

# Retail: Trying them online for size

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## Have you been worried about purchasing clothes online? Are you sick of the changing room experience?

Virtual changing rooms have been transforming this experience. Metail is one such company which has been revolutionising this concept and is reducing people's concerns about buying clothes online and helping retailers understand what their customers want.

Tom Adeyoola (inset), CEO at Metail, says: "Metail came about through a combination of two things. One was a personal problem for my girlfriend-now-wife. She was complaining a lot about buying stuff online and also about the changing room experience, the rigmarole of trying clothes on and them not fitting right."

It was a cold call by Adeyoola to Cambridge professor, Roberto Cipolla, an information engineer, which really got the ball rolling. Adeyoola was working at the time on product development for a gaming company and called him for his expertise in computer vision and robotics.

Cipolla showed Adeyoola his research, which took photographs of sculptures and turned them into a high-resolution 3D computer model.

"That I found very interesting," says Adeyoola. "That helped me. It could be the beginnings of the way in which you could create a 3D version of people and start to solve this online clothes-fit problem. Roberto then introduced me to one of his PhD students, Duncan Robertson, who I commissioned for this project. He became my co-founder for Metail.

"The power of the visual image to allow people to find what works for different body shapes, I felt, was the key to solving this problem."

The product works by the consumer clicking on an icon when they want to purchase an item of clothing. They input some basic information to create their body model. They can then see that piece of



clothing against their body model. They can spin it around 360 degrees and get sizing recommendations for the garment.

“The process of creating a body model and actually buying is really quick,” Adeyoola says. “You can go from start to the process of buying a garment in under a minute, with basic information you do not need to leave your computer screen for.”

“It is all about speed of process in helping users decide if they want to buy something. We went to Warehouse changing rooms and we talked to people there. We asked them what their frustrations were with the changing room process. What would they like to do?”

“The thing that came back was when they went to a store. They would really like to try on as many garments as possible, rather than being restricted to four to take in. We wanted to try to replicate that online [customers being able to change garments as quickly as possible]. That is what you get, you point and click and they are dressed on.”

Metail has been able to get valuable data insight for the retail industry off the back of consumers inputting their body size and shape on the system.

He says: “We can start to tell retailers, of people that buy size 12, this is actually their size and shape profile. These are the size and shape profiles of the people who return stuff because they potentially do not match the cut of your clothes.”

“These are really interesting insights that you cannot get anywhere else. That is the really exciting bit – we are not only helping people buy clothes, we are now in a position where we can start to help retailers with purchasing and production decision making. How they should be making their clothes, are they making the right cuts for their customers, are they making the right sizes?”

The product is also helping retailers solve problems they face when people buy online, such as return and sales conversion rates. British online clothing retailer ASOS claims that a 1 per cent reduction in returns is worth £10million to the firm.

“Different retailers have different issues we can help them with,” Adeyoola says. “For example, in Germany, where return rates are 60 to 70 per cent plus, it is about reducing these. But in the emerging markets [it is different] – a customer in Brazil has only a 5 per cent return rate. In Brazil it is all about increasing sales.”

“We started to see great results from our partners in terms of how the product works. It is a difficult problem for a lot of retailers and they are really keen to understand if you can help them make better sales.”

Virtual changing rooms are taking the worry out of consumers buying online. They are also providing valuable insights to the retailer and helping them reduce returns and understand their customers in

how their clothes fit.