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We want to become the Google of size and shape

Metail is a retail technology company for the online fashion industry. Its technology empowers shoppers to virtually try on clothes and provides recommendations based on specific body size measurements. **Tom Adeyoola**, founder and chief executive officer, Metail talks about solving issues of shapes and sizing with this technology to minimise returns and improved online shopping experience.

Q Where did the idea for Metail come from?

A. I was with my wife on a shopping trip when she was finding it difficult to find items that would fit well, or even fit at all. This stayed in my mind and it was then, when we got some clothes made, that we asked ourselves, why we can't always get a personalised made-to-measure fit. In the era of new and exciting emergent technologies why can't a few simple measurements always give us this? I'd been working with computer vision technology for a little while and the two seemed to fit. We created MeModels, that allows shoppers to try on clothes online, see what they look like, and buy the garments that they will be happy with.

Q What was the initial seed fund that your company received? Who are the major investors in Metail?

A. Our first partnership was with clothing at Tesco's. Since then, we have completed several rounds of funding with the most recent being in July. This year we raised £10 million in a Series B funding round which made our total investment to date £22.5 million. The funds have largely come from Asia, where they're streets ahead of the UK and rest of Europe when it comes to adopting retail tech innovations. Our largest investor is TAL, which makes an estimated one in six men's shirts in the US.

Q Sizing-and-fitting is an essential issue while shopping online not just for consumers but also retailers. What is the percentage by which retailers can reduce their return rates using Metail?

A. Returns are a significant issue in the fashion industry which cost the UK alone £60 billion a year. A research study with Kellogg University proved that our technology on a retail website can lift sales by 22 per cent, encourage customers to spend three-and-a-half times longer on a website, and cut returns by 5 per cent.

Q How does Metail provide sizing solutions?

A. We are using advanced, patented, computer vision technologies to digitise garments at scale. We started looking at how to provide these sizing solutions using breakthroughs in advanced computer vision technology from Cambridge University. The technology enables shoppers to create personal avatars built around specific body measurements - referred to as MeModels. Metail's MeModel has enabled over 7.7 million consumers to create a bespoke 3D model of themselves to try on clothes before buying online. You can create your MeModel in under ten seconds with just your height, weight and bra size. This generates a virtual avatar of you. The accuracy of the Me Model is found to be up to 96 per cent and can be seen in 360 degrees.

Q With many brands catering to consumers across the globe, the complexities in understanding size and fitting increase. How do you deal with this?

A. Metail's technology sets it apart from the competition. We have spent the past eight years developing its offering and are now confidently transforming online shopping. The data collected about the real body sizes and shapes of the millions of consumers who have made MeModels is in fact giving clarity to the size and fit of the problem.

Q How does Metail work in-store? What percentage of retailers use your technology for online vs offline stores?

A. We are firmly an online service and aim to give consumers the experience of a physical store online.

Q Fashion retailers are using 3D scanning and virtual trial rooms to aid consumers with size-and-fit woes. Does Metail provide a better judgement of size-and-fit?

A. There have been many attempts to solve this issue with a lot of false prophets. However, we use advanced and patented computer vision technology to digitise garments at scale. Our team includes 14 PhDs who are working on this-it isn't an easy problem to solve! We are the only people in the world who can build accurate 3D versions of yourself from basic measurements and then clothe you. Lots of people are using the kinds of technology used in gaming for their tech.

Q Do you provide size-and-fitting assistance only to brands that are on board with you?

A. We have many partners all over the world, and we have many companies trialling our product. We are constantly looking to invest in new technologies that can assist with individual brand's requests.

Q What is the kind of data you provide to the retailers? What can that help them with?

A. As we work for greater periods of time with our retail partners, the data on millions of consumers' bodies can be used to transform the way clothes are made and how they fit. In five years' time, we want clothes at major retailers to cut to fit real people's body shapes.

Q Who are your major clients? Besides UK which are your major markets?

A. More than 7.7 million people have created their MeModel since we started; we have digitised over 80,000 garments, and our technology is constantly improving and becoming faster. We are increasingly looking to the Asian market. We have a reach in South Korea, China, Taiwan, Vietnam and India, but we are looking to expand. With 79 per cent of Metail's revenues coming from outside the UK, we see the value in expanding in the emerging markets, and will continue to champion Asian e-commerce scene.

Q What are the future plans at Metail?

A. Our plan is to become the Google of size and shape. We are looking to make clothes better for everyone-and we think this will be the future approach of recommending clothes to people based on what they have previously bought, and what others similar shapes to you have bought. Made-to-measure clothes at ready-to-wear prices are the way forward. It won't be long before customised designs and a tailored fit come at a fraction of the price - we will be providing the data and consumer experience to enable robots and automation to take hold in fashion and make this a reality. We will be working on the male version of the MeModel, which we are planning to take to the market next year. (HO)

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