# Fashion industry must overcome reluctance to adopt existing sustainable technologies, says Lab Denim CEO



As the fashion industry grapples with its mounting environmental footprint, there remains a critical misconception that sustainable technology is either inadequate or unavailable. This misunderstanding not only hampers progress but also clouds the potential for change already within reach. Dustin White, CEO of Lab Denim, argues that the real challenge lies not in developing new technologies, but in the reluctance of brands to embrace these advancements.

While there is a growing awareness of sustainability among consumers and stakeholders, the industry's transition has been disappointingly slow. This inertia is compounded by the legacy of entrenched practices within complex global supply chains. Challenges such as cost constraints and logistical barriers often serve as convenient excuses for inaction. Yet deeper still is a reluctance to confront established business models—an approach that seems paradoxical in an industry celebrated for its creativity. Many brands continue to prioritise profit margins over environmental responsibility, frequently outsourcing production to regions with lax regulations, thereby avoiding the culpability of fostering sustainable practices.

The environmental ramifications of this negligence are stark. Locations near manufacturing hubs suffer from polluted waterways, degraded soil, and air quality issues, disproportionately affecting populations least responsible for climate change. The effects of global warming, including erratic weather patterns and rising sea levels, threaten not only ecosystems but also the livelihoods of these vulnerable communities.

To begin to redress this imbalance, White asserts that a shift in mindset is essential. Sustainable choices need not be flashy marketing endeavours; instead, implementing these changes in a subtle manner can prove to be a prudent business strategy. Brands that commit to integrating sustainable technologies can do so incrementally, allowing for a smooth transition that does not disrupt existing operations or provoke significant backlash from stakeholders.

Central to fostering this transformation is a rigorous evaluation of the environmental impact associated with traditional practices. For instance, the chemical runoff from dyeing processes can have devastating long-term effects on ecosystems. Engaging environmental experts to detail these impacts helps brands identify the areas where meaningful changes can be made. This approach not only aligns with ecological objectives but also enhances business viability by appealing to increasingly conscientious consumers.

Implementing innovations in sustainable practices often requires a thoughtful, step-by-step approach. Smaller-scale pilot programs, such as limited-run product lines, allow companies to gauge environmental benefits and consumer reception while minimising risk. These initiatives can yield invaluable data that informs broader implementation strategies and identifies potential challenges, leading to more effective scaling.

Moreover, cultivating a corporate culture that empowers employees to champion eco-friendly technologies can instigate a wide-ranging ripple effect. When companies invest in educating their teams about sustainable practices, they foster a sense of shared mission and commitment. Employees who resonate with their brand’s purpose contribute not just to retention but emerge as advocates for transformative initiatives, propelling the industry's shift towards sustainability.

The discussion surrounding technology's role in fashion extends beyond mere production efficiencies. Innovations, from digitised manufacturing processes to automated finishing techniques, are redefining the parameters of sustainable fashion. Yet true progress requires bravery from industry leaders; waiting for the perfect solution risks stalling vital advancements and exacerbating environmental damage. In the face of evolving regulations and shifting consumer expectations, immediate action is not merely idealistic but an astute business move.

Challenges remain, particularly in navigating the economic hurdles posed by sustainability investments. Recent reports underline that U.S. retailers are reassessing their sourcing strategies amidst rising costs and market uncertainties. However, integrating renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies can prove essential for long-term survival and viability in an increasingly eco-conscious marketplace.

Ultimately, as brands such as Inditex demonstrate through pledges to invest substantially in textile innovation, the transition to a sustainable fashion industry is not a distant dream but an urgent necessity. By committing resources to develop innovative materials and practices, these leaders set critical benchmarks for others to follow. The potential benefits—environmentally, socially, and economically—are substantial. Now is the time to seize the moment for revolutionising fashion, not just for the industry's sake but for the health of our planet and future generations.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: [[1]](https://www.fashiondive.com/news/future-fashion-dustin-white-lab-denim/747676/)
2. Paragraph 8: [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/sustainability-is-no-longer-fashion-apparel-industrys-future-depends-it-2025-05-12/)
3. Paragraph 9: [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/f0be47ca-dd6f-44d5-8be8-80012ed4b725)
4. Paragraph 10: [[4]](https://time.com/6285257/is-clothing-rental-resale-recycling-sustainable-nuuly/)
5. Paragraph 11: [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/zara-owner-inditex-launches-fund-finance-textile-innovation-2024-10-11/)
6. Paragraph 12: [[6]](https://time.com/6302562/stella-mccartney-sustainability-interview-lvmh/)
7. Paragraph 13: [[7]](https://apnews.com/article/a85da46b3a159e04d8789bfc15cb2be8)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.fashiondive.com/news/future-fashion-dustin-white-lab-denim/747676/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/sustainability-is-no-longer-fashion-apparel-industrys-future-depends-it-2025-05-12/> - This article discusses the apparel industry's economic challenges and the importance of sustainability. It highlights how U.S. retailers are reconsidering sourcing due to economic uncertainties and rising costs. The piece emphasizes the need for brands to invest in renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies in new manufacturing hubs to maintain affordability and long-term viability.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/f0be47ca-dd6f-44d5-8be8-80012ed4b725> - The article examines the environmental impact of the fashion industry, focusing on water pollution from PFAS chemicals used in textile production. It discusses the significant contribution of the industry to global water pollution and carbon emissions, and the challenges in recycling mixed-fiber textiles. The piece also highlights legislative efforts in Europe to mitigate environmental damage.
4. <https://time.com/6285257/is-clothing-rental-resale-recycling-sustainable-nuuly/> - This piece evaluates the effectiveness of clothing rental, resale, and recycling services in reducing environmental impact. It points out that, despite good intentions, these initiatives currently don't significantly benefit the environment due to issues like energy-intensive recycling processes and increased transportation emissions. The article suggests that genuine progress may come from policy measures and personal actions like using existing clothing longer.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/zara-owner-inditex-launches-fund-finance-textile-innovation-2024-10-11/> - Inditex, the owner of Zara, has established a €50 million fund to invest in textile innovation projects. Managed by Mundi Ventures, the fund aims to support startups developing new materials or technologies with reduced environmental impact. Inditex is committed to cutting its supply chain emissions by 50% by 2030 and producing 25% of its garments from innovative fibers not yet available on an industrial scale.
6. <https://time.com/6302562/stella-mccartney-sustainability-interview-lvmh/> - Stella McCartney, a renowned British fashion designer, has spent her career championing sustainable and ethical fashion without compromising on style and luxury. Since launching her label in 2001, she has avoided using leather, feathers, and fur, while creating fashion-forward designs. McCartney collaborates with startups to develop eco-friendly materials like grape-based leather and forest-friendly rayon, which comprised 90% of her latest collections.
7. <https://apnews.com/article/a85da46b3a159e04d8789bfc15cb2be8> - The French Parliament has approved a pioneering bill to curb fast fashion, aiming to reduce the production and appeal of cheap, mass-produced garments, primarily from China. The legislation seeks to limit advertising of inexpensive textiles and impose an environmental tax on these products. It also requires large fast-fashion companies to disclose the environmental impact of their products, promoting more sustainable and transparent practices.