

How to Design Cheaper (But Better) Shoes.

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The Directive Collective



Everyone wants lower footwear product costs. Brands, Consumers, Suppliers.

Here's 5 ways to use Good Design to reduce costs.

Skechers EX1042
Skechers v. FAST IP

1. Design smart patterns. Material usage including loss is typically more than 65% of the FOB product cost of footwear. Depending on the material type, waste can be as high as 20%. Smart design means being aware of seam placement to reduce loss. Smaller components nest better in die cutting and can maximize material consumption. Good design is using seams as a feature or creatively hiding seams with finishing treatments such as stitch and turn edges, or no-sew overlays.
2. Design modular tooling. Tooling cost is one of the largest capital expenses for footwear development and commercialization. Reducing tooling costs reduces the bottom line and can reduce product costs if amortized. Modular tooling design can be done in-mold (ie. using plugs in the mold) or with separate parts. For example, one midsole can be used to match with 2 different outsoles in a collection for a wider range of styles. Splitting a component into smaller parts can also help vary the look and reduce tooling costs while increasing variety. For example instead of a single rubber outsole part, one mold for the forefoot and one for the heel allow you to change up the look and feel of the shoe with minimal investment.
3. Design with working process in mind. Labor cost is not something designers typically think of in design and doesn't show in a sketch but can make a big difference in product cost. Simplifying the construction, assembly or working process of a design can reduce labor cost, increase output (amount of pairs per day) and decrease QC issues, all of which reduce product cost. Work with the factory developers and commercialization experts to make a shoe easier to produce. Examples of this include simplifying stitching and number of thread colors, reducing number of parts, keeping decoration "in-house" and using more basic seaming or assembly methods.
4. Design with depth of detail in mind. Cheap materials reduce costs but feel cheap. Instead, selectively use better materials at key touchpoints (tongue, collar, etc.) and consider elevating lower cost materials by using unexpected color, texture or with more premium details. A basic engineered mesh looks and feels high quality if it has oversized holes in a bias direction to the upper and features an all-over sublimation print. A simple shoe with a bright color sockliner mesh or a unique type of laces and contrast aiglet with screen print logo are inexpensive upgrades that can make a simple shoe pop. The details are not the details, they are the design.
5. Hire a Good Designer. A Good Designer knows how shoes are made and how to use tricks of design to bring value to a product. Making lower cost product is not the same as cheaper cost of design or "less" design. Good design focuses a strong design intent and execution without de-spec'ing, or reducing quality of design.