

TEXTILE & CLOTHING

THE DETERMINATION TO ACHIEVE THE NEW INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Textile & Clothing can once again become an industry with bright prospects if it grasps the new emerging opportunities. Tomorrow's Textile & Clothing industry will look totally different from yesterday's textile manufacturers. It will fire consumers' imagination by drawing on innovation and operational excellence. Textile & Clothing was the first industry to undergo an authentic Industrial Revolution during the twentieth century and it will be the first to pass the milestone of the upcoming Economic Mutation. Textile & Clothing is far from being an old-fashioned industry; it is the laboratory of new industrial modernity.

THE IMPACT OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTIONS

In the eighties, the Textile & Clothing industry was hit hard by the extremely violent impact of **an authentic Industrial Revolution**, a revolution much more acute than what could ever have been surmised by the term 'globalization'. The engines fuelling the radical change of economic structures and trade flows are:

- The concentration of distribution and retailing
- The development of information technologies

Without these factors, the relocation of western production to countries with low labour costs would never have been so massive. The sector has gone from a manufacturing industry that "pitched" its supply to scattered independent retailers to a model driven by customer-retailers whose strategic drivers are based on volume growth and lower costs.

Today a **new Industrial Revolution** is emerging; it is powered by:

- In-depth consumer changes
- Technological innovation in textiles

POWER IS NOW IN CONSUMERS' HANDS. After the era of industry, followed by the era of services, the **era of the individual** is now upon us. Consumer buying is no longer governed by need. Today's consumers seek to express their desires, emotions, identity, and opinions through consumption itself. Among the many rising trends, one has become predominant over the past two to three years, and that is ethical, responsible consumption that concurrently integrates the values of sustainability, respect, and ethics combined with pleasure.

Being able to tap into the **imagination and to learn how to weave and sustain an individual connection with each customer in a world oversaturated with goods** will become vital. This major transformation will undermine mass consumption and sow the seeds of new specific and diverse markets. Retailing organisation will be affected by this, and this in turn will have an effect on industry.

In view of these developments, **French industry boasts real potential enabling it to exploit the new opportunities**, because costs will no longer play such an exclusive and pervasive part.

The new growth levers are complex and based on multiple points of convergence: individuals' desires and dreams, the transmutation of innovation processes, the intangible, crisscrossing technologies, the shrinkage and fluidity of production channels, and collaboration.

THE STRUCTURAL BLOCKS HAMPERING FRENCH SME DEVELOPMENT

The majority of Textile & Clothing businesses are SMEs, or even very small businesses: 9 out of 10 businesses employ fewer than 50 people, and 6 out of 10 fewer than 10. Specifically French, structural blocks shackle the industry, i.e., **the access to funding and the administrative burden**. Two facilitating solutions have been submitted:

- **The creation of a *Fonds Commun de Créances* (common loan fund)**
- **The set-up of a one-stop window** for administration information collection, for SMEs

A WINNING STRATEGY FOR THE TEXTILE & CLOTHING INDUSTRY

Two worlds make up the Textile & Clothing industry:

- **The Textile & Clothing** sector accounting for three-quarters of the industry – It is subject to the strongest constraints because it must meet retailing requirements and end consumers' multiple aspirations. Its growth will depend on creativity, marketing, innovation, the organisation of an industry supply chain, dynamic business initiatives, image, and communication.
- **Innovative flexible materials** – Today textile is broadening its scope beyond mere clothing applications. A technological industrial revolution is now underway. This new world can enjoy the prospect of extremely high growth if it does not lose sight of end-customer needs, wherever they may be. Its strategic drivers are driven by technological innovation, marketing, and dynamic business initiatives.

Aside from standard strategic focuses, the strategic policies special to the Textile & Clothing industry also involve ideas but little explored until now.

ORIGINAL STRATEGIC FOCUSES

Some strategic focuses seldom come up for the Textile & Clothing industry.

- **Restoring Brand Image**
- **A New Type of Innovation**
- **The Supply Chain**
- **The Value Network**

Innovation is among the strategic focuses because the term is usually limited to technology, which in itself is not the road to success.

A prerequisite: The brand image – Today the industry's poor image seriously impedes its growth, if only in the area of attracting new talents or investors. The profession must urgently roll out structured collaborative work to correct its brand image and ensure its large-scale impact.

The Importance of All-round Innovation – The term innovation is misleading because the tropism of technology is so strong. **Innovation has radically changed.** A mere technological innovation no longer guarantees business success, far from it. Innovation must absolutely integrate the intangible in all its processes. **Intangible innovation has become systemic, affecting every aspect of creation:**

- The first stages of design, by delving into consumers' imagination to invent new concepts
- The entire development chain, by integrating different worlds (multi-disciplinary, multi-technology, crossing aesthetics with technologies) and opening onto new realities
- The final product, by injecting a spiritual and emotional charge
- The increasingly vital development of new services

Technological innovation must not be neglected but its must be rooted in consumer aspirations. This aspect is critical for the future of technical textiles. The central focus for the Textile & Clothing industry will be to increase technology transfers to SMEs, foster the hybridisation between different technologies, cross technologies with pure creativity, and transpose existing skills and expertise to new areas.

The French State will have to toughen the **fight against counterfeiting**, which has become a scourge. The fight is broken down into two parts: strengthening extant legislation in France and Europe, and having discussions with the retailing sector to integrate it fully in the policy to protect intellectual property.

The Supply Chain, specifically in the Textile & Clothing industry, is a major strategic lever. At the end of the day customers and retailers are not only buying a product but a global service as well. The industry businesses must learn to work together within the same supply chains to serve their customers and the different markets that will emerge.

The Value Network – A value network literally includes myriad interfaces, connections, and interactions between different realities. Its growth and enhancement is a strategic objective in itself for the Textile & Clothing industry, and is fully consistent with changing consumers. R2ITH (*Réseau Industriel d’Innovation du Textile et de l’Habillement*, industrial network for the innovation of textile and clothing) is a model that should be broadened and reproduced.

STANDARD STRATEGIC FOCUSES

Aside from the above-mentioned original strategic focuses, some standard strategic focuses are still fully relevant, i.e., **dynamic business initiatives, mainly international business initiative, and rising skills and expertise.**

Rolling out a bold strategic plan for the Textile & Clothing industry involves **boosting human skills and expertise throughout the Textile & Clothing industry.** The entire strategic plan critically depends on strengthening managerial skills. FORTHAC (an approved joint fund-collecting agency), which is very efficient in the industry, could usefully help accomplish the bold plan, by taking a position as a true skills and expertise cluster for the entire Textile & Clothing industry.

CONCLUSION

Textile & Clothing is a magnificent industry, abounding in remarkable human, industrial, technological, and creative wealth. It can take the path to a new Renaissance by discarding the narrow industry-focussed view and committing to new consumer aspirations. The industry has patent assets and numerous stakeholders are strongly committed to ensuring that it is able to exploit these advantages. Together they can rise to meet the wonderful challenge:

Textile & Clothing – An Industry with Promising Prospects for France

