

Fast Fashion

In Zara stores, customers can always find new products—but they're in limited supply. There is a sense of exclusivity, since only a few items are on display even though stores are spacious (the average size is around 1,000 square meters). A customer thinks, "This green shirt fits me, and there is one on the rack. If I don't buy it now, I'll lose my chance." Such a retail concept depends on the regular creation and rapid replenishment of small batches of new goods. Zara's designers create approximately 40,000 new designs annually, from which 10,000 are selected for production. Some of them resemble the latest couture creations. But Zara often beats the high-fashion houses to the market and offers almost the same products, made with less expensive fabric, at much lower prices. Since most garments come in five to six colors and five to seven sizes, Zara's system has to deal with something in the realm of 300,000 new stock-keeping units (SKUs), on average, every year.

This "fast fashion" system depends on a constant exchange of information throughout every part of Zara's supply chain—from customers to store managers, from store managers to market specialists and designers, from designers to production staff, from buyers to subcontractors, from warehouse managers to distributors, and so on. Most companies insert layers of bureaucracy that can bog down communication between departments. But Zara's organization, operational procedures, performance measures, and even its office layouts are all designed to make information transfer easy. Zara's single, centralized design and production center is attached to Inditex (Zara's parent company) headquarters. It consists of three spacious halls—one for women's clothing lines, one for men's, and one for children's. Unlike most companies, which try to excise redundant labor to cut costs, Zara makes a point of running three parallel, but operationally distinct, product families. Accordingly, separate design, sales, and procurement and production-planning staffs are dedicated to each clothing line. A store may receive three different calls from the headquarters in one week from a market specialist in each channel; a factory making shirts may deal simultaneously with two Zara managers, one for men's shirts and another for children's shirts. Though it's more expensive to operate three channels, the information flow for each channel is fast, direct, and unencumbered by problems in other channels—making the overall supply chain more responsive.

In each hall, floor to ceiling windows overlooking the Spanish countryside reinforce a sense of informality and openness. Unlike companies that isolate their design staffs, Zara's cadre of 200 designers sits right in the midst of the production process. Split among the three lines, these mostly twentysomething designers—hired because of their enthusiasm and talent, no prima donnas allowed—work next to the market specialists and procurement and production planners. Large circular tables play host to impromptu meetings. Racks of the latest fashion magazines and catalogs fill the walls. A small prototype shop has been set up in the corner of each hall, which encourages everyone to comment on new garments as they evolve. The physical and organizational proximity of the three groups increases both the speed and the quality of the design process. Designers can quickly and informally check initial sketches with colleagues. Market specialists, who are in constant touch with store managers (and many of whom have been store managers themselves), provide quick feedback about the look of the new designs (style, color, fabric, and so on) and suggest possible market price points.

Adapted from www.hbswk.hbs.edu

Ex. 1 Find the words or expressions in the text which mean the following:

- 1) large: _____
- 2) a place where clothes are: _____
- 3) to be similar to sth: _____
- 4) high fashion: _____
- 5) the material from which clothes are made: _____
- 6) at the centre: _____
- 7) to be connected to sth: _____
- 8) providing sth: _____
- 9) happening at the same time: _____
- 10) able to respond: _____
- 11) staff: _____
- 12) to make sb more willing to do sth: _____

Ex. 2 Match the expressions from the two columns into logical collocations:

| | | |
|-----|---------------|----------------|
| 1. | sth is on | to the market |
| 2. | rapid | staff |
| 3. | to beat sb | chain |
| 4. | stock-keeping | a point of sth |
| 5. | supply | costs |
| 6. | production | display |
| 7. | office | replenishment |
| 8. | to cut | layout |
| 9. | to make | flow |
| 10. | information | units |

Ex. 3 Provide English equivalents of these expressions:

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1) handel detaliczny | 7) zbędny |
| 2) partia towaru | 8) niedotknięty problemami |
| 3) około | 9) całkowity |
| 4) ubiory | 10)wzmocnić coś |
| 5) ciągły | 11)pośród |
| 6) spowolnić coś | 12)spontaniczny |

Grammar corner...

You may have heard about phrases that organize text, called discourse markers (they literally mark where you are and what you're dealing with in a text). Their main role is to make sure that the reader finds it easy to follow the logic in the text they are reading. Some of the examples include: both A and B / A and B both do sth, after, according to (as sb said), predominantly / primarily (mostly), in recent times (not too long ago), probably (maybe). Others include: once (after), however (but), actually (in fact).

Ex. 4 Fill in the gaps with an appropriate discourse marker.

- 1) _____ you and I know that this deal will not be accepted.
- 2) _____ you've finished the draft, please send it over to me.
- 3) _____ statistics people are more likely to buy something if it reminds them of their childhood.
- 4) Senior management positions in Asia are occupied _____ by middle-aged men.
- 5) The use of social media has spread significantly _____.
- 6) The new line of clothes is unisex, but its targeted _____ at men, though.
- 7) We will ship the parcel _____ we've received your payment.
- 8) The financial crisis will _____ last for another several years, who knows.
- 9) If you lease a car you may use it, _____ you can't sell it.
- 10) A realized gain is one that you _____ made, as opposed to an unrealized gain, which stays theoretical until you have acted.

| GLOSSARY | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| spacious | przestronny |
| a rack | półka |
| to resemble sth | przypominać coś |
| couture | kolekcje znanych projektantów |
| fabric | materiał |
| centralized | scentralizowany |
| to be attached to sth | być częścią czegoś |
| procurement | zaopatrzenie |
| simultaneously | w tym samym czasie |
| responsive | responsywny |
| cadre | kadra |
| to encourage sb to do sth | zachęcać kogoś do czegoś |
| sth is on display | coś jest widoczne |
| rapid replenishment | szybkie uzupełnianie |
| to beat sb to the market | jako pierwszy dotrzeć do klienta |
| stock-keeping units | magazyny |
| supply chain | łańcuch dostaw |
| production staff | personel działu produkcji |
| office layout | plan biura |
| to cut costs | ciąć koszty |
| to make a point of sth | podkreślić coś |
| information flow | przepływ informacji |
| retail | handel detaliczny |
| a batch | partia towaru |
| approximately | około |
| garments | ubioły |
| constant | ciągły |
| to bog sth down | spowolnić coś |

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| redundant | zbędny |
| unencumbered by problems | niedotknięty problemami |
| overall | całkowity |
| to reinforce sth | wzmocnić coś |
| in the midst of sth | pośród czegoś |
| impromptu | spontaniczny |

ANSWER KEY:

Ex. 1

- 1) spacious
- 2) a rack
- 3) to resemble sth
- 4) couture
- 5) fabric
- 6) centralized
- 7) to be attached to sth
- 8) procurement
- 9) simultaneously
- 10) responsive
- 11) cadre
- 12) to encourage sb to do sth

Ex. 2

- 1) sth is on display
- 2) rapid replenishment
- 3) to beat sb to the market
- 4) stock-keeping units
- 5) supply chain
- 6) production staff
- 7) office layout
- 8) to cut costs
- 9) to make a point of sth
- 10) information flow

Ex. 3

- 1) retail
- 2) a batch
- 3) approximately
- 4) garments
- 5) constant
- 6) to bog sth down
- 7) redundant
- 8) unencumbered by sth
- 9) overall
- 10) to reinforce sth
- 11) in the midst of sth
- 12) impromptu

Ex. 4

- 1) talking
- 2) talk
- 3) argue
- 4) arguing
- 5) get
- 6) getting
- 7) drive
- 8) driving