

Tagging

by Paul Lefrere and Marina Cugurra



TAGGING is about deciding what to say about specific textiles or items of clothing; where and how to say it; and what aspects of it to investigate for added value such as patentability or design registration.

To make this concrete: a mundane and familiar example of tagging is a wash-care label, in the form of a tag sewn into a garment. Interestingly, some washing machine makers have high levels of customer complaints because their washing machines use a mix of standard and non-standard washcare symbols. Ideally, all manufacturers and retailers would restrict themselves to standard wash-care symbols. Looking at less familiar aspects of tagging, these include language, legal requirements, local market expectations and additional requirements and practices in specialist markets such as using standard safety tests to evaluate protective clothing.

Tagging practices in retailing or e-tailing can include value-adding activities such as in stock control and theft reduction, as well as apps to tag all the items in a consumer's wardrobe, or tags to help in finding garments that are a good fit to the body shape and size of a customer, or in other ways can help to simplify shopping.

Tagging innovations such as dynamic and personalised tagging can also help designers and manufacturers to penetrate high-value niche markets such as those that involve access to a personal shopper. Tagging in professional databases can be much more complicated than

tagging practices in retailing, but the basic decisions are the same: telling people what they need to know, in ways that they appreciate and that can be validated by others if required. In every case, tagging practices need to be aligned with local and global practices, industry norms and regulations regarding what to say it; who to say it to; how to say it to them (e.g., what kind of label to use, and where to attach it); what they can do with the information you provide; how they can validate what you tell them; and what you are not telling them that they should be told.

Tags can be used in more ways in textiles and clothing. One way is political, and is used by the world's largest clothing retailer Inditex. They select data to share with customers and shareholders. Their tags therefore publicise their admirable record on green-manufacturing, to align with the corporate image that Inditex conveys in its annual statement to shareholders. Their latest annual report lists many such awards that they received, including for innovations in manufacturing and in care for customers and for Inditex staff.

There are also illegal tags, added by former workers in out-sourcing companies (text: "I made this item you are going to buy but I didn't get paid for it"). Those industrial-dispute tags make claims that may or may not be true, see <https://www.change.org/p/justiceforbravoworkers>. Customers who discover such tags sewn into their garments may wish to check the status of the claims being made. A traceability database could include such data, allowing customers to reassure themselves that garment makers were paid for their work. This would help big manufacturers and retailers not only to reassure people in their ecosystem, but also to protect those organisations from infringing local laws and mores.

To summarise, in the textile and clothing world, tagging can be physical, in the form of a human-readable label attached to a garment, or virtual, as a record in a database that merges data from many possible sources, or a combination of both, like a database of wash-care icons for clothing labels, or a traceability database that shows the manufacturing history and current location of each item in a retailer's stock, and that uses data from unique electronic tags attached to each item and used for anti-theft or for stock-taking tag.

Tags therefore can serve multiple purposes and can be part of the business processes associated with every stage in the lifetime of a garment or a piece of textile.