

Broker gives forgotten fabrics a renaissance

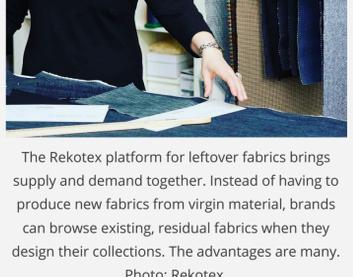
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All around the fashion industry, manufacturers stockpile their leftover fabrics. Marie Jonsson's digital marketplace shines a light on the forgotten resources, and mediates them to other producers that want to use them. Resources are saved – and small manufacturers can piggy-back on more sustainable value chains.

A midnight blue denim, waiting in Italy. On a shelf somewhere in Gothenburg: wool fabrics, melange and in various patterns. And from Portugal, a cotton jersey with red stripes enters the system.

"These are readymade fabrics, and there is a demand for them. But they have ended up on storage shelves because there has not been an easy way to trade leftover fabrics. All it takes is a place where sellers and buyers can meet", says Marie Jonsson, founder of the digital textile market Rekotex.



The Rekotex platform for leftover fabrics brings supply and demand together. Instead of having to produce new fabrics from virgin material, brands can browse existing, residual fabrics when they design their collections. The advantages are many. Photo: Rekotex.

Facts about Rekotex

- Rekotex, a startup company based in Borås, Sweden, has developed a digital platform for brokering quality leftover fabrics to other companies that can use them in their production.
- Rekotex was founded by Marie Jonsson in 2016. The digital platform was unveiled in March 2018. The company works with brands such as Filippa K, Nudie, Houdini and Tiger of Sweden.
- The development has been supported by the Re:texture innovation programme at Science Park Borås, the FashionINK incubator, and the logistics coordinator Tekologistik.
- In August 2018, Rekotex was awarded the Encouragement for Action sustainability award by Fashion District Stockholm.

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Two birds with one stone

Rekotex acts as an intermediary between those companies that have leftover fabrics to spare, and those that want to use them to produce something. The company was founded in 2016, and the digital marketplace was unveiled early in 2018.

Marie got the idea when she realized that it could potentially solve two problems in the fashion industry with a single blow. Textile manufacturers have long lead-times and high minimum order quantities. This forces clothing producers to systematically buy more than they actually need. It also creates a hurdle for small companies to enter the market.

"Setting up a loom requires so much work and effort that the just-in-time production that works in other industries really isn't an option. You can't just order the amount you need right now. The lead-times make it difficult to plan how much you are going to need; collections are designed ahead of time, and you have to reserve certain quantities when you still have no idea on how popular the garment is going to be, just so you won't find yourself without raw material if it sells well. If you are designing a certain kind of jacket, for instance, you may know that you are going to need 1000 meters of fabric. Still you would perhaps be willing to buy 2000 meters, knowing fully well that in all likelihood, much of it is going to end up unused in your stockpile", says Marie Jonsson, who has a background as a trained textile economist.

Jonsson understood that these problems were interconnected, and that they had a common solution – one that would also contribute to better resource management in the industry.

"I have been working in the business for a number of years. I have seen these growing stockpiles: rolls of brand new fabrics, still wrapped in plastic, lying around for years. I have seen the other side of the coin as well: small and intermediary producers that have a large difficulty acquiring fabrics, because they need smaller quantities. A textile producer can demand that you order 3000 meters before they set up a loom, and smaller companies are basically excluded from that market", Marie Jonsson explains:

"In the lifecycle of a textile product, the manufacture of the fabric is what consumes large amounts of chemicals, water and energy. When existing fabrics that are just lying around can be put to use – and we are talking about substantial volumes – the environmental advantage is great since the entire resource input required to make new fibers is avoided. Tearing up and recycling the leftover fabrics would not make much sense either, they are premium products and should be used."

Intermediary and checkpoint

There are other companies that purchase lots of unwanted fabrics, but they generally pay little and many fabrics just end up stockpiled in some other warehouse instead. The innovation in Rekotex's business model is that it connects prospective buyers directly with the specific fabrics they want to use to produce new garments. The price is kept reasonably high, and everyone involved benefits.

"The sellers are ready to drop the price compared to what they paid for it – and we add our sales commission on top of that. It is a good deal for all of us: the sellers are paid for something that they otherwise would keep in a costly storage. The buyers get hold of quality assured fabrics in smaller quantities than the producer's minimum, at a total price comparable to the original", Marie Jonsson explains.

The suppliers add information about their availabilities on Rekotex's web platform. Interested customers can browse the materials and place their orders online. The transaction takes place directly between the buyer and seller, but Rekotex acts as an intermediary for the payment and helps with the transport of the goods (in collaboration with another Borås-based company, Tekologistik, that coordinates transports in the textile industry).

"I think it is important to make it simple for the sellers to use the system, since this is all outside their core business; they are already focusing on the next collection of their own. The sellers don't have the sales channels or the contacts they would need to get rid of their excess fabrics, but that is where Rekotex comes in. The seller makes a payment to Rekotex when they place their order. The seller sends the lot of fabrics straight to the buyer's production unit, and we hold the payment until delivery, and until the buyer has verified that the fabrics comply with the quality criteria", Marie Jonsson says. She points out that Rekotex acts as a checkpoint between the parties:

"The service is intended for premium fabrics, not for substandard products with weaving faults or similar that perhaps should go to materials recycling instead."

Huge interest and many partners

Today, Rekotex has active partnerships with Filippa K, Tiger of Sweden and Nudie. Different brands have different locations for their sewing facilities, and to simplify things, Rekotex has so far been concentrating on producers within Europe.

"The fabrics are stockpiled at the production facilities, which may be anywhere from Italy to Riga. At first, I tried to find out which Swedish textile companies had the most sustainable practices, and those were the ones I contacted", Marie Jonsson says. She talks about partners rather than buyers and sellers:

"A certain company may be both buyer and seller at different times; even the larger manufacturers we work with, who have the means to buy large quantities directly from fabric producers, may occasionally need to buy a smaller quantity as well for a certain purpose. Smaller series can also be an opportunity to stand out."

Sustainability along with the fabric

"Since we mostly work with companies at the leading edge of sustainability, we have had the privilege of conveying some really nice fabrics so far: organic, certified and so on", Marie Jonsson says. This is an added bonus for the smaller companies that consult the service:

"A small company rarely has the resources to be present at the production units to monitor how the fabrics are treated, but the large companies have a much better overview of the process. If you are able to use a denim originally ordered by Nudie, you automatically benefit from the transparency of their value chain and their strict specifications. You get to share their quality assurance of the fabric into the bargain."

Marie Jonsson estimates that 10 000 meters of fabric has shifted hands on the platform to date – but the service is garnering considerable interest, and since its relevance grows with the number of participants, Marie Jonsson has a bright outlook on the future. In August, Rekotex was given an acknowledgement from the industry, when the innovation received the *Encouragement for Action* sustainability award – and Marie can still feel the ripple effect:

"It has drawn plenty of attention, and there are so many new exciting partnerships in the making, I have great expectations. Considering the keen interest, I think things are about to speed up very soon", Marie Jonsson says, and concludes:

"The textile industry has to come up with a better way; 27 percent of all finished garments are never worn, they just stay on the shelf. But there is a lot happening in the industry now, and I am thrilled to be a part of the transformation."

The article was published in November 2018.



"An exciting start-up focusing on resource efficiency by making readymade materials available. Win-win-win for producers, designers and the planet." That was the motivation when Rekotex received the *Encouragement for Action* award in August. Stockholm Fashion District's initiative wants to encourage sustainable practices in the fashion industry. Photo: Rekotex.

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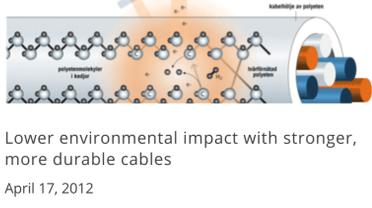
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