

The Fashion Founder FAQ

Real answers to the questions you have

Starting a clothing brand looks glamorous from the outside. From the inside, it's a series of decisions most people never see coming. This guide won't sugarcoat any of them — but it will save you from learning the expensive way.

What makes a brand or product successful?

Three things, and they all must be clear before you spend a dollar on production. A clear idea — you know exactly what you're making and what it stands for. A clear target customer — not "everyone who likes clothes" but a specific person you understand deeply. And a clear answer to the question every founder eventually must face: what will make your target customer buy from you instead of your competition? The strongest answer is usually a product that solves a problem — a fit issue, a functional gap, an experience nobody else is offering. Style alone isn't enough anymore. There are too many brands making beautiful things. The ones that grow are the ones with a reason to exist.

How long does it take to launch?

Realistically, 6 to 12 months from initial idea to a product you can sell — and that's if things go smoothly. Design and tech pack takes 4 to 8 weeks. Sampling takes 2 to 4 months, often with multiple rounds of revisions. Production is another 2 to 3 months. Then you must factor in shipping, quality checks, photography, and getting the product ready to sell. Brands that rush this usually end up with samples that miss the mark and start over — which costs more time than doing it right the first time.

How much does it cost to start?

For a small first collection (2 to 5 styles), budget between \$10,000 and \$30,000 to get to your first production run. This includes technical design, sampling, materials testing, production minimums, and shipping. The range depends heavily on what you're making — a simple t-shirt costs a fraction of what an outerwear piece costs. If someone tells you a fashion brand can be launched for a few thousand dollars, they're cutting critical corners or they haven't done it. Plan for more than you think you need.

Can I just use standard sizing?

There isn't an industry standard size chart — every brand builds their own, and sizing varies wildly between categories and target markets. The best starting point is your target customer: think about who they are, then find real garments in stores that fit them the way you want yours to fit. Use those as your reference. From there, your patternmaker or technical designer helps you build a size chart tailored to your product and customer. Getting fit right during sampling saves you a mountain of returns and bad reviews later.

How do I find manufacturers?

A few solid starting points: directories like Maker's Row and Sewport for U.S. factories, or Alibaba and Global Sources for overseas (Alibaba requires much more vetting). LinkedIn is underrated — search for factory owners in your category and reach out directly. Trade shows like Sourcing at Magic in Las Vegas are great if you can get to one. Working with a sourcing agent is often the fastest path, especially if you're producing overseas — they handle vetting, communication, and quality checks for you. Whichever route you take, always request samples of previous work and check references before signing anything.

How many products should I start with?

Fewer than you think. Most first-time founders want to launch with 8 to 12 styles because they're excited — and most burn out or run out of money before they get there. Start with 2 to 5 styles that clearly represent your brand. This lets you learn the production process, test what customers want, and manage cash flow without stretching thin. You can always add more once your first collection sells. Every additional style multiplies your development cost, sampling time, and risk.

Do I need to have my designs finalized before starting?

No — and this is one of the biggest misconceptions. You don't need polished sketches or finished designs to begin. A rough sketch, reference photos, or a similar garment with notes is enough to start a real conversation. Waiting until your ideas feel "ready" often means waiting forever. The technical design process is where ideas get refined into something producible.

What's the difference between a sample and a production run?

A sample is a single test garment made before you commit to production. Its job is to prove your design works — the fit, construction, and materials all behave the way you expect. A production run is the batch order that comes after samples are approved. You'll typically go through 2 to 4 rounds of sampling before approving production, and each round is a chance to catch problems before they get multiplied across hundreds of units.

Do I really need a tech pack?

Yes. Reputable manufacturers won't take your order without one, and the ones that will are the ones that make expensive mistakes. A tech pack is the document your factory uses to build your garment correctly — every measurement, construction detail, material, and label spec is documented so nothing is left to guesswork. Without one, factories make assumptions, and assumptions lead to wrong samples, wasted money, and lost time.

Can I get a production-ready tech pack up front?

Not really — and anyone who tells you otherwise is selling you something. A production-ready tech pack reflects a garment that's been sampled, fit-tested, and refined. Every fabric, trim, and measurement has been confirmed in real life, not just on paper. What you start with is a strong first version — detailed enough for your factory to make a great first sample. From there, the tech pack evolves. Each sample round surfaces things to adjust: a seam that pulls, a measurement that needs tweaking, a trim that doesn't work in practice. The tech pack gets updated after every round until it reflects the final garment you're producing. That's what "production-ready" means — it's the destination, not the starting point.

What if I only have an idea and no fashion background?

That's the position most successful founders start from. What matters isn't industry experience — it's whether you're willing to work with people who have it. The founders who fail are the ones who try to figure everything out themselves. The ones who succeed hire the right specialists for the parts they don't know: technical designers, patternmakers, sourcing agents, production consultants. You bring the vision. Experts handle the technical execution.

Ready to start?

If you've read this far, you're taking the process seriously — which puts you ahead of most first-time founders.

I'm Tatyana, founder of TM Tech Packs. I help fashion brands and startups turn ideas into production-ready designs through detailed tech packs, 3D modeling, and hands-on technical support. 10+ years of experience, hundreds of clients, and a business kept intentionally small so you always work directly with me.

The best first step is a free 15-minute discovery call. No pitch, no pressure — just a real conversation about your idea and what it would take to bring it to life.

Book a free discovery call → tmtechpacks.com/introcall