

As technology advances in machines and fiber are creating new opportunities in seamless apparel, some hosiery manufacturers are finding its a niche that fits well.

Cajah Corp. of Hudson, N.C., is an example. Executives there are finding it fits very well – as snug as an Elie Tahari seamless tank.

William Shelley, CEO for Cajah Corp., says he and others at Cajah Corp. realized two years ago that the business – at that



Cajah's workforce has doubled in two years.

time more aligned to the mass market production – needed an adjustment.

With the business at that time comprised of 60 percent seamless apparel and 40 percent hosiery, company officials began looking at reorganizing their operation to target specialty markets.

“With the size of this company, we realized we had to switch gears,” says Shelley.

With less than 100 employees, Shelley says company officials didn't see how it could remain competitive in the mass market arena.

Already mass marketing its seamless wear for about five years, Shelley said the company decided it would begin zeroing in on specialty markets with more emphasis on fashion and niche markets.

The move has proved successful for the

company.

Cajah Corp. started 2004 with 90 employees. It started 2005 with 180 to 200 employees with plans to expand in the near future.

Shelley, who has served as CEO for Cajah's since Jan 2002, has been in the hosiery and women's apparel industries for the previous 25 years.

He served as a national sales manager for Victoria Secret and it was there that he saw the emerging

overseas distribution network are a stumbling block for retailers who are wanting



A sea of seamless garments flow through Cajah Corp.'s three-story facility in Hudson, N.C.



Cajah Corp. employs a fleet of Santonis to produce its seamless wear.

trends of outsourcing.

“Those who find a niche and those in fashion will survive,” says Shelley.

For Cajah Corp., seamless wear has proved to be that niche and its a niche that Shelley believes offers advantages for companies struggling to compete with offshore products.

He says the logistics of importing products overseas will continue to be a problem. In the fast-paced fashion arena, delays at ports and at other points in an

to get the latest fashion craves on their shelves quickly.

While seamless apparel can an attractive to mass market pressures, Shelley says the business has its own pitfalls and that it requires a completely different marketing environment than many in traditional hosiery operations are prepared for.

“There has to be a strong customer base,” he says. “It used to be that a hosiery manufacturer had two or three good customers and that was enough. That's no longer the case. A company can't survive on five or ten percent margins. They might for awhile but not long.”

One of the keys to success in the seamless market, says Shelley, is strong management.

He credits the management staff at Cajah Corp. for much of the company's success.

When Alba-Waldensian shuttered its plants and offices in Valdese, numerous of the company's management staff chose not to relocate with the company.

Several of those employees are now employed with Cajah Corp. and Shelley says the experience that they brought to the company has been an asset.

Shelley says Innovation, both in product development and marketing, is another key ingredient to success in the seamless apparel market.

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for new and innovative applications,” says Garner.

Look for more innovation out of the fiber and yarn segment as those innovations will continue to enhance machine capabilities for the development of new products.

Unifi last May announced a partnership with Peabody, Mass.-based Saucony Inc.’s HIND division to introduce two sport bras – the Motion Sensor Bra and the Proactive Bra – featuring Unifi’s Sorbtek moisture-management yarn. It also teamed up with Marmot Mountain Ltd., Santa Rosa, Calif., to produce Marmot’s Infinity Baselayer collection featuring BacteriaStat with unifi’s A.M.Y. antimicrobial yarns.

David Darwin, Hyosung’s senior marketing director for North America, cites his company’s antimicrobial spandex as one example of Hyosung fiber application in the seamless apparel market.

Already Darwin has seen a host of new concepts in seamless brought about through technology in the fiber industry, particularly moisture control, micro deniers and antimicrobial fibers. He foresees the trend to continue.

Darwin believes the seamless apparel is best suited for companies looking for niche and specialty markets because of the fashion aspect of the business.

“As trends change quickly, they’ve got to supply garments close to the markets,” he said.

The importance of being able to supply fashion markets quickly was the focus of comments from a Sangiacomo executive in a July 2004 Knitting International article. Although the comments were directed toward European retailers, the implications for U.S. seamless manufacturers is obvious.

Sangiacomo’s area sales manager, Fulvio Bosio, says that he is far from convinced that China can respond to European and U.S. market requirements for certain seamless products. “In terms of fashion and delivery, the quicker the fashion changes, the better it is for seamless producers in Italy and Europe,” he commented.

Alan Parker, executive vice president of PAM Trading Corp., witnessed the enthusiasm over seamless apparel at a Santoni seamless show last month.

Parker said the show drew participants from California, Canada, Maine, Alabama, North and South Carolina and other locales.

“It was a good indication of the type of business that is out for seamless apparel in the United States,” he said. “It’s out there and it’s growing.”

Fashion dictates the seamless market and its an area of fashion that changes constantly. Instead of four floor sets a year, Shelley says retailers now are thinking in terms of eight a year.

Manufacturers of seamless wear must meet those fashion demands with innovative and creative offerings for the retailers.



Seamless garments at Cahaj Corp.

“It’s a moving target,” says Shelly, who at times travels twice a week to New York for marketing purposes.

Despite the challenges that seamless apparel can present, Shelley believes its an avenue other hosiery manufacturers could take advantage of as global price pressure is expected to continue.

“It definitely has potential,” he says. “We saw it here and we’ve been fortunate in our ability to develop that potential.”

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DYNA YARN USA, LLC

PO Box 811 327 E. Elm Street
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Tony Holt – President
johnanthon@aol.com
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