solid platform for communication competitive advantage in a transparent way.

In sum, the tangible and intangible essence of Knit on Demand should be translated and communicated through the creative marketing tools. To manage competition with both customizers and brand suppliers, it is important to create a communication that not only is transparent and informative, but that also contains a high level of authenticity in design and value for the customer.

6 Results and actions for future growth

This chapter presents the creative solutions based on above analyzed material and information. To begin with the guidelines from the researches are summarized to get an immediate explanation of the concept behind the proposed marketing tools (web site, store visual, packaging and etiquettes). In a second part follows a brief analyses and criticism of the presented results.

6.1 The ground for creative solutions

The initial research including the actual situation of Knit on Demand, information about the involved parties and their relative requirements has provided a basis for a comprehension in what should be developed for a future growth of the product and Knit on Demand as a brand. Further analysis of the market's character and marketing approaches has added more precise direction on how such development may be created in order to achieve noticeable results and answer the expressed requirements.

Before presenting the actual creative results, it is important to highlight some key points revealed from above analyses. The purpose of marketing in this specific case is to translate the concept and requirements of Knit on Demand into communication, firstly through a web site.

Within the main concept, lays the fact of being a customizer, something that itself represent a unique fact on the knit wear segment on the Swedish fashion market. In focus, there is the end-customer who is an integral part of the product. Except from the importance of the co-creation and the relationship with the customer, is the sustainable approach of the product and its developing system, both as regards the natural resources as the human resources. Local production, good quality for a reasonable price, distinction and authenticity are further representative key words to bring in focus.

These characteristics may follow the required aspects of the market today that are concentrated to that of being and acting in a transparent way and where authenticity represents an important core. In fact, it has been found that maintaining authenticity and relationship is important in marketing tools and especially via the web site, as learned from the analyzed case studies.

When referring to the four requirements of Pine et al (1993) concerning an instantaneous and costless process, a seamless relationship and a frictionless communication (See page 7), the marketing tools will be related to the main aspects of the concept including these requirements in the strongest possible way.

Part of the communication of the competitive advantage is the division of the product in tangible and intangible categories and may in the case of Knit on Demand be described as follows:

- *Core product* Customized knitted sweaters
- *Formal product* Brand name Knit on Demand and Made-In logo, Basic style with customized features

- *Augmented product* Perfect fit guarantee, Service and close contact in store

All features around the product are connected to the tangible product itself and should be gathered into one single concept for a precise branding and positioning.

The concept and the highlighted features to bring into the content of the web site can now be summarized as follows:

- Information about customisation and Knit on Demand - Communication of the core values of Knit on Demand - Transparency in information about the material and the production
- Contact information - Creativity

These guidelines will create a platform that is possible to start from when communicating and marketing Knit on Demand. The aspects will create a focus in the communication and flourish in all communicative tools and materials for now and for the future. It is important to further add that the content of modernity and fashion are crucial in order to compete and be perceived as an emerging alternative on the fashion market. The communication need to include features that can provide brand connection and strong relationship from a fashion perspective as indicated from external market information.

The relevant tools of marketing that are chosen will be developed in below paragraphs. Firstly, the creation of a web site proposal is presented. The web design will have an “umbrella effect” on the other tools that will follow the same approach and design in order to be coherent and as unified as possible. Thus, secondly, creative proposals on a store visual, packaging and accessories such as etiquettes and brochures will be presented and there through represent a more complete portfolio of marketing functions.

6.2 The web site

In an initial stage, the requirement of the thesis result and the scope of the web site are mainly for communicational reasons and to educate the customers about Knit on Demand. However, it is structure in a way that it easily can be developed with time as will be discussed further on.

To begin with, an internet site enables Knit on Demand to extend the communication levels with the end customer. Not only is it an informative source but it also enables the existing customers to create their personal account where they can log in and see information regarding previous purchase for example (See “Your Sweater”, Figure 5). The customers leave their personal contact information to the store after ordering, and should be confirmed at the moment of purchase to be used also for this specific scope.

In marketing terms, this function can be further translated in other forms of relational features; where newsletters, promotions, fidelity programs and discounts, birthday greetings et cetera, can create a stronger fidelity and interest.

The previously discussed key points to bring into the marketing are presented in a simple and clear design aspect of the web site. Plain, concrete and informative aspects with a touch of creativity enables the customers to enter directly into the “world” of Knit on Demand.

It has been of big importance in creating the authenticity of relationship and product development also on the web site, whereby the information is written in second person and creativity is blended with necessary information.

The logo and the name Knit on Demand is clearly visible in the top of the page in order to further connect the product with a brand name, something that is important for the customer to relate to. The logo and the main menu remain as a layer underneath when entering the different pages on the site. This way it is easier to move from one page to another without having to go back to the home page for choosing from the menu.

Below presentation provides information and the actual creative results of the complete web site. The relative titles of the main menu will be examined one at the time: “Introduction Loading Page”, “Home”, “About”, “Customisation”, “The Value Chain”, “Store”, “Inspiration”, “Gallery” and “Contact”.

6.2.1 Introductive loading page

The first page to appear when editing an internet address is traditionally a loading page where a circle or a line indicates the download from 0% to 100%. This feature is in this case suggested in a more creative way where instead a knitted sweater is “designed” as the page is loaded. Once the page is fully loaded, the visitor chose language, Swedish or English, in order to proceed to the home page of Knit on Demand.

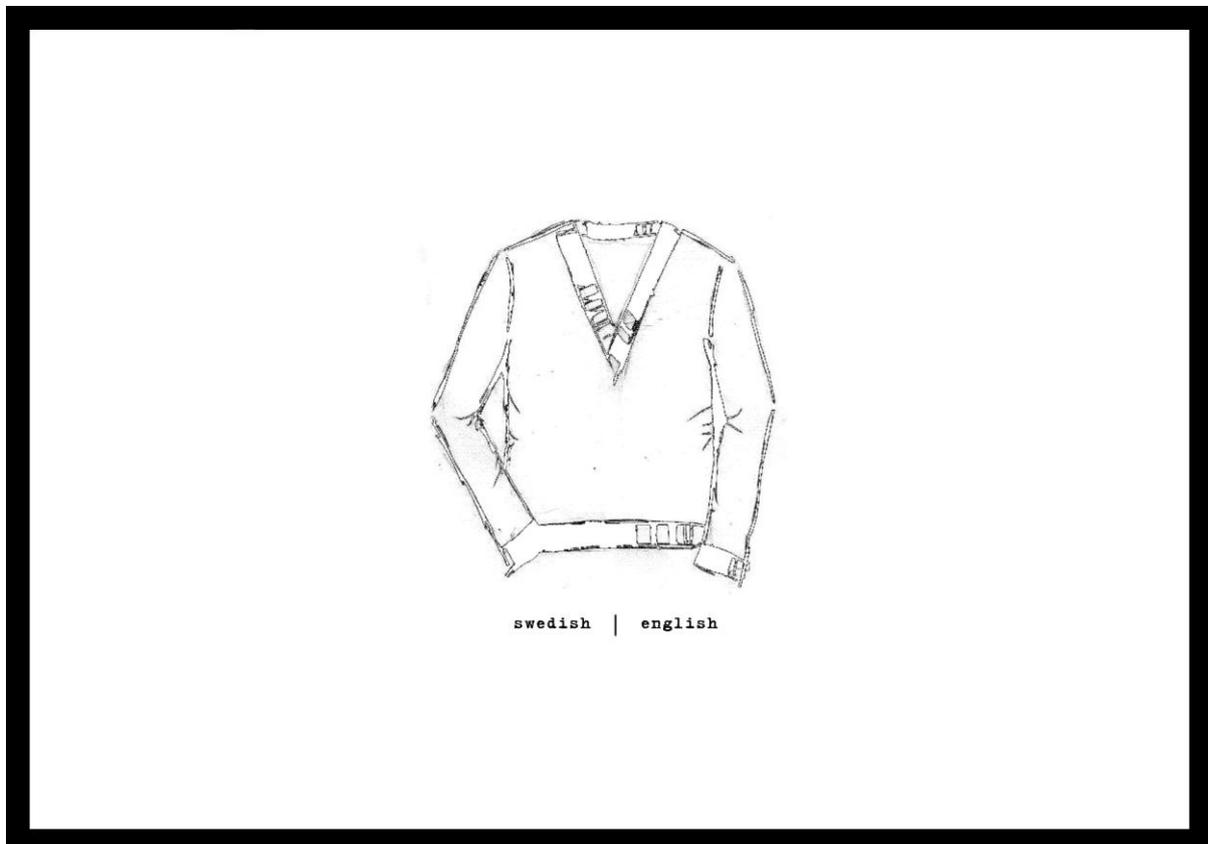


Figure 4: Web Site; Introductive loading page

6.2.2 Home page

The purpose of the home page is to immediately embrace the Knit on Demand concept and product. Authenticity, transparency and the creativity of customized knitwear is translated into a clear and simple though informative layout.

It is further important to create brand awareness and the name and logo Knit on Demand is therefore presented in the top of the page.

Key words on the right side will function similar to a slogan and explain some key aspects of Knit on Demand. These words are appearing from the back and moving forward in order to give movement to the page.

Black and white are the dominant colours, with some additional colours on the pictures.

In focus stands also the illustration of the value chain, in order to emphasise majorly the importance of relationship and transparency; from the material to the end customer.

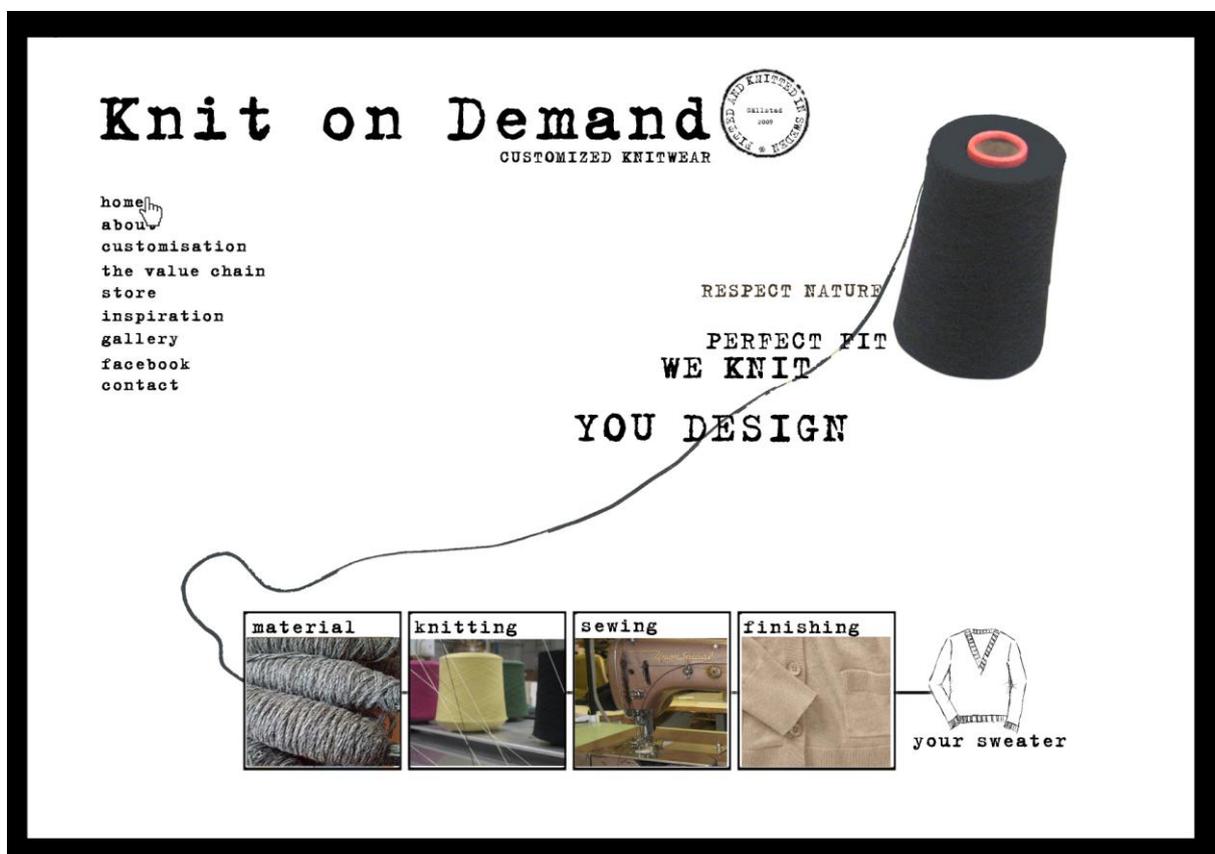


Figure 5: Web Site; Home page

6.2.3 About

The second title in the main menu is “About”. Here, the visitor will achieve information about Knit on Demand, the history and the philosophy. By being a new brand, the suggested text aim to provide as much information as necessary to catch the interest of the potential customers whilst being transparent in explaining as much as possible about Knit on Demand.

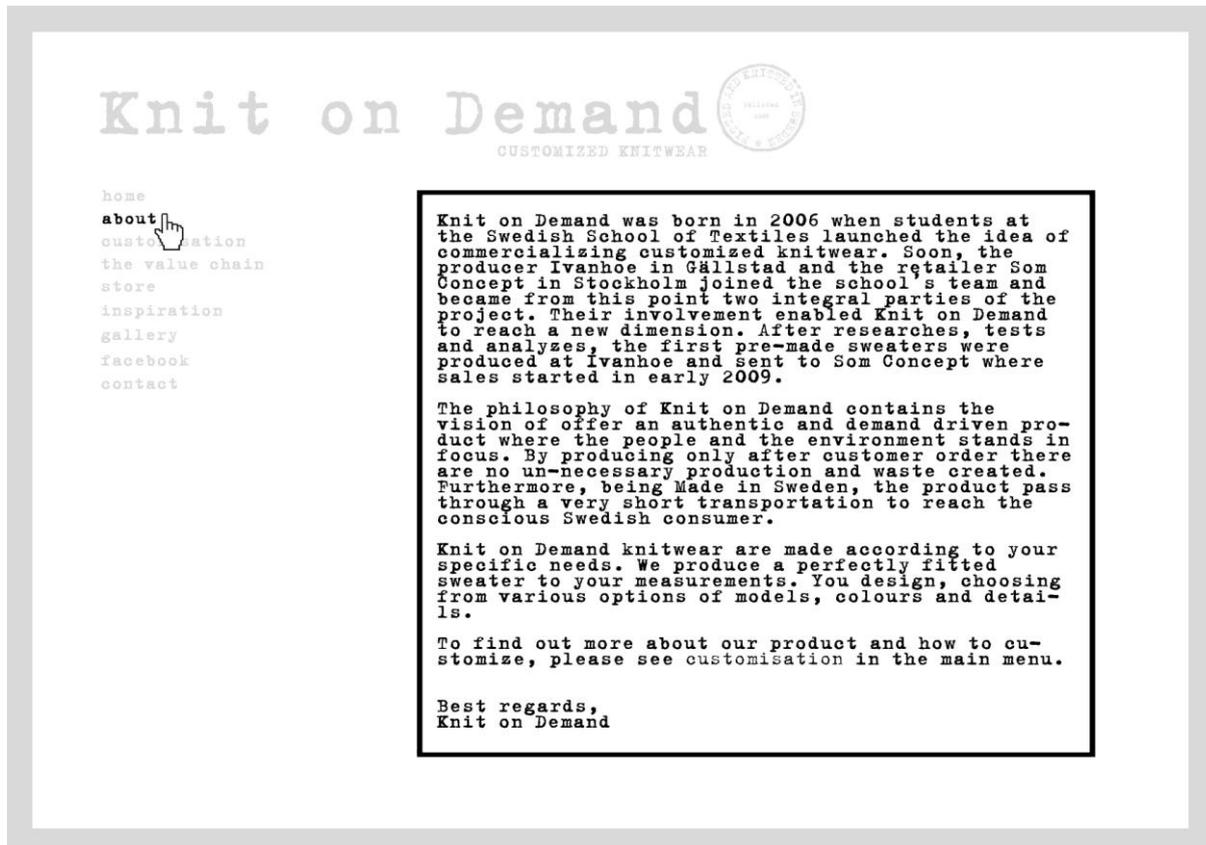


Figure 6: Web Site; About

6.2.4 Customisation

The title “Customisation” aim to explain what customisation means for Knit on Demand and there through inform the potential customers on how the process work, from start to ready-made garment.

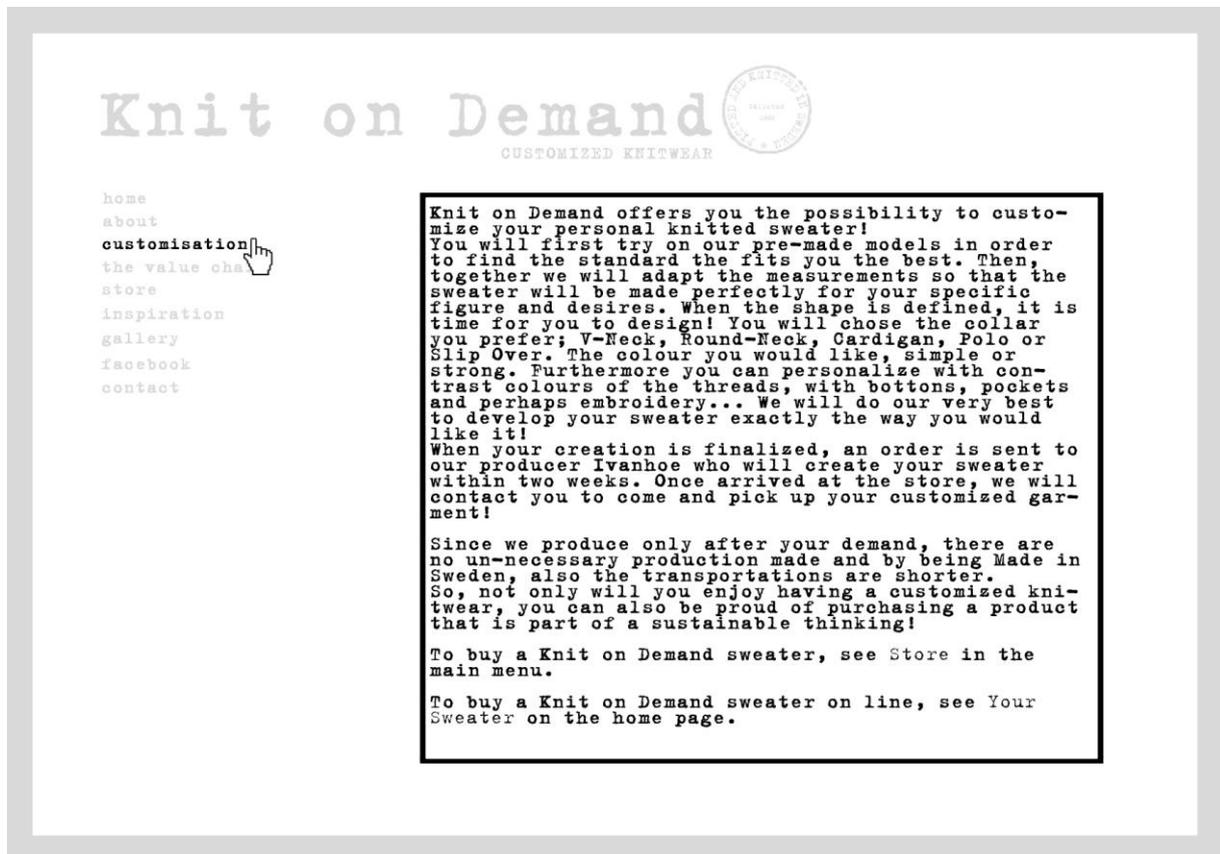


Figure 7: Web Site; Customisation

6.2.5 The Value Chain

One of the most important parts of the Knit on Demand concept is to communicate a transparent and well connected value chain. In this section, information, links and pictures of all involved parties are therefore provided, from material to finishing process. This part will provide an even deeper insight in how the production process works and what stands behind the customized product (Figure 8-11). The pages of the value chain are except from being available in the main menu also possible to enter via the illustrated value chain on the home page.

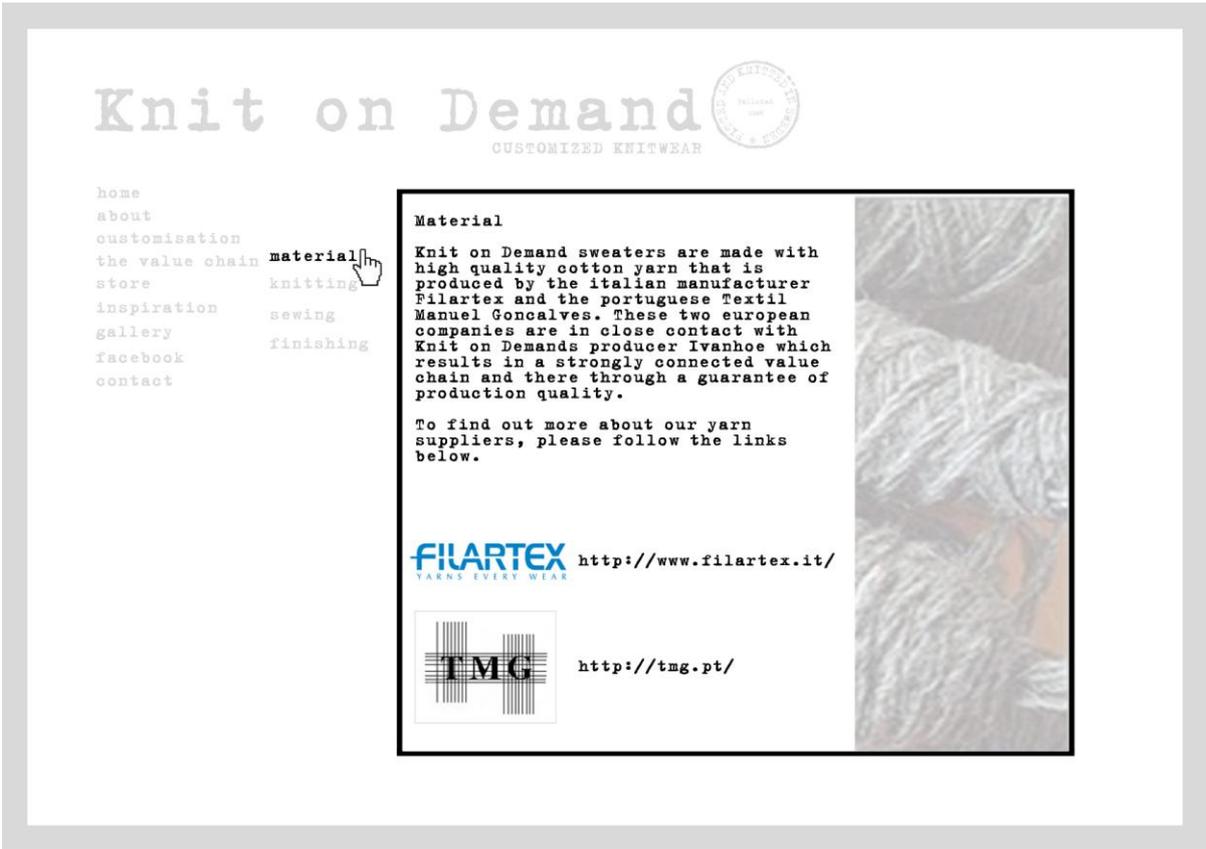


Figure 8; Web Site; The Value Chain - Material



Figure 9: Web Site; The Value Chain - Knitting



Figure 10; Web Site; The Value Chain - Sewing

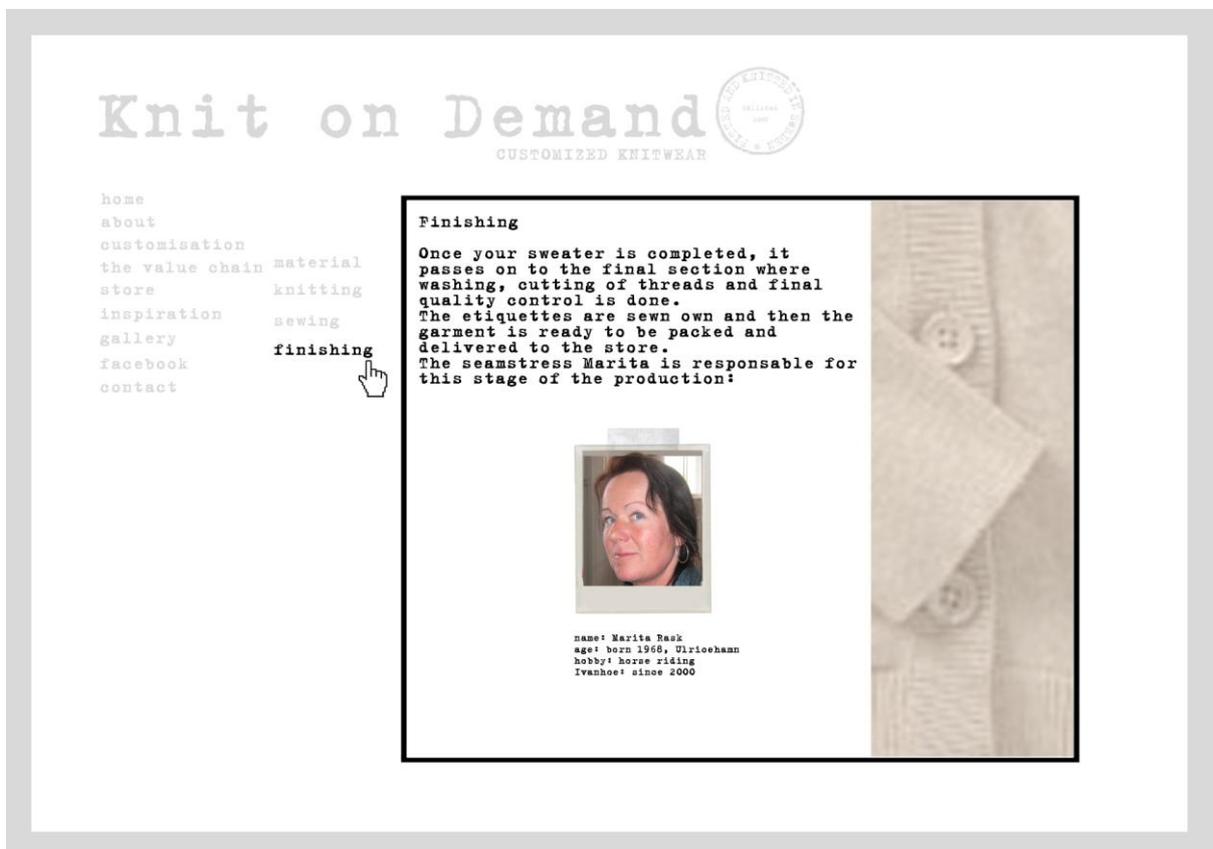


Figure 11; Web Site; The Value Chain - Finishing

6.2.6 Store

In the middle of the menu, there is the title “store” in order to enable the interested visitor to easily see where to buy the customized Knit on Demand sweaters. It is a rather simple page where the most important thing is represented by the actual information of how to get in direct contact with the retailers.



Figure 12: Web Site; Store

6.2.7 Inspiration

The first pages are, as presented, concentrated to information that aims to educate and to generate interest from the visitors'. The more creative part of the web site starts with this section, "Inspiration". The goal is to get the customers inspired in customizing their own Knit on Demand sweater. But there is also the possibility to promote the colours of the season through mood boards with pictures. In fact, after having chosen the season (spring/summer or autumn/winter), the visitors choose from entering the women or the men inspiration part. There, they find except from the mood board, short sentences that functions as promotional and slightly provocative slogans to generate curiosity. As on the home page, these words move from behind frontwards to make a creative feeling and movement. These pages are further important from a fashion market perspective, where themes and messages are important when communicating brands, trends and products.

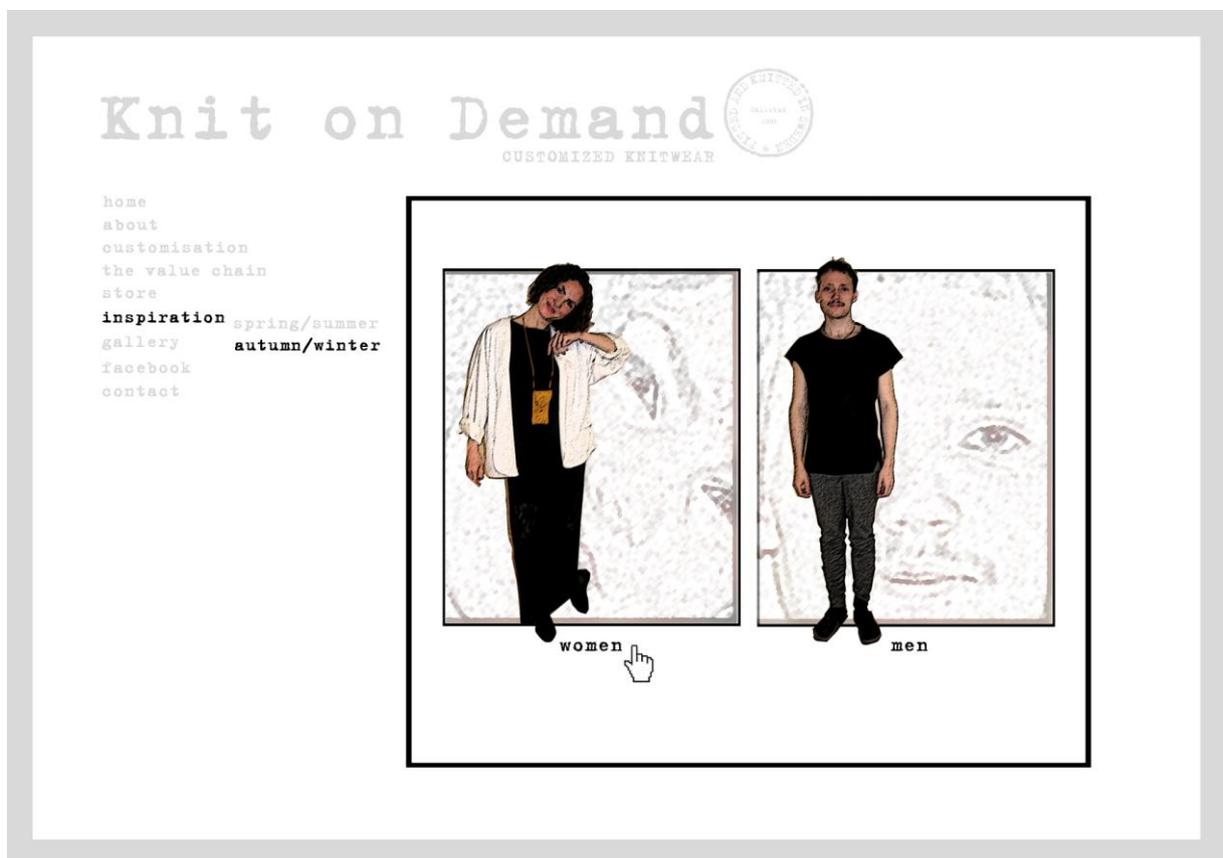


Figure 13: Web Site; Inspiration - Women/Men

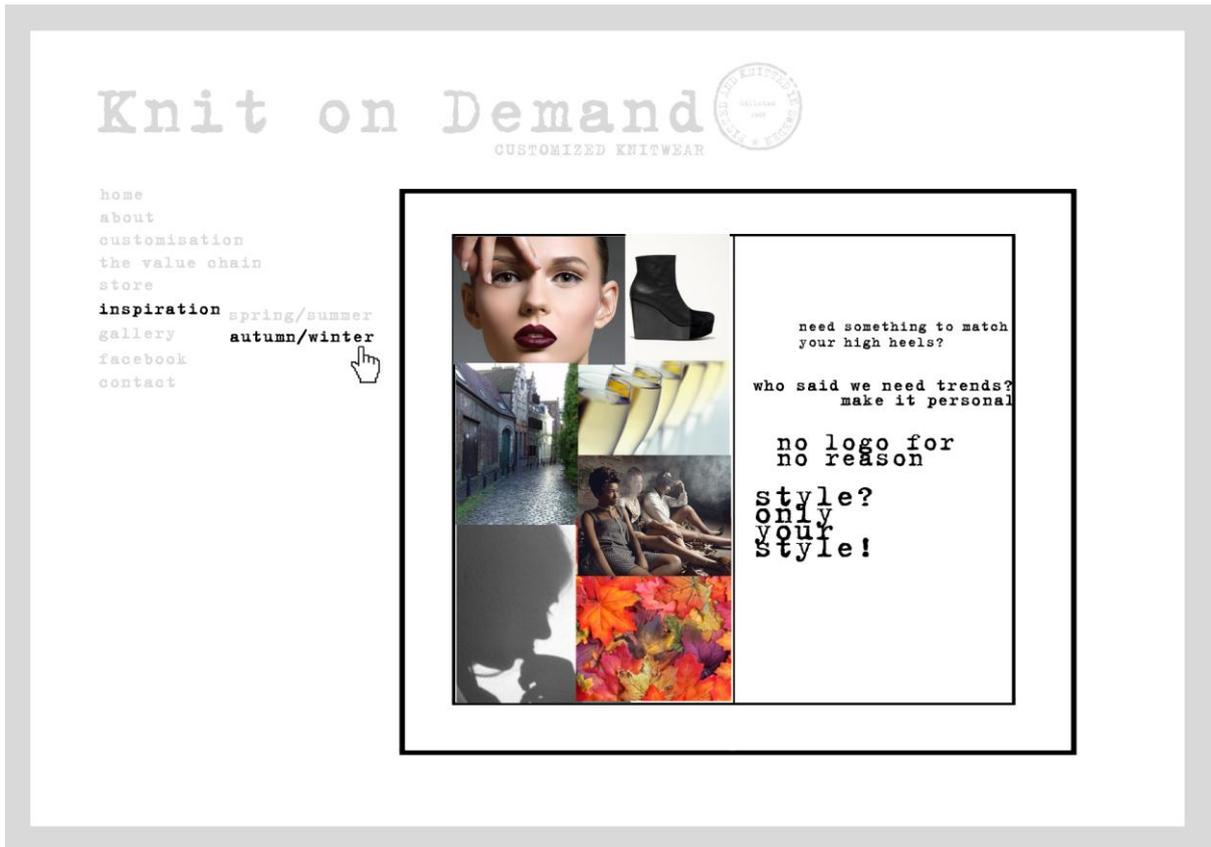


Figure 14: Web Site; Inspiration - Women

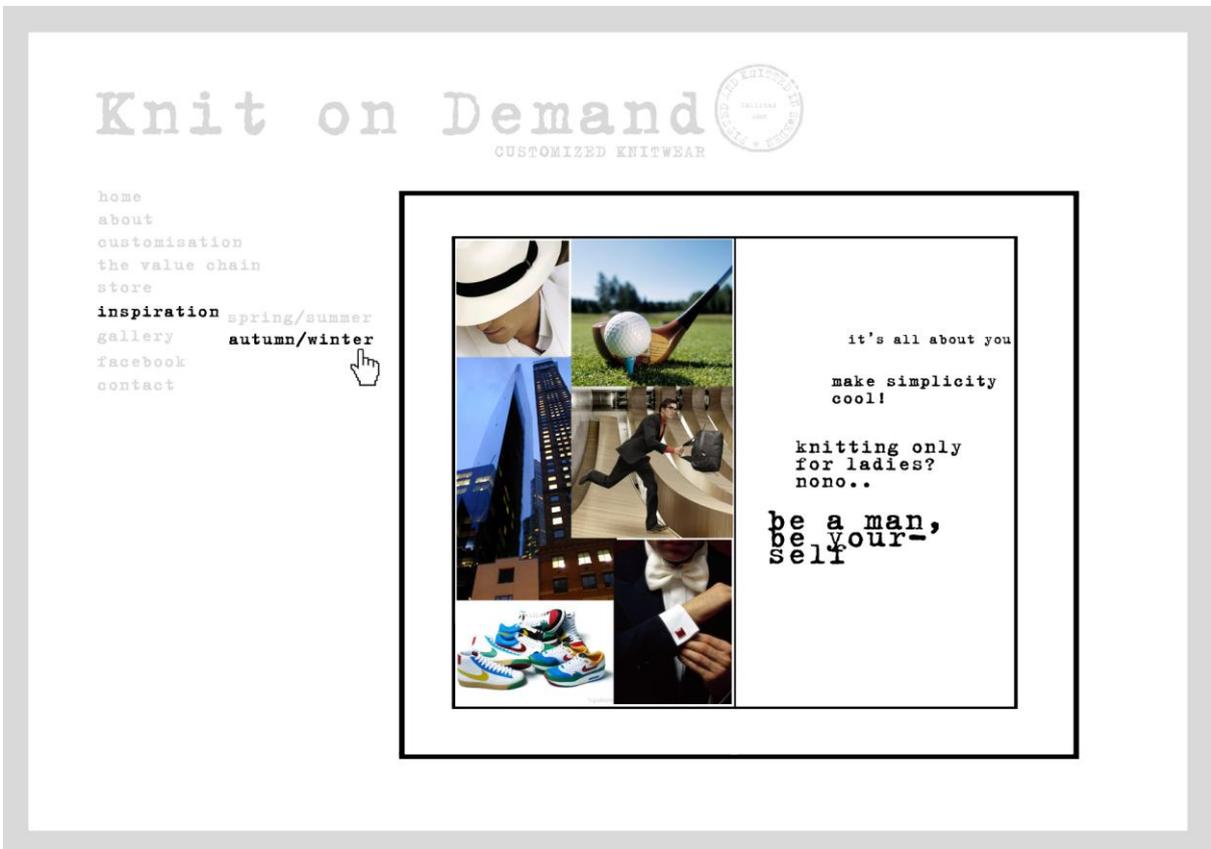


Figure 15: Web Site; Inspiration - Men

6.2.8 Gallery

The “Gallery” section functions as a further source in providing inspiration to the visitors and potential customers. Pictures of previously made sweaters, gives an input on what one can create but does also promote the product in itself. This part is also possible to use as a news section where pictures from eventual future events of Knit on Demand can be published.



Figure 16: Web Site; Gallery

6.2.9 Contact

The last title in the main menu is “Contact” where the visitors can find the contact details to all involved parties; Knit on Demand at The Swedish School of Textiles, Ivanhoe and Som Concept. This is a further emphasise in strong relationship and connection to the customers since they from here can have information about the direct connection to all partners, concerning all aspects of Knit on Demand, from production to retail.



Figure 17: Web Site; Contact

6.3 Opportunities in developing the web site

As mentioned, the web site is structured in a way that easily can be adapted for future development of the brand, product and marketing strategies. As shown on the home page, two suggestions for future opportunities are the usage of social media like Facebook and retailing via a Shop online;

6.3.1 Shop Online

Today, the direct contact with the customers is a crucial and inevitable part of the product itself, and this means that the most optimum sales channel is a boutiques or a multi brand store such as Som Concept. Only in such space there will be the opportunity to assist the customers towards the purchase and guide them through the development of once personalized sweater. But a direct operating store provoke high costs, and new business ideas such as that of Knit on Demand can consider other forms of retailing beforehand. Today, the increasing importance of internet and there through the e-commerce gives big opportunities for higher future sales. The web site, that represents the focus in this thesis, can include such feature to meet the request of higher sales as well as the market characteristic of today. As briefly presented and as learned in the case studies, e-commerce represents a strong possibility to further succeed as a customizer on the fashion market. In fact, a further notice is that on Swedish fashion market, apparel sales via e-commerce reached a total turnover of 22 billion SEK in 2009 (Svensk Handel, 2010).

A shop online, can except from pointing out the customization process give further visibility and there through higher sales especially in a short term period as Knit on Demand retailing initially consists only of two points of sales on the market (Som Concept and Ivanhoe's multi brand shop).

The icon "Your Sweater" illustrated on the home page as the last link of the value chain is proposed to be used for this purpose (Figure 5). The suggested shop online is easy to follow whilst maintaining the authenticity of the creative process that Knit on Demand stands for. There is also the possibility for existing clients to use their personal registered measurements that was inserted by the moment of their previous purchasing in store. For new clients it is possible to register and create an account whereby they insert their specific measurements by themselves. These options can simplify the process even more and contribute to higher sales in the end.

The online order process follows the same step as those used when purchasing in store in order to keep as much as possible of the Knit on Demand concept. After having logged in, the process start from the choice of model, moving on to specifying the measurements followed by the designing through colours and details. The final part is where the customer chose to buy immediately, to save the inserted data for later or to go back a step to do changes.

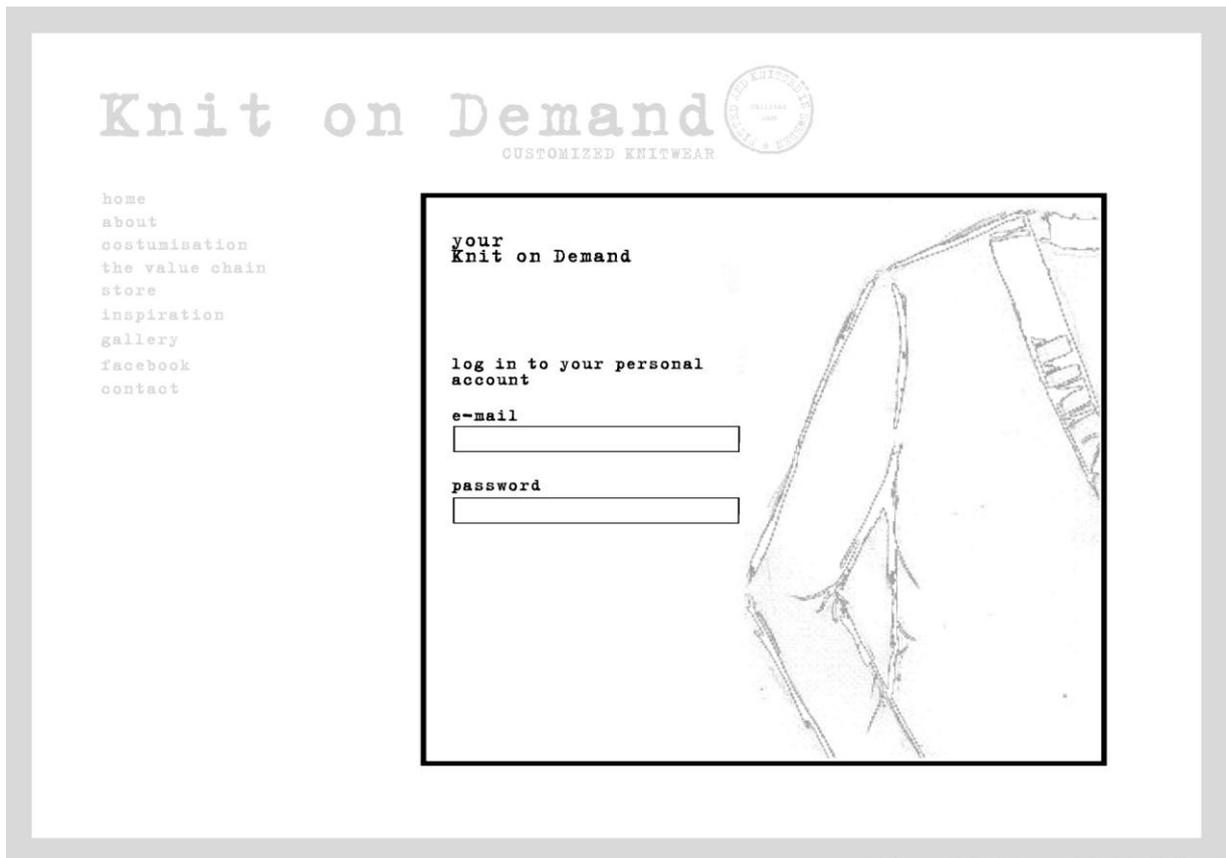


Figure 18: Web Site: Shop online - Log In

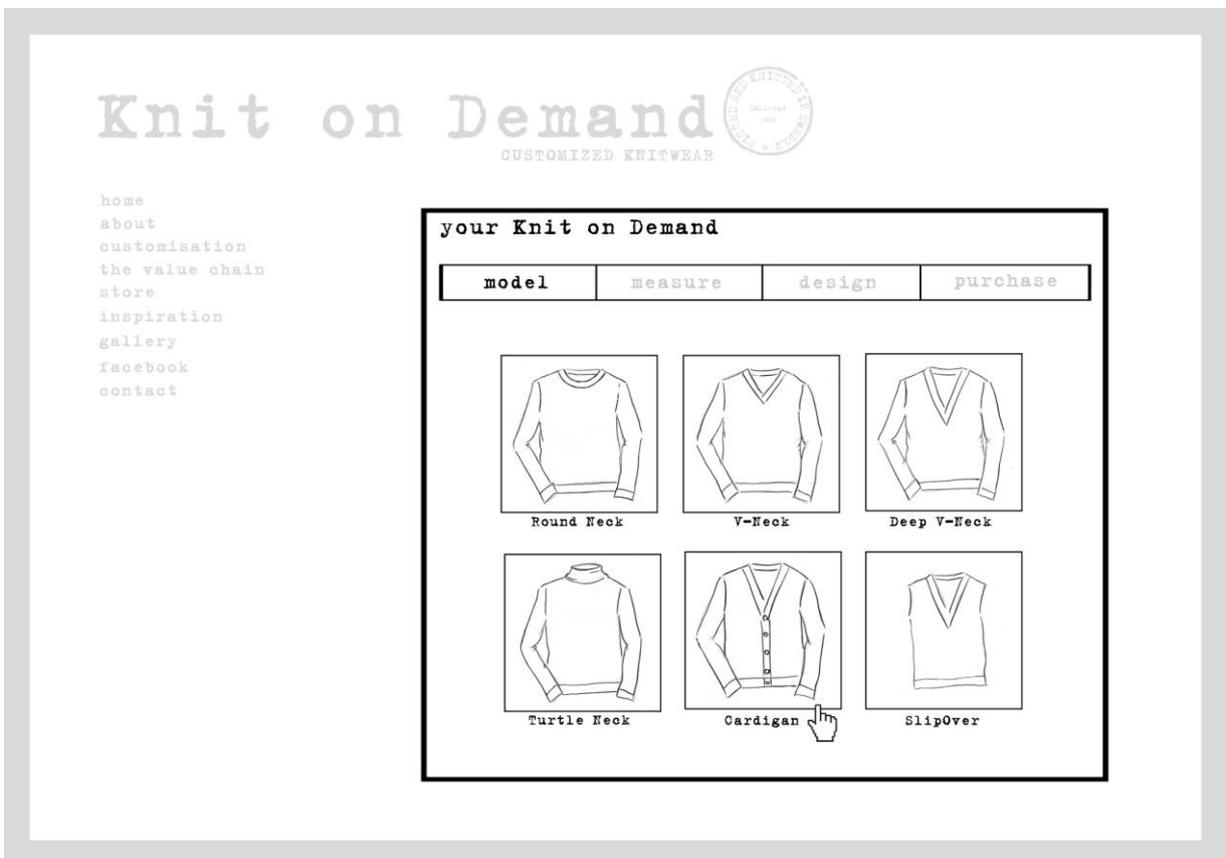


Figure 19: Web Site; Shop Online - Model

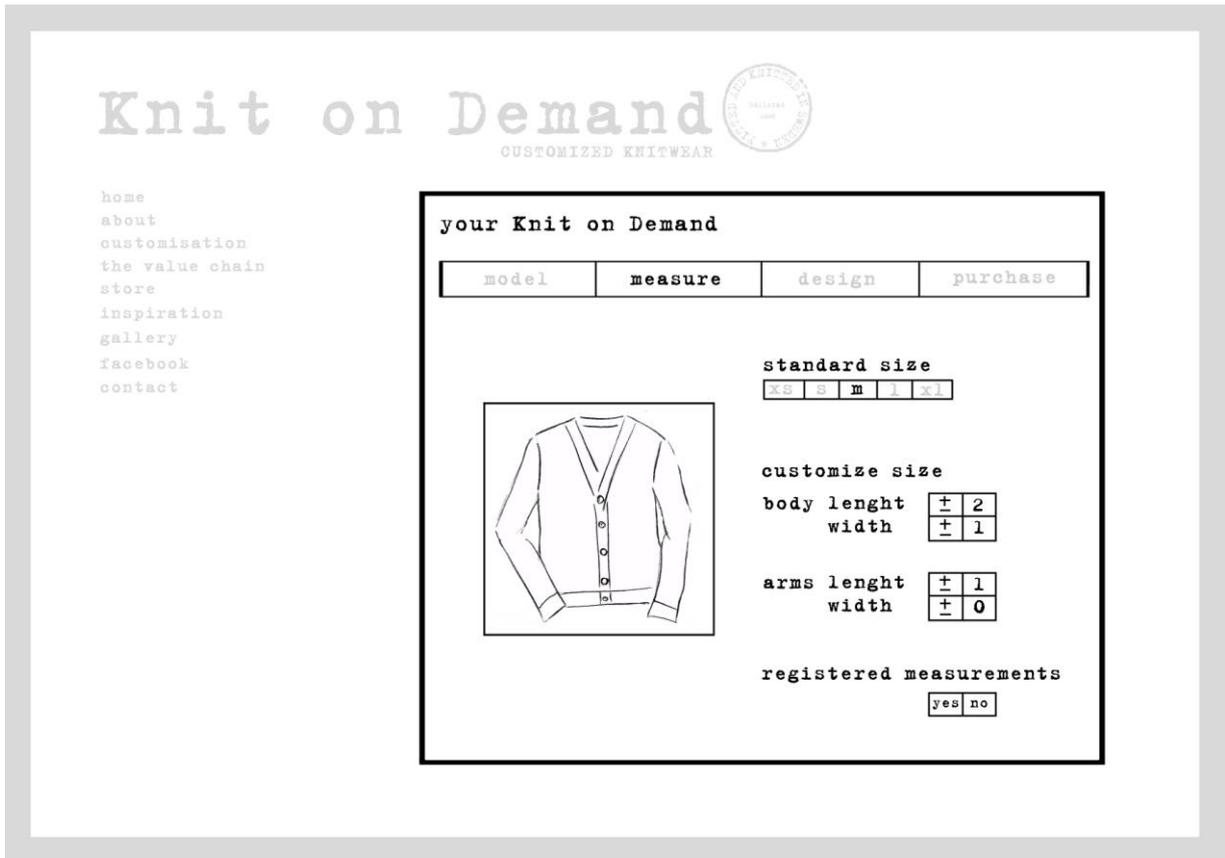


Figure 20: Web Site; Shop Online - Measure

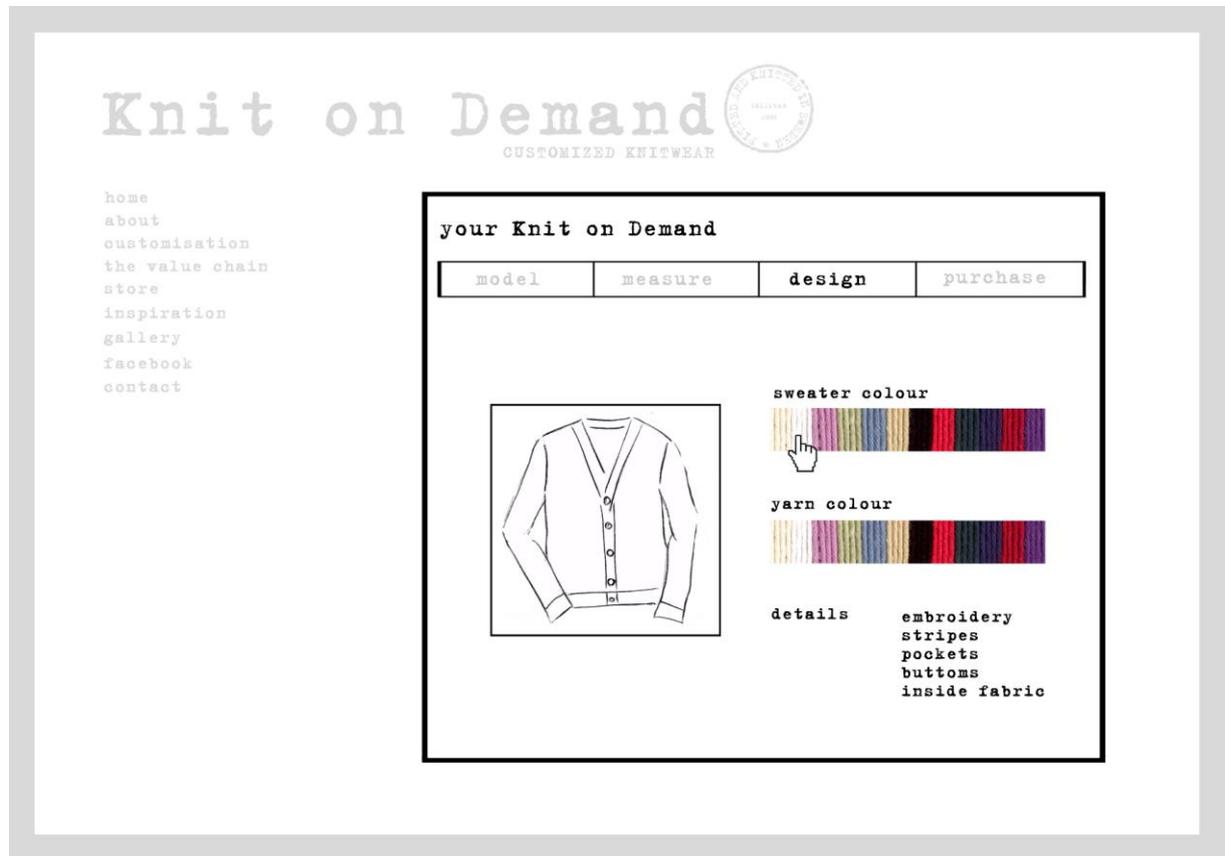


Figure 21: Web Site; Shop Online - Design

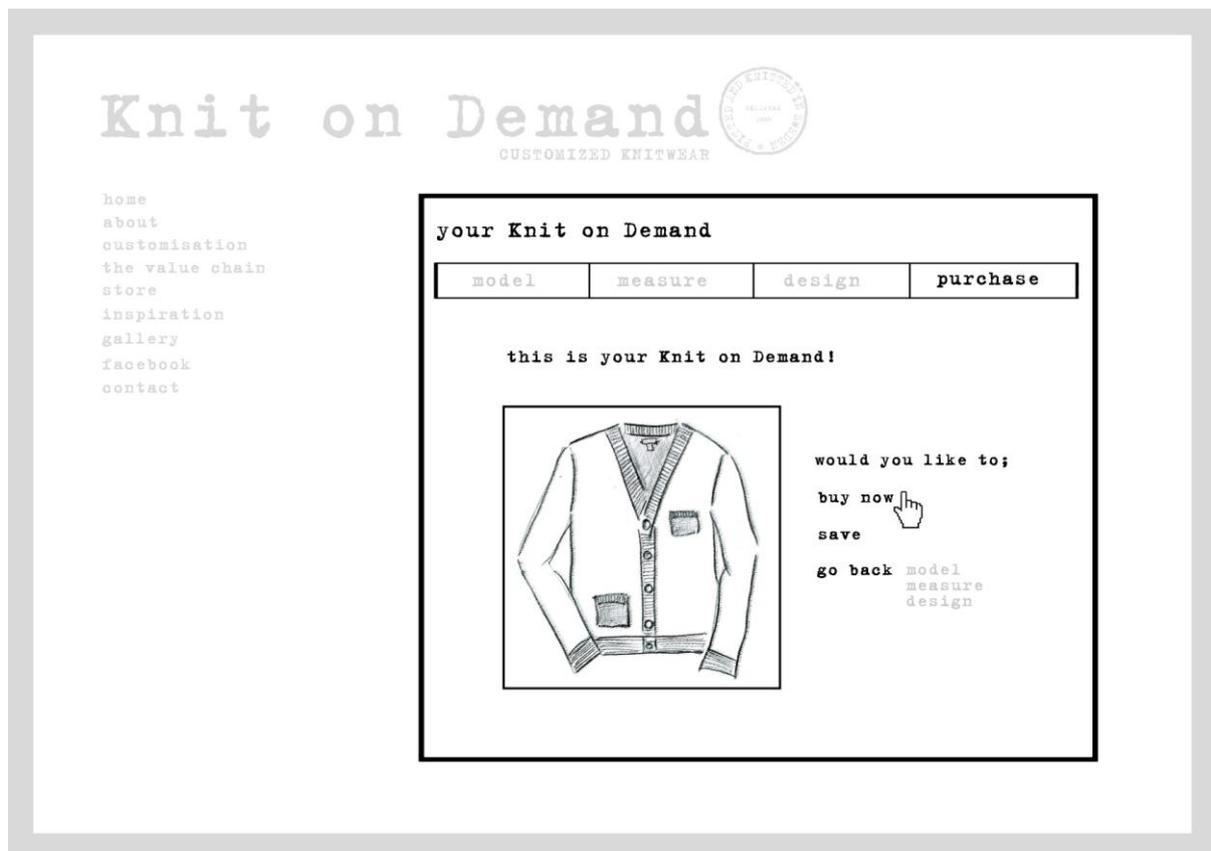


Figure 22: Web Site; Shop Online - Purchase

6.3.2 Social media

A further proposed title to be added in the home page menu in the future is the connection to a social media like Facebook (Figure 5, Web Site; Home Page). Such a channel can provide Knit on Demand team with further connection to the end-consumers whilst achieving valuable feedback about the company and the product for improvement. Additional creative possibilities that can be connected to the social media are promotional events and activities. As NikeId managed to successfully engage hundreds of individuals in occasion to the Soccer World Cup, an event or activity can be very important for brand awareness and attraction of the customers that most likely will achieve a stronger connection to Knit on Demand as indicated by the NikeId case. An example of this is to launch an activity where the customers will be informed on the social media page that when visiting Knit on Demand home page and clicking on the value chain, the first 50 customers to click will achieve a Knit on Demand scarf. Such an event would create desire, interest and curiosity from the customers' side. From Knit on Demand's point of view there is the possibility to whilst launching an extended product category, achieve higher sales number also on the customized sweaters since many customer might want to match their scarves with a customized garment in the same colour and style. A social media involvement can also be used as a tool for other promotional communication such as seasonal offers, discounts and news updates to mention a few. Most importantly, there is a possible result of an expanded word-of-mouth effect among individuals who constantly shares opinions and thoughts via these means of communication in these days. This feature represents therefore a possibility to reinforce the launch, the communication and the web site of Knit on Demand.

6.4 The store visual

As the present main scope is that of higher sales and visibility, a reinforced retail network is appropriate to meet such a target goal.

The producer Ivanhoe is interested in including Knit on Demand in the multi-brand store GY-Store attached to the knitting factory (U. Göthager, 2010). The intended area for a Knit on Demand shop-in-shop is situated by the entrance of the store in the left corner. The area is approximately 4 meters long and 2,5 meters wide.

The idea and concept behind the below suggested shop-in-shop is following the same parameters as the web site design, meaning informative but still creative whilst communicating the philosophy of Knit on Demand. The focus is on relationship, of transparency, of local production and of the creativity behind the customisation process.

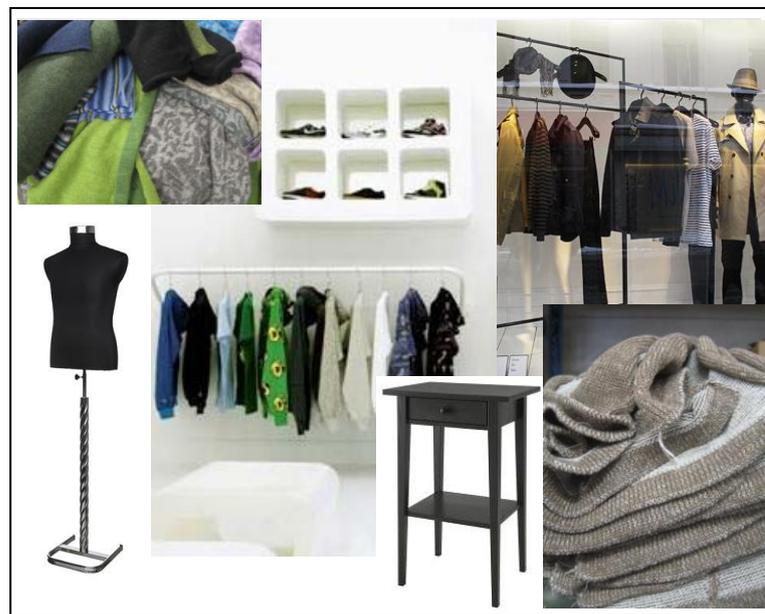


Figure 23: Mood board; Modern version of store visual



Figure 24: Mood board; Atelier version of store visual

The area should most importantly emphasize the close contact and the co-creation between Knit on Demand and the individuals, whilst at the same time catch immediate interest as the potential customers enter the store.

Two versions have been created in order to present a variety of options for the Knit on Demand team. One proposal stands for a more modern and fashion-like visual whilst the second version is more likely a traditional knitting/sewing atelier. The process of customizing a Knit on Demand sweater is in both of the suggested store visual versions explained on three signs hanging in the centre of the shop-in-shop space. This way, it also functions as an element of attraction of potential customers entering in the main store.

6.4.1 Modern version

The modern version contains the black and white signature colours of Knit on Demand. There are two tables where the pre-made sweaters may be put on folded. The necessary material for the store personnel such as pens and measuring tape can together with the customers file and magazines for inspiration be placed on these tables. They also enable the store personnel to fill in the order in the area without leaving the customers.



Figure 25: Store visual; Modern version

The pre-made sweaters are hung and folded in the centre of the space. Over the sweaters one can find samples of different knitting textures to choose from. The colour availability is presented with yarn cones that are placed on the wall with hooks. Finally a fitting room is placed attached to the shop-in-shop to further emphasise a strong relationship and authentic assistance.

6.4.2 *Atelier version*

The atelier version on the other hand is different when it comes to the choice of furniture, materials, colours and the presentation of the pre-made sweaters. Instead of being placed on hangers, the knitted sweaters are folded and positioned on shelves. This enables the sweaters to stay in their original shape for a longer time.



Figure 26: *Store visual; Atelier version*

The table placed in the middle is an important element as regards the contact and the interaction with the customers. The yarn cones and the texture samples are placed behind the desk in order to facilitate for the store personnel when showing the available options for the customer as they discuss by the table. Furthermore, on the table there is the possibility to put the necessary material for filling in the orders and for inspiration pictures and magazines for the customers.

In sum, the suggested store visual represents a communicative space that enables a strong connection with the customers and that communicates the Knit on Demand concept. The required furniture and materials does furthermore not necessitate any high investment.

6.5 Supporting materials

In order to complete the creative part of the suggested marketing concept, there are some further suggestions on communicational materials; Packaging, Brochure and Etiquettes.

As the web site concept affected on the development of the proposed store visuals, so does it influence the creation of these extra materials as they follow the same red thread. This is important in how they need to be coherent with the general marketing concept and to communicate both Knit on Demand as a brand name as well as the main philosophy. These promotional materials are presented in below section;

6.5.1 The packaging

Whilst a well made shopping bag can contribute to additional perceived value for the customer, it also represent a tool of brand communication as the customers will carry it home from the store and the logo will then be seen by the people they meet.

The packaging for the customized knitwear is created in an innovative way as it has a twofold utility; a shopping bag that later can be used as a laundry bag. This aspect let the customers take care of the garment by washing it in the laundry bag and enable an even longer lasting perfection of shape.

The packaging will be made in a non woven material on the front part where the logo is printed, meaning the shopping bag. In order to be able to be used as laundry bag, the back of the packaging is in polyamide that traditionally is used for laundry bags.

The packaging has a low cost and does not therefore need to affect much on the final retail price.

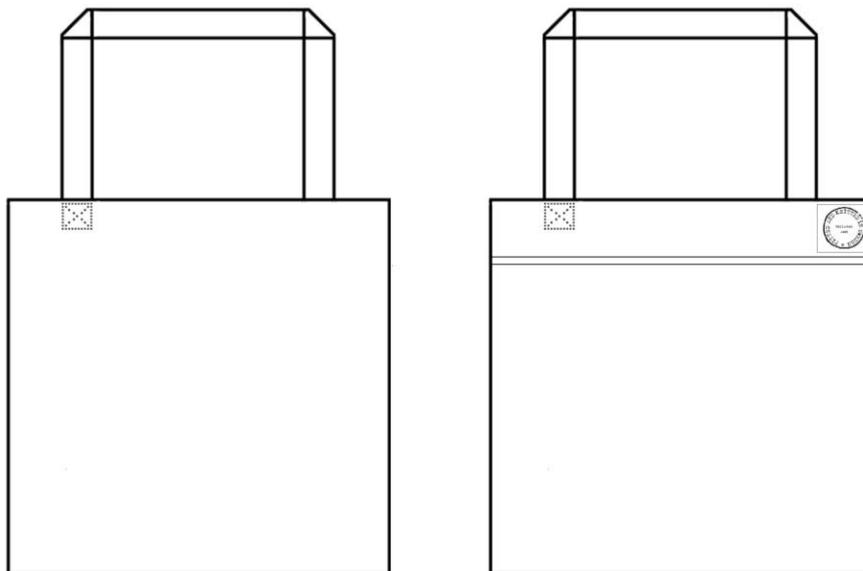


Figure 27: Supporting Materials; Packaging



Figure 28: Supporting Materials; Packaging – Front



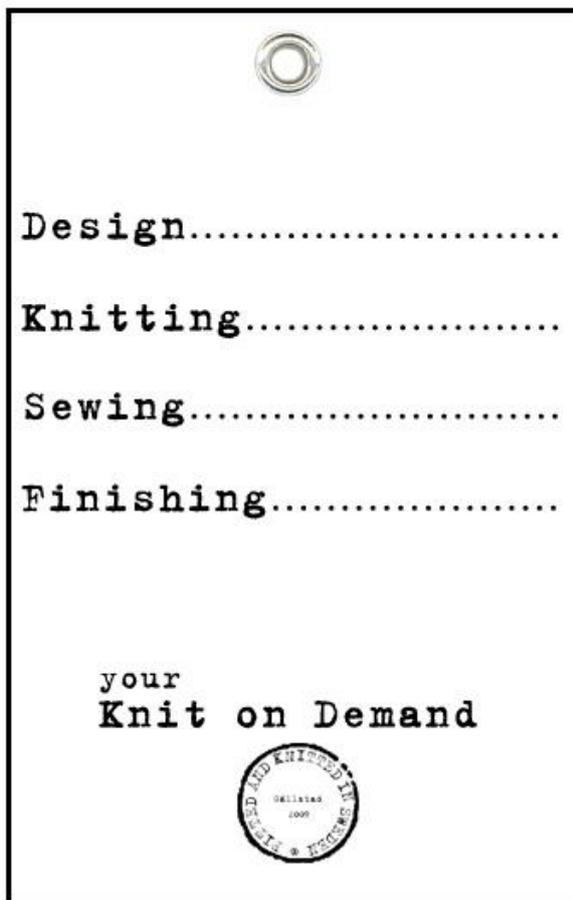
Figure 29: Supporting Materials; Packaging – Back

6.5.2 The brochure

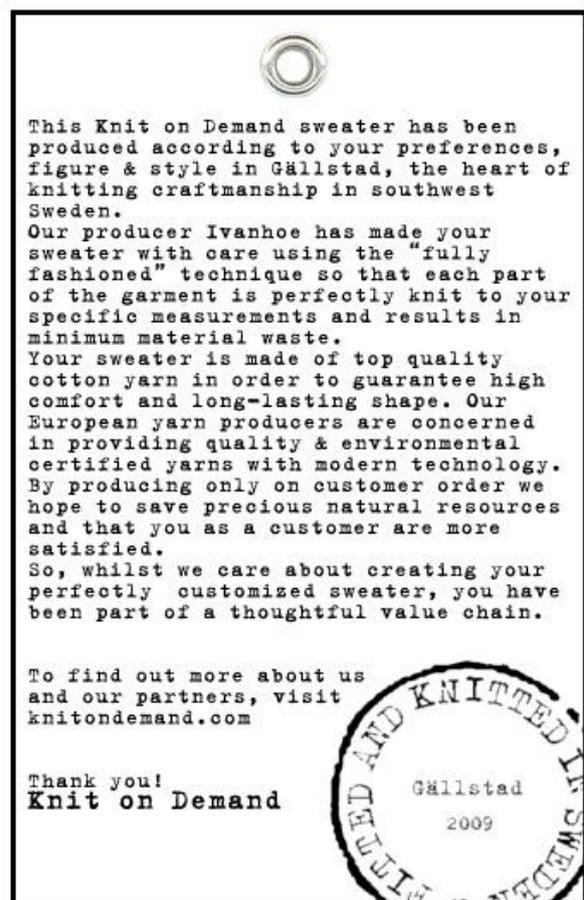
Instead of proposing a traditional informative brochure in paper it is created as a hang tag to be pinned onto the inside ready-made sweater. It has two pages where the first emphasise the importance of the value chain. In fact, all individuals involved in the production of the customized sweater, are aimed to sign their autograph on the relative line on the brochure; knitting, sewing or finishing. The customers will sign on the first row when they come to the store to pick up their garment. By doing so, the co-creation, authenticity and personality behind the sweater is put more in focus

The second page of the booklet, explains the philosophy of Knit on Demand through which further communication about the product, the brand name and its concept is presented.

As the packaging, the brochure is made in a non woven material in order to use as much as possible of the already existing materials. A non woven material does not necessitate to be sewn which is a positive aspect for the brochure and the manufacturing of it has a relatively low negative impact on the environment.



First page



Second page

Figure 30: Supporting Materials; Brochure

6.5.3 The etiquettes

The etiquettes sewn on the inside neckline, has the function of identification with the brand name as traditionally on fashion garments. It is divided in two parts that are sewn together and attached with a simple seam on the top. The design is plain and the white background emphasizes the name Knit on Demand in black. The smaller of the two etiquettes has only the logo printed on; the stamp “Knitted and fitted in Sweden, Gällstad 2009”.

Usually in fashion, in this position on the garments the Made In tags are placed, which in the case of Knit on Demand is easily created as the logo itself communicates the Made in Sweden production.

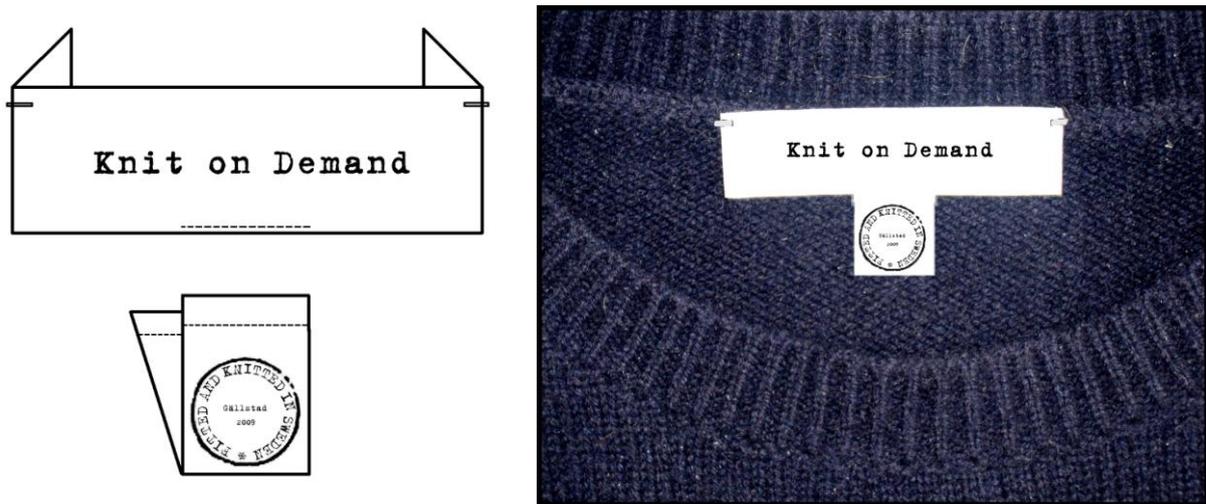


Figure 31: Supporting Materials; Etiquettes

Concluding, all supporting materials follow the same red thread as the web site and the store visual. Whilst being a source of communication these tools also provide an extra value to the product, where they are able to be perceived as a “gift” added to their purchased customized product. Something that is important in fashion as discussed previously, where the emotions and the intangible feature around the product counts significantly.

7 Discussions

This chapter discusses the results of the thesis project including criticism whether the research questions are met and the objectives are fulfilled.

7.1 Web site

The web site is based on the key features that Knit on Demand wishes to communicate. It is further adapted to the fact of being a customizer on the fashion market. The design and the content on the site is created according to the business philosophy, the desired positioning and the requirements of being part of a competitive fashion market as discussed along the research project. In short, the result is based on all relative information, both internal as external and extracted in a logic creative marketing tool. Therefore, it can be stated that the purpose of creating a proper and significant web site for Knit on Demand is satisfied.

The titles on the home page menu, follows a rather traditional content for a web home page. The titles “About” (history and foundation concept), “Customisation” and “Value chain” provides an informative presentation of Knit on Demand where the customers and the interested individuals can be “educated” about the brand, the product and everything it stands for. Here the requirement of transparency and relationship is presented. The other titles in the menu stand for the more creative parts that enable the customers to be more interested about the product; photographs of Knit on Demand sweaters and creative mood boards give both inspirations for the curious customer whilst emphasizing the fact of being a fashion company. Finally the “Contact” and “Purchasing” details provides a simple link for the customers in directly contacting the involved parties regarding any kind of issue.

The web site, the store visual and the supporting materials, is a starting point that easily can be updated every season but that also enables bigger changes when needed with time as for example including the future shop online.

As regards the design aspect, once again, the red thread of a clean, transparent still contemporary black and white Knit on Demand signature is dominant. This creates coherency between the logo and brand name and the style of the web site.

The information and the design of the site contain the elements of authenticity to Knit on Demand: as a customizer, a fashion brand and a transparent company. The information is provided in second person that creates something similar to “face-to-face” communication.

In sum, whilst being informative there is also a content of creativity and authenticity that typically surrounds Knit on Demand concept and that therefore results in a coherent way of marketing the product and the brand.

7.2 Store visual

The two versions of the suggested visual store design, represents a result based from the content and the concept of the web site. By following such scope, the marketing strategy and its included creativity will most probably enable a stronger effect. The black and the white signature is present, so is the information and the creativity.

One of the most important issues however is focus of a strong relationship with the customers, the authentic contact that is of big importance for Knit on Demand. The shop-in-shop's layout is a concentrated area to emphasize the close contact and strong relationship with the customer. The fitting room is close to where the store personnel will be filling in the orders, for an easy communication and assistance.

The proposed interior does not provoke any high investment. But with few features the shop-in-shop enables to achieve both a communicative space as a collaborative zone. Thus, the visual is based on a relatively easy interior where the product and the customer represent the focus.

7.3 Supporting materials

As the store visual is following the creativity and information of the web page, so is also the proposed supporting material. Once again, the wish was that of including transparency, authenticity and being concerned about sustainability.

Starting with the packaging. For a relatively low investment, the product will have further value as the packaging has a twofold purpose; shopping bag and laundry bag. Not only the brand name is seen along the street after purchasing, meaning a promotional result, but the customer will be able to take care about the sweater with the laundry bag than facilitate long lasting quality and shape. The Knit on Demand signature is present and the design can be classified as rather innovative by combining the shopping bag with a laundry bag. The result is also of environmental concern thanks to such aspects.

The brochure on the other hand stands for the more informative aspect of the marketing strategy as it contains both emphasize on the value chain as the concept of Knit on Demand.

It is innovative in how it is different from a traditional paper or cartoon booklet and more in line with the design of the other marketing tools. Furthermore, by being produced in the same material as the packaging, as little waste as possible gained. Furthermore, by letting the customers sign their autograph at the moment of receiving the garment, they can feel a further and stronger connection both to the brand as to the personalized garment.

Finally, the etiquettes sewn to the inside neckline are putting in focus the actual brand name and the local production; "Knitted and Fitted in Sweden". It has a clean and simple design where the main purpose is identification of the product.

Summarizing the web site and the additional communicative tools, they results in a simple and low investment representation that is part of and that offers a solid marketing concept. All relevant features within he Knit on Demand concept and product are included whilst there is a concern to the parties involved (low investment and possibility of higher visibility), the customers (information, relationship and connection to their personalized garment) and the environment (no extravagant materials are needed). These facts show that the result can be considered satisfying to the this thesis main objective.

8 Conclusions

As presented, the task of the thesis and the targeted marketing concept (from the web site construction to the presented additional means of communication) was to answer different questions within that of communicating Knit on Demand via the internet as indicated in chapter one. The questions results in the following answered;

How can the end consumer be reached and how can Knit on Demand grow on a fragmented and volatile fashion market on a relatively small geographic area like Sweden?

It has been discussed how people are frequently using internet both for communicating with others as well as for purchasing products. The answer to this question is therefore that Knit on Demand has the opportunity to reach a big amount of individuals by having a well performing web site. In order to respond to the competitive and volatile situation on the market, the main competitive advantages are communicated within the web site and the additional marketing tools presented above, considering both the fact of being a customizer as well as a fashion company. Furthermore, the marketing concept also includes the importance of branding.

How can Knit on Demand compete with both customisation brands as well as fashion brands on the Swedish fashion market?

Within the suggested results lies a distinctive concept where both the brand philosophy and the product are communicated. There is a focus in being a customizer but also in being a fashion company through the design and the structure of the marketing concept. Furthermore, the request from the society in being a transparent company with good intentions concerning individuals and environment is communicated in a clear and honest way.

This focus and distinction gives Knit on Demand a good opportunity in competing both as a customizer as well as a fashion company.

How can the business concept be launched; the philosophy, the product and customization in an efficient manner?

In all marketing tools the concept and the concerns of Knit on Demand is presented.

Through key words on the home page, through the structure on the shop-in-shop and through the transparent representation of the entire value chain, the business idea and vision is communicated in a coherent and unified manner.

How can the focus of authenticity and customer relationship be preserved in communication and future point of sales?

The authenticity of Knit on Demand is communicated by the information about being a customizer in the presented marketing tools. By providing a concept that stands for both an individualized product as well as a fashion brand name, there is the possibility in creating an authentic world around Knit on Demand. The communication gives the option in being perceived as a customizer with features of a fashion brand and the same time a fashion company with features of a customizer.

Emphasize in customer relationship is presented as a focus both in the store visual as in the communication on the web site and the signing on the brochure with the purchased garment.

A further notice here is the option of communicating directly via email and social media with the customer via the presented web site.

Concluding, the proposed web site and the supporting communicative materials to accompany the marketing of Knit on Demand, represents a first step in reinforcing the brand awareness and the sales of the customised knitwear. Information and creativity in the different tools are containing the philosophy and the concept of Knit on Demand whilst respecting the involved parties requirements and market situation of today. Finally, the presented marketing concept and tools also creates a ground for further development being easily adaptable as Knit on Demand grow in the future.

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