



Clothing Serviceability

What Is It?

How Is It Offered?

How Do You Evaluate It?

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What does "serviceability of clothing" mean to you today?

It used to refer mainly to how durable clothing was—how long it would last, and last, and last.

Today to most consumers, this term means durability for as long as the consumer "wants" clothes to last—as long as a sleeper fits a baby; as long as denims fit an 11-year-old; as long as a dress is in fashion.

It means even more than these aspects of durability. Other important factors of serviceability today are comfort, ease of care and appealing appearance.

DURABILITY may be the most important in a work uniform.

COMFORT may be the most important in underclothing.

CARE may be the most important in playclothes.

APPEARANCE may be the most important in a dress.

All of these, however, may interact in one item of clothing. For example, if you don't like the looks of a dress, will you be satisfied with it even if it met your requirements of durability, comfort and care? When you see a dress that you'd like to buy, it is impossible to fully evaluate it and its potential for serviceability.

The value that is built into an item of clothing is the result of interaction between raw materials and numerous manufacturing processes. Most of the manufacturing steps occur independently of each other: fiber producing, yarn processing, fabric structuring are all separate processes and are not always coordinated toward the same level of serviceability. So deficiencies can result.

Examples:

1. A fiber producer may produce a high quality fiber, but he may not have any control over how that fiber is further processed and used.
2. A weak, loosely woven, lightweight dress fabric will not necessarily be improved by high quality bonding.

Once clothing is purchased and worn, its serviceability is exposed to all sorts of conditions: sunlight; humidity; atmospheric gases; wet, dry and hot conditions; perspiration and body oils; and mechanical forces such as flexing, straining and abrasion.

It is impossible for even the most complex and refined laboratory test methods to duplicate the conditions under which clothing is expected to be serviceable.

CAN SERVICEABILITY BE ASSURED?

1. There is a minimum degree of serviceability implied by different types of clothing—T shirt, hosiery, evening dress or sport shirt.
2. Some national retail stores conduct research as a basis for establishing their own set of serviceability standards for their clothing.
3. Although a brand name (trademark) may designate a certain kind of serviceability or quality to a consumer, the brand name itself is only a means of identification. A brand name may become a symbol of serviceability, justified or not.
4. Through trial, error and experience, consumers themselves evaluate certain brands as serviceable or not serviceable.
5. Much clothing proves satisfactory because "serviceability" was built in at all stages of manufacture. This may or may not be indicated on the clothes for sale to you.

MORE EVIDENCE — LESS GUESS WORK

Several labeling programs in use indicate some assurance of serviceability. They vary from "implied" to "specific" assurance.

Guarantee Programs

A guarantee label on clothing usually means the manufacturer will replace the clothing or refund its original price, if the item does not live up to its promise of performance

within a stated time. If offered, specific care instructions may be a critical factor in the guarantee.

Example:

This
(trademark of the company)
Permanently Pressed
(trademark of stay-white feature)
Shirt Is
GUARANTEED
to Stay White

This new (trademark of company) permanently pressed (brand name of stay-white feature) shirt of 65% (trademark of fiber) polyester, 35% cotton is guaranteed to stay white. The (trademark of company) Shirt Company will replace the shirt with a similar shirt of the same type and quality should it not stay white, provided it has been laundered in accordance with the directions on the reverse side of this certificate. Simply send the original shirt and this certificate to (name and address of company).

Replacement or refunding has always been the policy of many manufacturers and major retail outlets. Returning clothing to the manufacturer is one of the most effective ways of registering dissatisfaction.

Licensed Trademark Programs

The word "license" means authorization or permission to use a brand name or trademark, providing certain stipulations or requirements are met.

Example:

50% (trademark of fiber) polyester. 50% cotton exclusive of ornamentation. This is the official (trademark name of fiber) tag. It gives you added assurance of satisfaction for it is awarded only to fabric styles meeting the performance requirements of the (trademark of fiber producer) (trademark of fiber) Trademark Licensing Agreement.

CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Machine wash—wash and wear cycle—or hand wash; drip or tumble dry; easy to iron—warm setting only.

Licensing may apply to the use of fibers or processes (yarn dyeing, finishing) used in manufacturing fabric.

A licensed trademark program requires testing, checking, and controlling serviceability throughout the entire manufacturing processes, including the garment. It is costly and time consuming.

A licensed trademark signifies technical assurance of serviceability without technical jargon on labels and hand tags.

Certification

A certification label indicates an article of clothing, or the fabric of which it is made, has been tested for serviceability and approved, usually by a testing laboratory or agency independent of the manufacturer.

Example:

A symbol on a label or hangtag which certifies the product as "washable" by a trade association.

It may be difficult to tell what is represented by the certification. Is it in compliance with recognized standards for serviceability or merely a seal of approval with no specific information given?

A certification is as reliable as the certifying party and not always easy to evaluate.

The American National Standards Institute (an industry-supported clearing house for voluntary national standards) has launched its ANSI certification program. Purpose is to provide a single, easily recognized certification mark indicating compliance with nationally approved standards for particular kinds of clothing.

So, there are guarantee programs, licensed trademark programs and certification programs. Some imply serviceability; some specify it; others assure it, and some assure replacement of an unsatisfactory product.

BUT:

Who takes the final risk?

What is your responsibility?

Who decides whether the claim is justified or not?

Judging the quality of a clothing product is virtually impossible; but, neither is it easy to judge the assurance of quality given to a clothing product by its manufacturer.

FASHION WITHOUT FUSS

Attractive clothing with easy care requirements make up the two most important serviceability factors for many consumers.

A Voluntary Guide For Improved and Permanent Care Labeling of Consumer Textile Products has been developed by a Textile Advisory Committee in cooperation with the President's Committee on Consumer Affairs.

The purpose of the guide is to provide a common language of care instructions to use on all hangtags and labels. The guide recommends that clothing which requires special care handling be labeled with permanent attached instructions.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) of the U.S. Department of Commerce is proposing a new trade regulation calling for permanently attached labels on all textile products, without exception.

Industry-initiated or government-regulated consumer protection costs money. Serviceability in clothing is no exception. Therefore, your reaction to proposed plans is very important.

Do you check hangtags and labels for specific care instructions before buying clothes?

Are care instructions easy for you to understand?

Do most care instructions coincide with the cleaning equipment you have?

Are care instructions brief and specific enough to interpret correctly?

You can benefit most by

- recognizing what serviceability factors are most important to you,
- looking for evidences of assured serviceability when buying clothing,
- keeping priorities of serviceability consistent between the purchase and care of any clothing item.

If the appearance is the priority factor in your purchase, don't switch and make care, comfort and/or durability the high priority later on and expect complete satisfaction in serviceability.

Acknowledgment

The helpful suggestions and review by Nancy Harries, Department of Human Environment and Design, MSU, is very much appreciated.