

HOW MUCH CAN YOU IMAGINE

30 April 2016 – By Slicer



Throughout my early years in merchandising, when I was building the Levi's brand in India, part of my role was imagining a range in all its details.

If you have ever been a merchandiser or a category manager, this story will feel like déjà vu!

Imagine that you've done your market visits and your brain is buzzing with ideas and full of the new ideas or trends you saw, the concepts to plan, the colours to highlight, the next big thing you're going to showcase in the market. Your imagination is working overtime to great effect.

You've collected a kaleidoscope of colour references, swatches, pictures, samples, competition information as well as snippets and impressions during these market visits. You now need to make sense of all these inputs and create a story board.

Having completed the first story board you begin another iteration that's slightly (or drastically) different. You start working with your designers to create the improved story boards. It's a tedious process, but you get it done. Next you brief the designers about the new highlight designs to create and then, once the designs are done, sit and sort through them and lay out the pictures together to see how the overall collection theme is looking.

You've had your fair share of conjuring up product images from descriptions and starting to put them together. At this point, you are relatively clear on what the range should look like, and this is the point at which your imagination is working at its best (though it should be taking a back seat to visualisation).

Let's say you start with five types of 2-pack tees: Black and White, Black and Navy, Heather Grey and White, Navy and White, and Navy and Dark Heather Grey. Now add some V necks with contrasting colours: black, navy, olive, red and white. And you mustn't miss out on the logo tees... This proliferation of design variants makes it difficult to imagine the collection, with thousands of possible combinations. It would be much easier if one could visualise the products.

As it is, it's challenging to think of all the possible options for a single design, and if you add more designs, like polos, and repeat the above steps, your brain starts losing granularity on the line.



This is where we, as merchandisers, start making mistakes. We leave gaps in the line, create similar designs, or have a colour over-represented in a line.

If you multiply the effort required to put out a simple set of core tee shirts to get to a comprehensive line of products across categories, then suddenly your work as a merchandiser starts to look hellish. You can't make good decisions when you're trying to keep the entire line in mind. The imagination needed to create a differentiated but coherent line is a big ask. And this question always kept coming back to me: HOW MUCH can one imagine?

Visualising a line, by season, in all its details, helps avoid unbalanced lines. Visualising is consistent with the fundamental user experience adage: "observe and interpret rather than recall or imagine".

Having been a merchandiser, I completely believe imagination has a prime place in a fashion line preparation, but without adding visualisation you can still make costly merchandising mistakes.

So why is visualising hard? There has never been a tool that allows a merchandiser or range planner to easily and fluidly visualise ranges, iterate and visualise again.



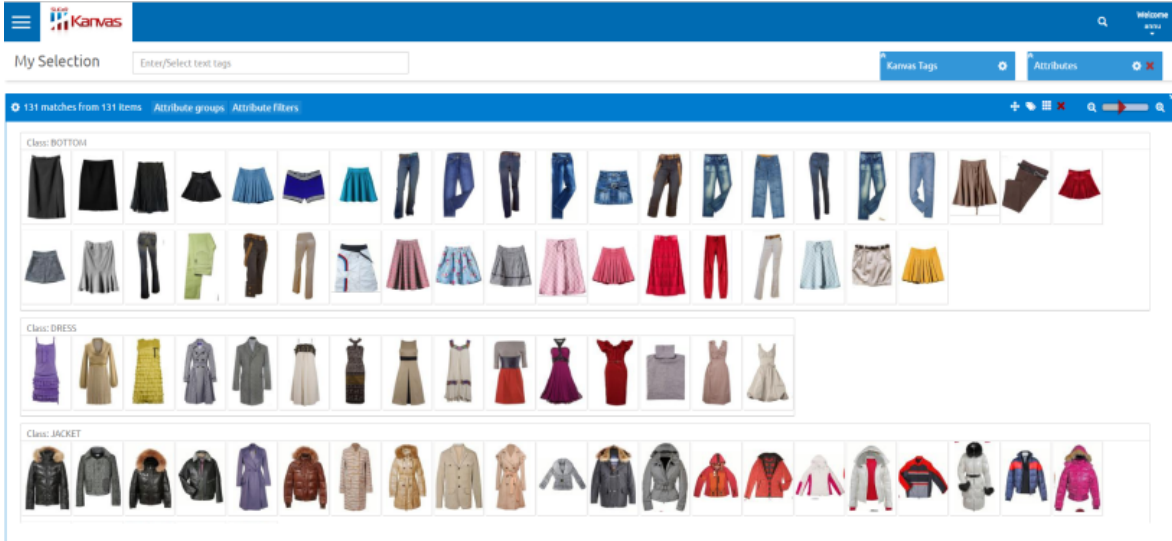
There is no tool that permits visualisation at the speed of thought. Merchandising organisations span many levels of sophistication, from paper, glue stick, scissors and tack board (or walls) at the primitive end, to sophisticated (sometimes custom built) PLM tools at the other end.

The challenge at the primitive end is the labour, time and cost required to assemble the line. At the sophisticated end, it is impossible to visualise an entire line together, fluidly and iteratively. Most PLM solutions do not allow for mashing up any numeric data (e.g. sales, sell through etc. in the previous seasons, for similar designs) with the product images planned in the future lines as a group.

The tedium of doing numeric analysis on spreadsheets and manually combining it with rudimentary line visualisation in a disjointed-layout presentation software doesn't allow for iterative visualisation of product lines.

If I were starting my career in merchandising again I would benefit enormously from an ability to apply my imagination to a line that can be iteratively visualised and manipulated based on business assumptions. I could be so much more productive in a world where I had a robust software in which I could quickly pull product images and data together and create assortments and clusters dynamically, making a line that looks like magic without losing sight of the numbers that could be delivered. And my company would get better, faster decisions and higher productivity.

Our product Canvas finally provides the answer to "HOW MUCH can you imagine?". Canvas is a Data plus images visualisation tool. Using Canvas, merchandisers/category managers and analysts in the fashion industry can now empower their imaginations to unprecedented levels.



Copyright © 2015, SlicER Pte Ltd

Kanvas not only pulls the pictures together but also links the associated data to them (any kind of data). So you can power your imagination, build a balanced line and manage it much more efficiently, increase team productivity and make better decisions more swiftly!

Go ahead and see how you can leverage your imagination: ask for a Kanvas demo today at <http://slicerpl.com/schedule-a-demo/>.