Teaching Fashion Students Product Data Management

The Fashion Institute of Technology, generally known as FIT, is a State University of New York (SUNY) college of art, business, design, and technology connected to the fashion industry in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, New York City. It is ranked among the top five fashion schools in the world and has an enrollment of more than 10,000 students.

The challenge

FIT desired its students to increase their business acumen with an immersive and engaging training program. In particular, FIT students were not understanding the business significance of Product Data Management and its impact on the design process.

The solution

Tata Interactive Systems' solution featured a detailed mathematical model on product management that was presented in visually appealing manner:

- Extensive consultation and fact-finding with SMEs from the company led to the creation of two highly customized scenarios that focused on the two critical phases of fashion design.
- Students were placed in the shoes of a fashion designer with a growing business.
- The first scenario dealt with trend identification, optimum group formulae, and pattern-fabric matching.
- The second scenario dealt with correct fabric source selection, cost calculations, and point of origin choices.

- For each scenario, the learners had access to inputs and resources such as forecasting reports, sales reports, a time and action calendar, and advice from colleagues.
- Feedback was tailored to learner decisions, enabling learners to replay the simulation scenarios to understand the trade-offs involved in their decisions.
- "Shocks", events that changed the operating environment, were introduced midway to challenge learners in adapting their decisions to changing circumstances. This emphasized that real-world considerations could influence their business very quickly, and they needed to stay up-to-date with fashion trends around the world instead of designing within a cocoon.

The result

Fashion as a business: The scenarios were designed to be as close to the reality of fashion as a business, with data inputs on forecasting, sales, and timing calendars. The aim was to bring home the reality that fashion can't be successfully done with just creative inputs; the "boring" parts of product data management need to be executed as well, so you can deliver those fantastic products you've created to your customers on time and with great quality.

Appreciating complexities and interconnectivities: The simulation model that connects student decisions on product management to their outcomes helps students with this goal. Each decision in the simulation must be weighed against a multiplicity of factors. Doing well in the simulation involved getting a lot of things right: trends, material, timing, positioning.