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Desmonds - A Microcosm of Marks and Spencer

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Introduction

Marks and Spencer P.L.C. is one of the largest retailing organisations in the world. In Britain alone they employ over 52,000 people directly. Desmond and Sons Ltd. of Northern Ireland, manufacturers of fashionwear, employing almost 3,000 people are Marks and Spencer's tenth biggest supplier of clothing. It is the close collaboration between these two companies and their combined strategies which is the focus for this thesis.

In the summer of 1993, I spent six weeks working for Desmonds, and during this time had ample opportunity to observe their approach to mass production and the organisation of their business. It is the position which Desmonds have chosen for themselves in relation to Marks and Spencer, manufacturing exclusively for them since 1956, which will be one of the most important aspects under discussion in this thesis.

Desmond and Sons Ltd. and Marks and Spencer P.L.C. came into being within months of each other. Both were born out of the efforts of two very brave and enterprising individuals. In the case of Marks and Spencer, it was the nineteen year old Russian immigrant Michael Marks, who arrived in England in 1882, illiterate, unemployed, without a trade and unable to speak English but, on whose efforts and initiative Britain's largest retailing organisation was founded in 1884. (Rees, 1973, Chapter 1).

Similarly Annie Desmond, a working mother in 1885 began a cottage industry

in Claudy near Londonderry, supplying shirts to outworkers. The fact that she bore and raised twelve children did not prevent her from nurturing a business which today is Northern Ireland's largest privately owned industrial company and indeed the largest manufacturer of clothing on this island. (Wedge, 1993, p.19-23). One of the most important decisions to be made by Desmonds was undertaken in 1956 when James Desmond, the father of the current chairman Denis, decided to close all of the company's accounts, except one, and in the future to focus his business on satisfying the demands of that one customer. That customer was Marks and Spencer.

While there has been a lot written about Marks and Spencer, there has been little written with regard to their suppliers. Of Marks and Spencer's top ten suppliers, Desmonds are unique in that they manufacture exclusively for Marks and Spencer. This thesis will focus on Desmonds, and analyse why such a successful company would place themselves in the seemingly vulnerable position of relying entirely upon one customer for all of their business needs. The thesis will also be examining the effects which this has had on their company particularly, with regard to design, marketing and mass production. Above all, it will be investigating the influence and control which Marks and Spencer have exerted over Desmonds in providing them with a market for their products and, by occupying the position of sole customer to their business.

Chapter one will analyse why Desmonds in 1956 decided to concentrate their business exclusively on satisfying the demands of a sole customer, Marks and

Spencer. To facilitate this discussion I will look at the development of Desmonds from their inception in 1885 to their position in 1956. This chapter will also examine the growth and expansion of Marks and Spencer to discover why it was successful and, to unearth why a manufacturer would want to become a supplier to them.

The image of Marks and Spencer today will be examined in chapter two, along with their approach to mass production and mass selling, using Desmonds as a vehicle for this discussion.

The effects which Marks and Spencer have had on Desmonds, both by occupying the position of their sole customer and by the extent of the power which they exert as a market leader, will be analysed in chapter three.

Chapter four discusses mass production and how this is approached by Desmonds. The influence of Marks and Spencer is crucial to this discussion.

This thesis hopes to establish the strong connections between these two firms, Desmond and Sons Ltd., and Marks and Spencer PLC. In doing so, it will illustrate how Desmonds, in supplying Marks and Spencer exclusively, have been transformed from a small independent company into a microcosm of the multi-conglomerate Marks and Spencer.

There has been little official documentation written about Desmonds and as a result, in researching for this thesis, I have surveyed their own literature such

as, their company newspapers and catalogues and analysed the information available from these sources. In addition to this, having spent several weeks working on the factory floor in Desmonds Irvinestown factory in County Fermanagh, I was in a position to directly observe and experience the relationship between Desmonds and Marks and Spencer and to analyse these observations for use, where applicable, in this thesis. In working for Desmonds, I also had the opportunity to meet many key personnel within the company and to seek their views on matters important to this thesis.

Marks and Spencer on the other hand have been a subject of interest to many authors. One of the most extensive and indepth surveys of their history was carried out by Goronwy Rees who published his book "*St. Michael, A History of Marks and Spencer*" in 1973. I have made several references to this text throughout the thesis as it is particularly helpful in understanding the relationship between Marks and Spencer and it's suppliers. Marks and Spencer's own publications such as, their Annual Report, their Company Factfile and their company newspaper combined with an interview with Libby Gribben, Personnel Manageress at Marks and Spencer's Mary Street branch in Dublin, have all been valuable sources of information for this thesis. This information has also been backed up by my own observations of their two stores in Dublin.

Chapter One

This chapter will analyse the reasons why, in 1956, Desmond and Sons Ltd. decided to close all of their company's accounts and to focus their attention exclusively on satisfying the needs of Marks and Spencer Plc. To do this, I will examine briefly the development of Desmonds from 1885 to 1956. The growth and expansion of Marks and Spencer will also be discussed to discover why it was successful, and to unearth the reasons why manufacturers wanted to become a supplier to them.

DESMONDS 1885-1956

Desmond and Sons Ltd. was established in 1885 by Annie Desmond, the grandmother of the present managing director, Denis Desmond. At that time Londonderry was the centre of the shirtmaking industry for the world. Annie began her business as an agent for a shirtmaker supplying outworkers with shirt parts which she would later collect and deliver back to the shirtmaker. The foundations of the business were laid when Annie invited the outworkers to use her home in Claudy, near Londonderry, as a base from which to work. At the turn of the century she travelled to the United States to study their methods of manufacture. (Wedge, 1993, p. 19-23). America was, at that time, far ahead of Europe in its approach to the mass production of clothing. European manufacturers, those that were in existence, had little or no standardisation in their method of manufacture, and perhaps more importantly, no consistent methods of sizing garments which is one of the key elements to good clothing production. This trip to America at such an early

stage in it's business shows that from the outset Desmonds were a forward thinking company. The company refused to accept a status quo, but instead, strove to continually better itself and it's standards of production. By the 1920's the results of Annie Desmond's efforts were already evident in that her shirtmaking industry had progressed to factory status and was, by the end of the First World War, employing approximately 60 people.

It is interesting to note that from 1924 onwards Simon Marks, son of Michael Marks, the founder of Marks and Spencer, habitually made business trips to America to study their methods of chainstore retailing, a system of retailing which was new to Britain at that time. (Rees, 1973, p.76). This is an example of one of the many similarities which exist between these two companies some of which were coincidental and others which were deliberate, but all of which point to the fact that although these two companies grew and developed alongside each other until they converged in 1956, they had from their outset a common approach to business.

During and after the war there was a boom in the market for pyjamas and so Desmonds, recognising a good business opportunity, began to manufacture pyjamas. In 1938, when they received their first order from Marks and Spencer it was for men's pyjamas. At that stage Desmonds were still supplying many other customers among them chain stores such as Littlewoods (Desmond Company Catalogue, 1993). This boom in the pyjamas industry prompted Desmonds to expand their business, and so in 1948 a new factory was built in Claudy near Londonderry which is still in operation today. At this point their

product range began to diversify to include dressing gowns and the number of staff employed rose to 150. At one point during the 1950's Desmonds were producing 5000-6000 dozen pairs of pyjamas per week making their company the largest pyjamas producing unit in Europe at that time. This would indicate that in the span of 50 years Desmonds had established themselves firmly in the clothing manufacturing industry. With the capacity to produce 72,000 pairs of pyjamas per week, it becomes apparent why a chain-store such as Marks and Spencer, who at that time already had 240 stores, should be attracted to Desmonds as a potential supplier.

From their first dealings together in 1938 the relationship between Desmonds and Marks and Spencer grew, so that in 1956 James Desmond, the managing director at that time, undertook the decision to close the 100 other accounts of the company and to concentrate in future on supplying Marks and Spencer exclusively. A decision which bearing in mind the status which Desmonds had as a clothing manufacturer at that time seems rather drastic. Today 38 years later, Desmonds are still totally committed to supplying quality garments to Marks and Spencer. An analysis of the company of Marks and Spencer will disclose many of the reasons why James Desmond made such a drastic decision.

MARKS AND SPENCER ~ GROWTH, EXPANSION, SUCCESS

Goronwy Rees in his book *"St. Michael - A History of Marks and Spencer"* has researched the growth and expansion of the company in considerable depth. I have analysed the sections in this book relevant to Desmonds relationship with

Marks and Spencer and used this analysis throughout this chapter.

Having opened his first penny bazaar in 1884, it wasn't long until Marks had a chain of penny stalls and it became necessary to find a partner to share the burden of this responsibility. In 1894, one of the most famous partnerships of all time was born when Tom Spencer and Michael Marks joined forces to become Marks and Spencer.

From the beginning, Marks and Spencer were different from their competitors. Their penny stalls and later their stores were very popular with the public because of their revolutionary methods of selling which made shopping easier for the customer. Methods such as the accessibility of their merchandise, their use of open display and self selection combined with the fixed price point of a penny were revolutionary in the world of retailing at that time.

It was this policy of using a fixed price point, which was in many ways responsible for the future success of the business, as it forced Marks to source far and wide in order to obtain products of good quality which could be sold cheaply. It is this association between quality and price which is the cornerstone of the Marks and Spencer business.

In 1916 Simon Marks, son of Michael Marks, became chairman of the company and in 1917 his brother-in-law and friend Israel Sieff joined the board of directors. Together these two young men moulded the company into what it is today.

At that time in Britain the wholesaler acted as the link between the manufacturer and the retailer. In 1924, in an effort to reduce costs and to attain the product spread which they required Marks and Spencer decided to bypass the wholesaler and establish direct links with the manufacturer. Marks and Spencer saw themselves as an interpreter between the consumer and the manufacturer. From their daily transactions with their customers Marks and Spencer were in the position where they could keep their suppliers accurately informed as to what the consumer needed.

Because of their intimate day-to-day contact with the public they were able to interpret its demands quickly and accurately to the producer. Their awareness of their part in the process of production for the market became what was essentially a new conception of the function of the large-scale retailer, that is to say a conception of the retailer as an interpreter to industry, at every stage of the productive process. (Rees, 1973, p.122).

Manufacturers were persuaded to supply Marks and Spencer directly because of the guarantee of long runs of production coupled with the assurance of a growing market for their products.

From the beginning, Marks and Spencer exerted constant pressure on their suppliers to adopt policies of investment, modernisation and rationalisation directed towards reducing costs and improving quality; moreover pressure and persuasion were accompanied by forms of service and advice designed to assist the manufacturer in achieving this task. (Rees, 1973, p. 142).

The opening of Marks and Spencer's textile laboratory in 1935 was testimony to this. Its task was to ensure that all of the merchandise from the various suppliers conformed to a high and uniform standard. It was also responsible

for detecting faults and tracing them to suppliers who could then be advised on how to rectify them. In addition to this, Marks and Spencer pioneered specification buying, giving their suppliers precise and detailed instructions on the quality, quantity and types of materials to be used in production, and the methods of manufacture to be employed. This shows how determined Marks and Spencer were to achieve a form of quality control which is based on the policy of preventing faults rather than detecting them.

Initially, as well as using British suppliers Marks and Spencer in an effort to obtain a wide variety of merchandise looked to foreign soil for suppliers. However when World War I broke out, links with their suppliers were severed and as a result Marks and Spencer adopted a policy of using British suppliers where possible. This policy paid off when World War II broke out, as Marks and Spencer, because they were using British suppliers, were still able to obtain quality merchandise, albeit a limited amount. They maintained their insistence on quality and as a result were able to supply quality goods to their customers "at a time when quality and value were very hard to come by". (Rees, 1973, p.208).

Due to rationing and the introduction of war coupons, people searched for quality before feeling justified in spending their money. They appreciated the quality and value which they found at Marks and Spencer, so much so, that they began to view Marks and Spencer as offering a service rather than selling a product.

they came to feel that the goods they bought embodied something, in

quality and in use and appearance, which was somehow over and above what their money would buy elsewhere. (Rees, 1973, p. 208).

After the war a new homogeneous society emerged with common demands for variety, value and quality. As a large chain-store outlet with an emphasis already on these values, Marks and Spencer were in a position to meet the demands of the people. Their rapid expansion after the war, at a time when British industry was struggling, was viewed with pride by the British people who were beginning to see Marks and Spencer as a national institution. The efficiency, customer service, quality and value for money which the company offered aroused feelings of pride and loyalty in their customers which has become one of the greatest assets of the company.

millions of people felt that Marks and Spencer's commercial success was the reward of services rendered to the community. It was a feeling inspired most of all by the quality and value of the goods which Marks and Spencer sold in its stores. (Rees, 1973, p.208).

This sense of achievement was also passed onto Marks and Spencer's suppliers by the public. It became almost a seal of approval if a manufacturer supplied Marks and Spencer, so high were their standards and their standing in the public eye. Because of this, many manufacturers proclaimed the fact that they supplied Marks and Spencer, as this fact acted as a beacon to attract business from other sources.

1956 - A MILESTONE YEAR

Having examined the growth and expansion of Marks and Spencer, it is easier to understand why James Desmond decided in 1956 to close all of his

company's accounts and to concentrate on supplying Marks and Spencer exclusively. Having already supplied Marks and Spencer for eighteen years James Desmond was in an excellent position to assess the future potential of Marks and Spencer and the numerous benefits associated with supplying them. These included:

- Long runs of production.
- A growing market for his products.
- Constant feedback from Marks and Spencer regarding the demands of customers combined with feedback on the performance of Desmonds products.
- Continuous practical advice and assistance with regard to the best sources of materials and the best methods of employing them.
- The demands which Marks and Spencer make on their suppliers remains consistent ~ quality and value for money.
- Prompt payment for their products which is unusual in a relationship between chain-stores and their suppliers.
- Marks and Spencer place an emphasis on building up mutually rewarding long term relationships with their suppliers, thereby assuring James Desmond that Desmonds relationship with Marks and Spencer would last many years.
- Supplying Marks and Spencer was akin to receiving a seal of approval which was recognised by business people and the general public alike.

In addition to this, Desmonds would no longer need to invest resources in advertising or design, as both of these were, at that time, undertaken by Marks

and Spencer. Despite this, James Desmond set up his own design and research departments to consolidate the information which he was receiving from Marks and Spencer. Such departments helped to establish the streamlined process of manufacturing which are the hallmarks of Desmonds business.

However dramatic James Desmonds decision may seem, it changed the future of the company irrevocably, setting it on a road to success. This has seen Desmonds expand from one factory in Claudy to nine production sites, a centralised headquarters and two warehouses in the North of Ireland with additional interests in England and the Middle East.

Desmonds are used as a vehicle for the discussion of mass production and mass selling as promoted by Marks and Spencer, in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

This chapter examines the image of Marks and Spencer today and discusses its approach as a multi-conglomerate to mass production and mass selling. To assist this discussion particular attention has been given to the areas of design, buying, promotion and advertising. It is vital that the size and workings of Marks and Spencer are understood in order to grasp the extent of the power and influence which they, as a multi-conglomerate, wield over their suppliers. Desmonds have been referred to throughout this chapter in order to cite the influence of Marks and Spencer on its suppliers.

MARKS AND SPENCER - A MULTI-CONGLOMERATE

Marks and Spencer from its humble beginnings in 1884, has developed into a worldwide chain of stores. Today, Marks and Spencer have 610 stores throughout 30 countries worldwide with a sales footage of 12.7m square feet, employing over 62,000 people to serve 15m customers every week. Despite their present size, Marks and Spencer are continuing to expand by over 500,000 square feet each year. At present they hold 16% of the retail market in the United Kingdom which accounts for 20% of the total clothing production there. In Britain alone, they have over 30% of the lingerie market, 35% of the men's underwear market and are also Britain's largest retailer of childrenswear. In addition to this, one in ten pairs of ladies shoes is purchased from Marks and Spencer, as is one in five mens suits. Bearing all of this in mind, it comes as no surprise to learn that Marks and Spencer are the largest retailing organisation in Britain (Marks and Spencer Factfile, 1993).

The future looks good for Marks and Spencer as *Verdict* reports that there is a demographic shift in the population towards the 30-60 year old age group (Verdict, 1993, p.189). According to Libby Gribben, Personnel Manageress at Marks and Spencer's Mary Street branch in Dublin, Marks and Spencer's average customer can be classified as middle class and typified as being from the middle market in that they have more disposable income and appreciate quality. If *Verdict* are correct, then Marks and Spencer look set to benefit from this demographic shift as they have a high reputation for supplying quality at outstanding value, which older customers also place a strong emphasis on.

DESIGN-BY-COMMITTEE

Marks and Spencer's buyers and designers visit trade shows, obtain fashion forecasts and assess the feedback which they receive from their Customer Services Department, which receives over 50,000 letters annually, in order to establish what is "in fashion", and what the customer is looking for in a product. The design department will then give their suppliers colour palettes and trends from which to design from. (Marks and Spencer Factfile 1993).

The vast size of Marks and Spencer's business means that they cannot rush headlong into every new fashion trend which emerges. Instead, they sell wearable clothes with a classic feel which reflect modern fashion rather than mirroring it (Ewing, 1986, p.205). While changing the look of their collections from season to season, Marks and Spencer realise the importance of maintaining a continuity of style. Each season they retain certain classic

garments such as a ladies blazer and update it to suit the incoming season. Such continuity of style assures customers that what they purchased in previous seasons, will co-ordinate with garments in coming seasons. This consideration is particular important to the age-group which Marks and Spencer claim to supply.

On the other hand, it could be argued that the retention of such classic garments is in fact a cost cutting measure on the part of Marks and Spencer, and a "cop-out" from introducing new designs which have not yet proven their ability to sell. Desmonds, in part, share this view as they recognise and place emphasis on the importance of "innovative design" in their mission statement, an emphasis which is notably absent among Marks and Spencer's company principles (Appendix P.52 and P.53 respectively). Desmonds also state when discussing design in their company newspaper

Whereas core products ensure stability within the business; good and innovative design must be the driving force for the future, encouraging growth, and increased competitiveness.

(Behind the Seams, March 1993, p.10).

Since the 1960's, Marks and Spencer have sought the expertise of designers to advise them on the design content of their garments. Their first consultant designer was an Irishman, Michael Donnellan, who had his own couture house in London at that time.⁽¹⁾ In advising Marks and Spencer, Michael was faced with the problem of "design-by-committee".

If one member of the board hates the full sleeve, another finds the three-button cuff too fancy, etc. etc. You can imagine how watered-down the final blouse ends up.

A cream gabardine raincoat, for instance, had a lovely rounded

raglan shoulder, good stitching detail. 'They'll change that - they'll make it a set-in-sleeve, because that suits more customers', sighed Michael, 'but I must let the design team do it anyway or they'll lose their enthusiasm and flair'.

(Sinclair, 1974, p.8).

In the early 1980's the threat from the new 'Next' chain prompted Marks and Spencer to conduct consumer research, in order to discover the public's perceptions of their company. The research showed that the public viewed Marks and Spencer as a retailer of clothing which was "safe and steady" (Marks and Spencer Factfile, 1993). This invoked Marks and Spencer to make a concerted drive to update their products.⁽²⁾ This drive was successful and today Marks and Spencer clothing is viewed as being "fashionable and dynamic", so much so, that despite being marginally higher priced than their competitors they have retained their position as a market leader. (Verdict, 1993, p.179).

Marks and Spencer have become more aware of the importance of good design in the past ten years and this is borne out by Desmonds who state

In years gone by Marks and Spencer were criticised for their lack of 'Fashion Consciousness'. Recently however they have become more aware of consumer demands and as such, more demanding on our designers.

(Behind the Seams, March 1993, p.10).

Desmonds design team are constantly faced with the problem of design-by-committee, as they work in conjunction with Marks and Spencer buyers. The dictatorship which Marks and Spencer impose on the design teams of their suppliers can often result in the "Freshness" of the original designs being lost as

FIG. I

A selection of designs from Desmond's design team.

DESIGNING FOR THE FUTURE

In years gone by Marks & Spencers were criticised for their lack of "Fashion Consciousness". Recently, however, they have become much more aware of consumer demands and as such, more demanding on our designers.

Whereas core products ensure stability within the business; good and innovative design must be the driving force for the future, encouraging growth and increased competitiveness.

Marks & Spencers' perception of Desmonds as one of their top suppliers can be greatly improved if we are seen to be at the forefront of design with the ability to translate this knowledge and expertise into commercial garments. As such the standard of design innovation, illustration and presentation are all important.

Our designers must be "ahead of the game" in meeting the competition from other Marks & Spencers' suppliers. By undertaking comparative shopping in a range of stores and attending design and fabric fairs both in the U.K. and abroad our designers can obtain inspiration and information at an early stage on fabric and colour trends. Also Marks & Spencers

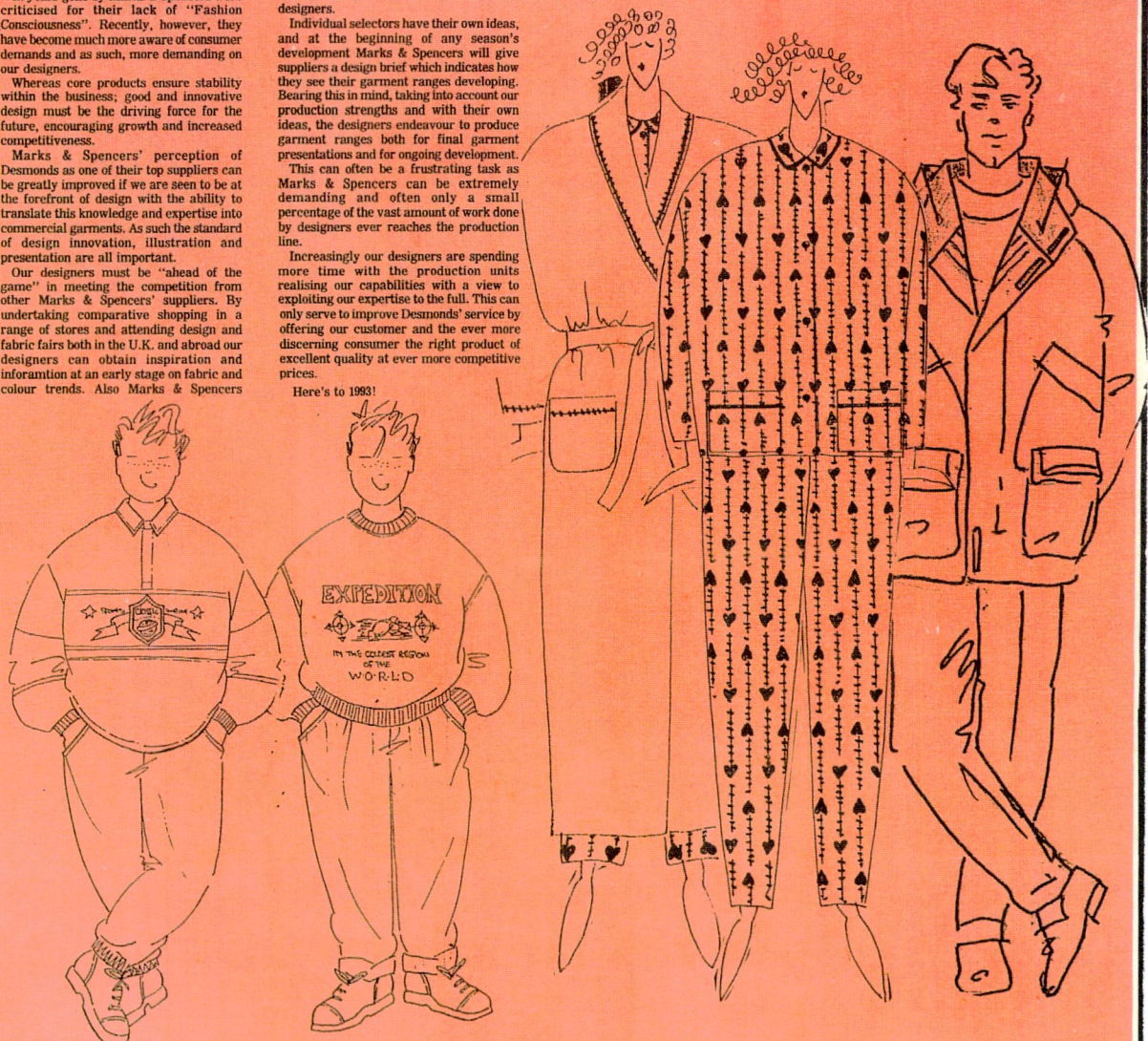
themselves have a lot of influence on designers.

Individual selectors have their own ideas, and at the beginning of any season's development Marks & Spencers will give suppliers a design brief which indicates how they see their garment ranges developing. Bearing this in mind, taking into account our production strengths and with their own ideas, the designers endeavour to produce garment ranges both for final garment presentations and for ongoing development.

This can often be a frustrating task as Marks & Spencers can be extremely demanding and often only a small percentage of the vast amount of work done by designers ever reaches the production line.

Increasingly our designers are spending more time with the production units realising our capabilities with a view to exploiting our expertise to the full. This can only serve to improve Desmonds' service by offering our customer and the ever more discerning consumer the right product of excellent quality at ever more competitive prices.

Here's to 1993!





they are continually modified. Desmonds design team for example, have over 8,000 sample garments made-up each year for Marks and Spencer buyers, yet, on average, only 5% of these will actually be approved for production (Behind the Seams, Oct./Nov., 1991, p.5).

Fig. I illustrates a selection of garments which Desmonds have designed for Marks and Spencer. As we can see the garments are extremely commercial relying on fabric, colour and minor details such as pockets or logos to make them fashionable. It is these deceptively "simple and basic" designs which are the most challenging for designers especially when one considers, that those who design with the Marks and Spencer company in mind must be extremely aware of the cost factors involved with the production of the garments. Marks and Spencer are so strict on price control that even the inclusion of an extra button or pocket could render the design too highly priced for production.

BUYING

One of the most important characteristics of the Marks and Spencer business is their ability to provide excellent quality at outstanding value. It has been said that "the soul of Marks and Spencer is in buying" (Olins, 1978, p.83) and in many ways this is true.

By maintaining a stronghold on price, Marks and Spencer force their suppliers into efficient mass production in order to compete for orders, which although large in size have small profit margins. It is for this reason that Marks and Spencer don't use small suppliers, as they would be unable to make the capital

investment needed to purchase the technology capable of producing such large orders (Gribben, 1993, Appendix P.55-59).

Marks and Spencer have a policy of not holding out of season sales or discounting goods in order to attract more customers and hence more sales. Instead they exercise what they call inventory control to devise methods of increasing sales without reducing profits.⁽³⁾ In 1993, they launched their "Outstanding Autumn Value Campaign" for the first time. The campaign was based around the idea that Marks and Spencer would achieve higher sales by offering their customers merchandise at the same price or lower than the previous year.

The key to this is co-operation with our suppliers. It is, of course, in their interests to help us to increase sales as it means increased volumes for them. We have, therefore, been able to negotiate lower cost prices on many lines and, by taking reduced margins ourselves, to hold or even reduce our selling prices.

(Marks and Spencer Factfile, 1993).

The result was an increase in sales, which in turn balanced out the reductions which both retailer and manufacturer had made. The campaign was a huge success and demonstrated how the close relationship which Marks and Spencer enjoy with their suppliers can be mutually rewarding.

Unfortunately such a relationship can also be destructive as some manufacturers were unable to make the necessary reductions in their costs and so, were forced to absorb the extra expenses themselves with serious consequences. According to Jim O'Kane, Desmonds Irvinestown Factory

Manager, it would not be unheard of for Desmonds to manufacture at a loss, in order to clinch an order and in doing so keep their competitors at bay. As Denis Desmond, Desmonds present managing director, said in a recent interview,

In the past, people sometimes felt the relationship between Marks and Spencer and their suppliers was maternalistic or protective, but today it is an extremely competitive environment and we have competitors to whom we could lose the business to, in any season.

(Behind the Seams, July 1993, p.2).

PROMOTION AND ADVERTISING

While Marks and Spencer are one of the most famous retailing organisations in the world, this has come about as a result of their commitment to meeting their customers needs, rather than as a result of any marketing which they have undertaken. Chapter one discussed the sense of loyalty which Marks and Spencer customers have towards the company in recognition for the quality and value which they consistently provide to their customers. As a result of this, there is the belief, however arrogant, within Marks and Spencer that they don't actually need to promote and advertise their merchandise as the quality of their merchandise coupled with the vast number of their staff and customers are an advertisement in themselves (Gribben, 1993, Appendix P.55-59). Despite this, I have observed that Marks and Spencer do engage in a certain amount of marketing and I have investigated this with regard to their shop fronts and layouts, in-store promotions, labels and packaging and finally, advertising.

In the early days of the business Simon Marks made many business trips to America, where he learnt the value of a large imposing shop front, such as that

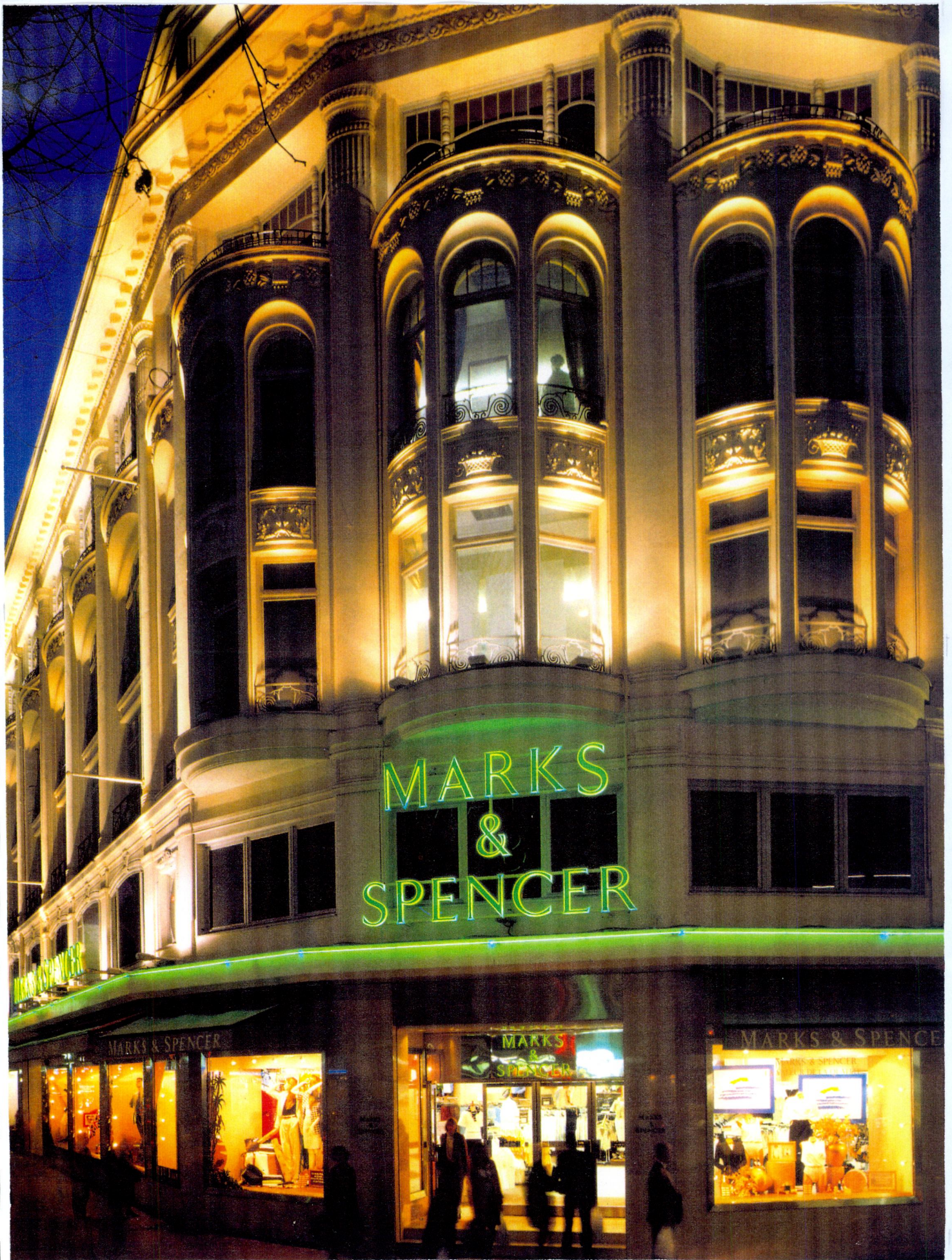


FIG. II Marks and Spencer's Nice store in France.

of their Nice store (Fig. II). Such a front gives their buildings landmark status. On examining Marks and Spencer's shop fronts, I was struck by the void at street level created by the large window areas. It is interesting to note that while most of Marks and Spencer's stores employ a window-display artist, window-displays are in fact largely dictated by head office where they tend towards open-window displays which give passers-by a "walk-on-in" impression but undermine the window display itself.

Marks and Spencer place an emphasis on the layout of their stores. Libby Gribben claims that Marks and Spencer aim to create a spacious, bright, uncluttered and hygienic shopping environment which makes shopping easy for the customer. This view is also shared by Rees who states with regard to Marks and Spencer that they aimed

to provide a shopping place which was simple, clean and attractive in appearance and in which nothing had been overlooked that might add to the convenience and comfort of their customers; as far as they could they wished to make shopping a pleasure
(Rees, 1973, p.260).

They carefully plan the location of each department within the store to maximise sales. Ladies lingerie would for example, never be placed beside menswear. Childrens-wear is usually placed upstairs or at the back of the store, so that mothers will have to pass through the store to get to that department and hopefully buy something else en route. (Gribben, 1993, Appendix P.55-59).

Their in-store promotion tends to be quite low key in keeping with the desired



FIG. III Desmond's in-store promotion for Marks and Spencer at Sprucefield near Lisburn.

uncluttered look. There are, however, a few stands and posters discreetly placed throughout the stores displaying their co-ordinates, but the size of the shop-floor tends to dwarf such promotions. Recently however, Marks and Spencer, in recognition of the efforts which Desmonds make on their behalf, offered them the chance to promote their own garments within Marks and Spencer's Sprucefield store near Lisburn. The challenge involved increasing the sale of denims, of which Desmonds are Marks and Spencer's largest supplier, without introducing new products. Desmonds jumped at such a chance and created an eye-catching display with a North American atmosphere (Fig. III). As a result, the sale of jeans within the store rose from £2,000 p.w. to £6,000 p.w. and maintained this level for the eight weeks of the promotion (Behind the Seams, July 1993, p.10).

I think this demonstrates two things. Firstly, the high esteem in which Marks and Spencer regard Desmonds, and secondly, if Marks and Spencer invested more energy in the promotion of their merchandise they would increase their sales. Rees however, does not share this view as he states in his book,

given the object at which Marks and Spencer aimed, which was to provide the best possible article at the lowest possible price, Marks and Spencer's problem was less that of increasing sales than of obtaining merchandise of the required quality, and in sufficient quantity, at prices which were within the reach of all classes of the population. It was a technical problem, and a problem of production, rather than of sales.

(Rees, 1973, p.211).

Nevertheless, I imagine that it must be quite alarming for Desmonds to realise that Marks and Spencer have an even greater selling potential which they are

not exploiting.

Just as Marks and Spencer control the design and production of each garment, they also have stringent regulations regarding the content of the labels on their garments. Each label contains different information such as, the brand name, country of origin, size, style number, etc. and each is positioned on the garment exactly as specified by Marks and Spencer. Despite all of the information contained on a Marks and Spencer label, the actual price of the garment is omitted. This is instead, always displayed on the rail above the garment. It is strange, that in today's consumer society where everything has a price tag that such an array of merchandise could be displayed without individual price tags. According to Libby Gribben, (Personnel Manageress at Marks and Spencer's Mary Street branch in Dublin), customers have never complained about the lack of individual pricing, she claims that the price is clearly displayed and that there is no need to tag each garment as this would lead to increased costs and increased pilferage as unscrupulous customers may swap price tags. (Gribben, 1993, Appendix P.55-59).

While each label bears the code number which Marks and Spencer allocate to each of their suppliers, the public would be unaware of what and whom the code was referring to. Therefore, while Desmonds, in supplying Marks and Spencer don't need to advertise their garments, they also receive no direct recognition from the public for the outstanding quality of their garments. This indicates how reliant Desmonds are on Marks and Spencer's ability to promote and sell "*St. Michael*" goods and in turn, Desmonds products.

Packaging is kept to a minimum, but all garments, except jeans, must leave the manufacturer on Marks and Spencer approved hangers with each dozen of garments sharing a polythene bag to protect them from dust.⁽⁴⁾ Such a system significantly reduces the amount of handling of the finished garment thereby avoiding soiling and creasing.

The cost of all labels and packaging must be paid for by the manufacturer. Desmonds estimate that out of every pound they earn, 11.2p is spent on trims such as buttons, threads, labels and packaging. (Appendix P.54). This accounts for £7m annually. Because of the high costs of labels and packaging, manufacturers tend to order the minimum amount which they will need for an order. Unfortunately, should only a few labels be lost and need to be re-ordered, the supplier of these labels would only accept an order for several thousand labels. Therefore, a few labels would cost as much as several thousand. In addition to this, an entire production line could be held up for weeks waiting for the labels to be delivered. (Behind the Seams, July 1993, P.6). Desmonds are combating this problem by investing in their own in-house adhesive labelling system, which gives them access to an immediate source of labels, thereby rendering them more responsive to their customers needs.

The labels and packaging which Marks and Spencer use are so informative about the garment, its origin, care instructions, fabric content etc. that customers fail to see the label as a subtle marketing ploy and an advertisement for Marks and Spencer itself. After all, a substantial part of each label is given

over to the display of Marks and Spencer's name, address and brand name.

The methods by which Marks and Spencer advertise differentiates it from its competitors. Participation in fashion shows, customer evenings and a bi-annual magazine, with a potential readership of 3m people, are three such methods of advertising (Marks and Spencer Factfile, 1993). Despite not having a high profile with regard to advertising *Verdict* estimates that Marks and Spencer achieve a sales density of £408 per square foot, which is higher than any other British retailer (Verdict, 1993, p.177), and their Marble Arch store in London takes in more money per square foot than any other retailer in the world. (Ash and Wright, 1988, p.68).

This chapter has briefly assessed some aspects of Marks and Spencer's business today, and analysed the control which they exert over design, sales and marketing. This has repercussions for their suppliers affecting their performance especially with regard to design and production. This assessment continues to show how the two firms, Marks and Spencer and their supplier Desmonds, must continually work in close collaboration with each other, in order to make each of their business interests viable.

Chapter three continues this examination by analysing the effects which Marks and Spencer have had on Desmonds, both by occupying the position of their sole customer and by the extent of the power which they exert as a market leader.

Endnotes

Note 1: Michael Donnellan was born in Ballinlough, Co. Roscommon in 1915. After serving in the war, he joined the House of Lachasse before opening his own couture house in London in 1953. He was a founder member of the *Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers*. He became, in the 1960's, a consultant designer to Marks and Spencer. His influence on high street fashion was profound, for he upgraded the cut and cloth of ready-to-wear clothes and became an overall adviser on mass manufacture style (The Times, Jan. 12th, 1985). For more information see Appendix P.60-61, which is the text of an interview with Leonora Curry (Design Consultant with *The Irish Trade Board*).

Note 2: This drive was a four-point communication strategy which involved media relations, events, publications and advertising (Marks and Spencer Factfile 1993).

Note 3: This is their term used to describe their methods of overcoming or controlling the problems which relate to their whole business.

Note 4: Marks and Spencer is one of 27 British companies working with their government to identify ways of reducing food packaging (St. Michael News, Sept./Oct. 1983, P.2). In my opinion, Marks and Spencer also extend this policy of reducing packaging to their clothing departments.

Chapter Three

This chapter aims to look at the direct effects which Marks and Spencer have had on Desmonds both by occupying the position of Desmonds sole customer and by the extent of the power which they exert as a market leader. It will also examine how the influence of Marks and Spencer has created the Desmonds firm of today by directly affecting Desmonds identity, expansion, design, products, prices and competitiveness. This chapter discloses the effects of Marks and Spencer's dictatorship on Desmonds. It also examines Desmonds response to this and the manner in which they turn it to their advantage.

IDENTITY

In examining the Company of Desmonds today and comparing it to that of the Marks and Spencer Company, it becomes apparent that Desmonds have developed into a prototype of Marks and Spencer itself. The decision to supply only one customer has meant for Desmonds, the development of a customer led approach to their business.

Mr. Denis Desmond describes the culture that must operate when dealing with only one customer. Marks and Spencer is certainly a very demanding yet extremely fair customer. To me they are the best customer in the world. They are looking for consistently high product quality. We have to strive to make it right, make it on time and deliver it on time. There is no room for complacency.

(Behind the Seams, July 1993, p.2).

Their entire company is moulded around satisfying the needs of Marks and Spencer, in fact not just satisfying them, but anticipating them and responding

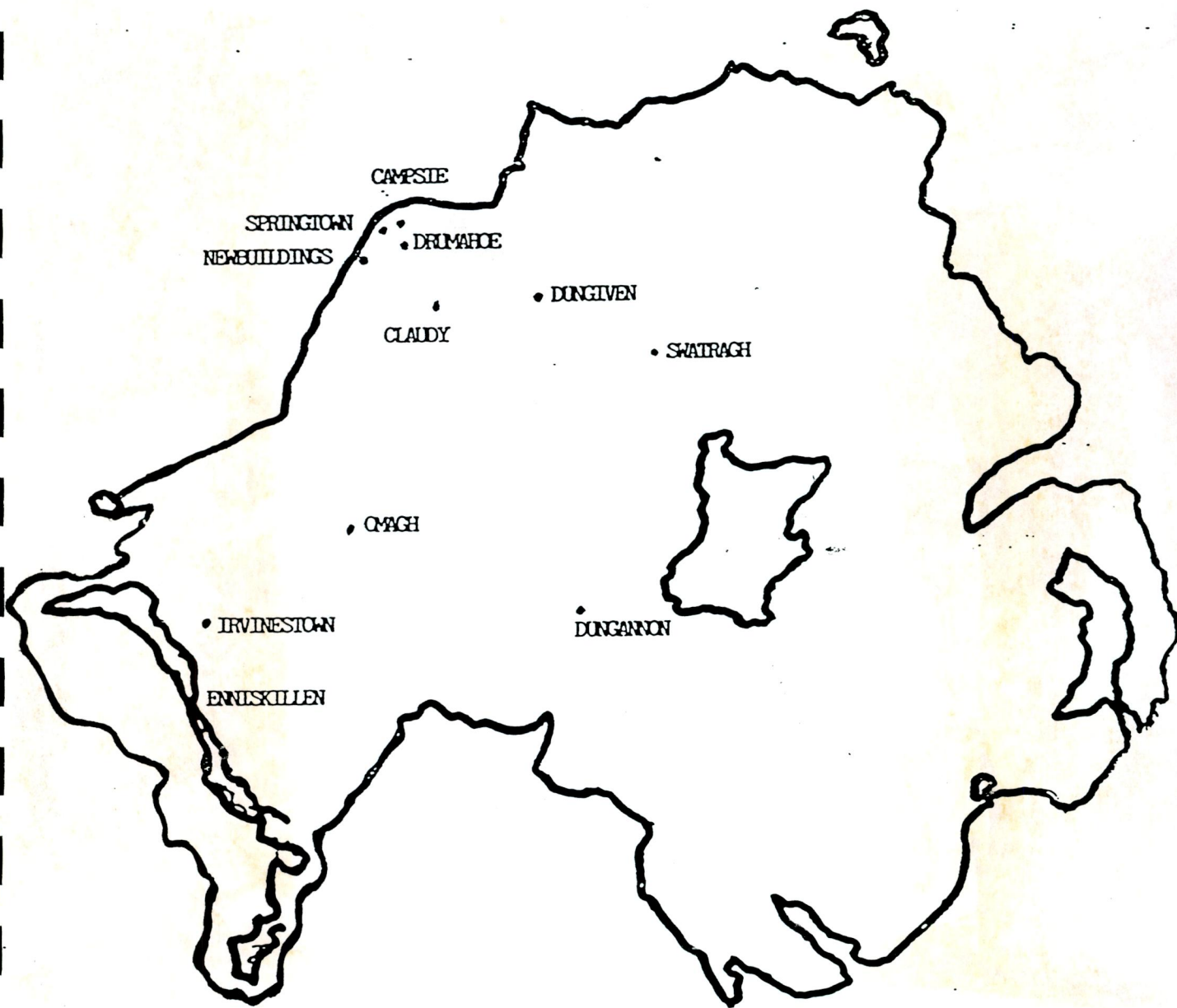


FIG. IV Desmond's factory and warehouse locations in Northern Ireland.

to them before their competitors have a chance to do so. This is borne out when one examines Desmonds mission statement (Appendix p.52) which places a particular emphasis on customer service.

To achieve the highest level of customer satisfaction by anticipating their requirements through innovative design, responsive manufacturing and sourcing, and prompt delivery.

Indeed if one compares Desmonds mission statement of two years, to the long established company principles of Marks and Spencer, one can see that Desmonds have sought to place an emphasis on everything which Marks and Spencer deem important in their company principles.⁽¹⁾ Desmonds must take-on-board everything that is important to Marks and Spencer, in order to secure and improve upon their position as a successful supplier to Marks and Spencer.

EXPANSION

Over the past thirty-eight years, in an effort to anticipate and respond to the demands which Marks and Spencer were making on them, Desmonds have expanded to their present position of operating nine production sites in the North of Ireland, a centralised Head Office in Drumahoe near Londonderry housing among other things, a centralised cutting-room, lay planning, pattern technology and an accounts office. Desmonds also have two warehouses in the North of Ireland one of which is the most modern in Europe (Fig. IV). They have an office in London, housing their design and sales teams, which is situated near Marks and Spencer's Head Office in Baker Street to facilitate ease

of communication between the two firms. In addition to this, Desmonds have sourcing and production sites in the Far East in countries such as Hong Kong, Morocco and North Africa.

In many ways Desmonds quest to

achieve the highest level of customer satisfaction by anticipating their requirements through innovative design, responsive manufacturing and sourcing, and prompt delivery
(Mission Statement, Appendix P.52),

has driven them to search far and wide for the materials, technology and personnel to achieve this.⁽²⁾ Desmonds expansion into the Middle and Far East came about as a direct result of the demands which Marks and Spencer were making on them. Because of the high cost of labour, it is difficult for manufacturers in the Western World to compete with those of the Middle and Far East in the manufacture of high production content garments, for example, jackets. Desmonds desire to expand into the outer-wear market has resulted in them having to look outside Northern Ireland for a base from which to manufacture at a lower cost. Desmonds claim that their activities in the Far East will not exceed more than 25% of their business, and that "the company's commitment, and it's heart, lies in Northern Ireland". (Wedge, 1993, p.21).

At present, Desmonds are subcontracting to several factories in the South of Ireland in an effort to meet the demands which Marks and Spencer are making on them. In anticipation of future demands Desmonds have a five year expansion plan valued at £24m, which is the largest investment ever made by a

clothing company in Northern Ireland.⁶⁹ (Behind the Seams, July 1993, p.1).

Desmonds directly attribute their expansion to James Desmond's decision in 1956 to manufacture exclusively for Marks and Spencer. The fact that Marks and Spencer have retained their position as market leader for many years and continued to grow during the recent difficult recession demonstrates the "soundness" of James Desmond's decision. The huge, continuously expanding size of Marks and Spencer means a continuously expanding market for Desmonds garments. Despite their present size Desmonds must expand and capture more of Marks and Spencer's market, in order to keep their competitors at bay and their position secure. On the other hand, Denis Desmond warns about the danger of getting too big.

We have to be conscious about one of the dangers of getting much bigger. It is possible that one becomes less responsive to the customer and, in that sense less entrepreneurial. We are in a situation that is constantly changing and we have to be prepared to act very, very quickly.

(Behind the Seams, July 1993, p.2).

Desmonds must ensure that an increase in the size of their company means an increase in the level of service which they offer to their customer. If by increasing their size, they become too caught up with the organisation of the business, Desmonds relationship with their customer, Marks and Spencer, will suffer to their own detriment.

DESIGN AND PRODUCT

The product is the most important element in any manufacturing business. In

Desmonds case where there is only one customer for that product, the importance of getting it right cannot be over-stressed. I spoke in chapter two of the problems faced by the design teams of Marks and Spencer's suppliers. While Marks and Spencer do not reference design in their company principles, if Desmonds designers failed to deliver the "right" designs to Marks and Spencer, they would be left with nothing to manufacture, as they would receive no orders. It is for this reason that Desmonds place an emphasis on "innovative design" in their mission statement (Appendix, P.52 and 53). It is also important that Desmonds designers, not only design products which Marks and Spencer will want to buy, but design products which exploit Desmonds capabilities as a manufacturer.

Increasingly our designers are spending more time with the production units realising our capabilities with a view to exploiting our expertise to the full.

(Behind the Seams, March 1993, p.10).

Having supplied Marks and Spencer for 56 years, Desmonds know exactly what Marks and Spencer are looking for in a product, "consistently high product quality" and they have every confidence in their ability to meet that demand. In addition to this, because they have only one customer, it is easier for Desmonds to obtain feedback from Marks and Spencer as to how their products are performing.

Desmonds know that with only one customer, there is no room for complacency in their business, and as a result, they are constantly striving to better themselves and their product in an effort to ward off competition from

other sources. To achieve this, Desmonds have introduced a system known as Total Quality Management or T.Q.M.

It is a common sense approach which extends the commitment to quality and the pursuit of excellence to every aspect of our business with an emphasis on the elimination of waste and on doing the right things right first time. T.Q.M. emphasised not only the importance of the external customer but also the internal customer. The internal customer is the next person to progress your work either in the office or on the production line.

(Desmonds Company Newspaper, July/Sept. 1991, p.2).

T.Q.M. is an on-going process and among other things has involved:

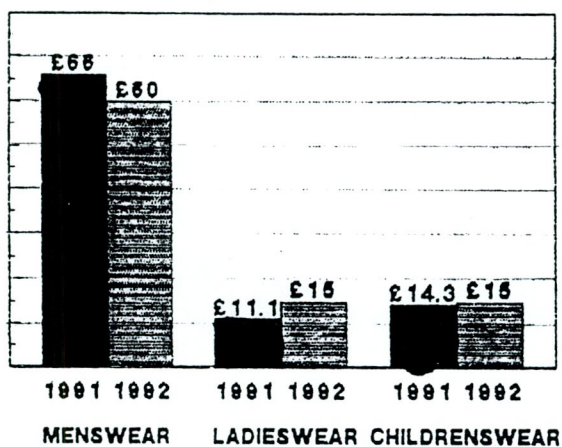
- Continuous projects within each factory to improve the production of garments.⁽⁴⁾
- The establishment and implementation of their mission statement.
- On-going projects to identify ways of eliminating waste.⁽⁵⁾
- A bench-marking project to evaluate how Desmonds stand in relation to their competitors and to establish how they can gain competitive superiority to become Marks and Spencer's biggest supplier.

Desmonds traditionally supplied Marks and Spencer with menswear. They then expanded into the children's-wear market supplying children's jeans. The next big step was breaking into the ladies-wear market, which was quite difficult as they were dealing with totally new departments within Marks and Spencer. The process was slow but today 17% of Desmonds production is ladies-wear and they estimate that by next year this figure will have increased to 25%.

1992 FACTS AND FIGURES

SALES:— £90 MILLION

BY PRODUCT AREA
£MILLION



BY SOURCE
£MILLION

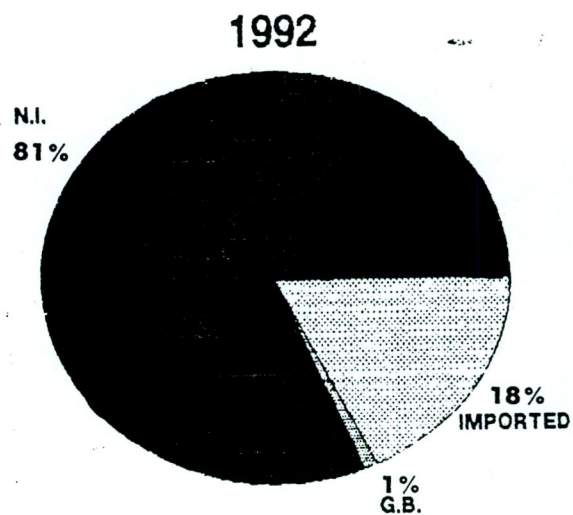
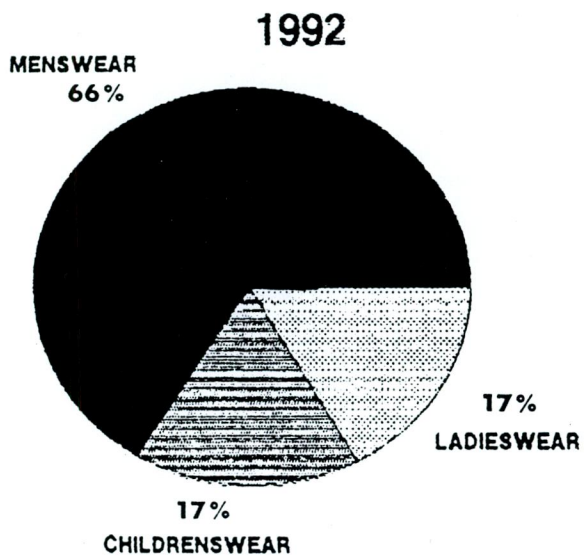
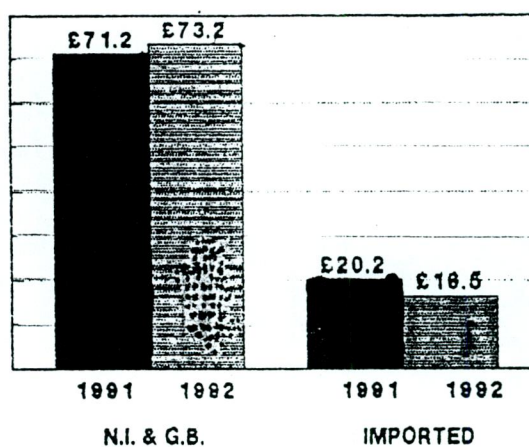


FIG. V Desmond's sales statistics for 1992 (Behind The Seams July 1993, p.9)

From supplying Marks and Spencer with men's pyjamas in 1938, Desmonds, as a result of their ability to respond to Marks and Spencer's demands, have developed a product spread which includes night-wear, leisure-wear and outwear.⁽⁶⁾ Fig. V demonstrates Desmonds performance in 1992 with regard to their sales, sources and products.

According to Denis Desmond,

Desmonds don't have a contract which guarantees long term business, but there is a strong element of trust which has been built up over a long period of time.

(Behind the Seams, July 1993, p.2).

As Desmonds are Marks and Spencer's 10th biggest supplier and their largest supplier of denim-wear, Marks and Spencer have, to a degree, become dependent upon Desmonds to provide them with the design and merchandise necessary to meet their customers needs. On the other hand Desmonds, without Marks and Spencer, would find it extremely difficult to obtain the orders necessary to keep over 9 production sites and 2,800 people in work. In addition to this, few other customers could offer the long runs of production which enable Desmonds to plan ahead and budget accordingly. From this, we can see that the relationship between the two companies is mutually beneficial with each company placing a certain degree of trust and dependence on the other.

PRICE

When Marks and Spencer approve the design of a garment, a price must be agreed before production can commence. Having designed the garment,

Desmonds will cost it. If the cost price which Desmonds offer is too high and they are unable to reduce it, they will lose the order, as Marks and Spencer will give it to another manufacturer. The time and money which Desmonds invested in the design of the garment will become someone else's asset. As a result Desmonds may decide to operate at a loss, rather than lose the order to a competitor.

Once the price of a garment has been agreed it is seldom changed. From time to time, however, if a competitor of Marks and Spencer was selling a similar garment at a lower price, Marks and Spencer in an effort to gain competitive superiority, may request Desmond to lower the agreed price. With only one customer Desmonds cannot afford to refuse such a request. The positive side is that Desmonds are forced to re-examine their methods of manufacture in order to retain their customer's competitiveness while still maintaining their own profit margins. Such examinations improve the level of Desmonds performance and ensure that they do not become complacent. The tight profit margins under which they must operate forces them to keep abreast with the modern developments in manufacturing and sourcing in order to remain competitive.

COMPETITIVENESS

With Marks and Spencer as their sole customer, Desmonds have managed to become that firm's 10th biggest supplier and their largest supplier of denim-wear. With over 700 suppliers competing for Marks and Spencer's business, it is clear that Desmonds face stiff competition each time they attempt to win an

order (Ash and Wright, 1988, p.63).

In their quest to become the top supplier to Marks and Spencer, Desmonds have embarked on a bench-marking project as part of their Total Quality Management process which I referred to earlier. Bench-marking is about identifying the best method of achieving something and then applying this method to their own business. It is not just a method of improving the business, but a method of gaining competitive superiority.

Viewed in this way bench-marking is a skill that encourages an organisation to set its sights on excellence, not merely on improvement.

(Behind the Seams, Dec. 1993, p.3).

Out of Marks and Spencer's top ten suppliers, Desmonds are the only supplier who is exclusive to Marks and Spencer. This gives them an advantage over their competitors as they can gear their entire business to satisfying Marks and Spencer's needs. Desmonds readily admit to pampering Marks and Spencer, their sales team is in constant liaison with Marks and Spencer selectors keeping them abreast with company developments and assisting them with any queries which they may have with regard to Desmonds. In essence, to secure their own future Desmonds must prove to Marks and Spencer, that out of their 700 suppliers, they are the most able to provide Marks and Spencer with the means of retaining their position as market leader. They will achieve this through the high level of quality service and the competitively priced product spread which they offer to Marks and Spencer on a daily basis and outclass their competitors in doing so.

From this, we can conclude that Desmonds, in supplying Marks and Spencer exclusively, have had to gear every aspect of their company towards meeting their customers needs. On the positive side, this has provided a focus for Desmonds business, and their aim to become Marks and Spencer's number one supplier has given them a goal which they can single-mindedly work towards. On the other hand, Desmonds have lost the identity which they had as a manufacturer prior to James Desmond's decision in 1956. In supplying Marks and Spencer exclusively, they have had to assume the identity of Marks and Spencer itself, and in doing so become almost a prototype of that company.

In chapter four Desmonds approach to mass production and the influence which Marks and Spencer exert over this will be analysed.

Endnotes

Note 1: Desmonds Mission Statement was launched in 1992.

Note 2: This is reminiscent of Michael Marks early days in business when he was forced to source intensively in order to obtain a wide variety of quality goods which could be sold for a penny. (Rees, 1973, p.8).

Note 3: This plan aims to create 400 jobs in a new purpose built factory in Magherafelt by 1997. It also plans to increase employment in their Drumahoe, Dungiven, Enniskillen, Newbuildings, Omagh and

Springtown factories by 200 employees.

Note 4: One such project involved decreasing the time-scale required to attach a pocket into a pair of jogging-bottoms. This was achieved by reducing the number of steps needed to complete the operation. Their new method surpassed the conventional method which involved, assembling a separate pocket bag and attaching it to the side-seam of the jogging-bottoms. The new system resulted in significant savings in fabric, time and therefore money.

Note 5: One such project was undertaken by the Springtown factory to reduce the levels of energy used within the factory. This was achieved by, modifying and eliminating all leaks in the compressed air system and introducing pull-cord switches to control light usage. This resulted in a saving of £160 per week which amounts to £8,000 per year.

Note 6: Nightwear includes dressing-gowns, pyjamas and night-shirts. Leisurewear includes, sweatshirts, jogging-bottoms, polo-shirts, shorts and tracksuits. Outerwear includes men's formal and casual trousers, denims, skirts, blouses, and swede, leather and denim jackets.

Chapter Four

Discussed in this chapter is Desmonds approach to mass production with a particular emphasis on pre-production preparation, the cutting room, garment assembly, storage, staff and factory layout. This analysis of their approach to mass production demonstrates how Desmonds have endeavoured to direct every aspect of their production to improving the level of service which they offer Marks and Spencer. We will continue to perceive the extent to which Marks and Spencer influence Desmonds business, particularly their production methods. Much of the information contained in this chapter is based on my own observations while working at Desmonds.

PRE-PRODUCTION PREPARATION

In chapter two, I referred to the processes and problems which Desmonds designers face in working with Marks and Spencer. I also made reference to the fact that several sets of samples must be produced before any garment will be approved for production. Once production has commenced each and every garment will be expected to be of the standard of the approved sample. Although this criteria may seem bureaucratic, it ensures that both the manufacturer and Marks and Spencer know exactly what the finished product will be, and how exactly it will be manufactured. The high number of prototype samples which Desmonds produce each year is both an indication of the level of service which they offer Marks and Spencer, as well as, an indication of the level of demands which Marks and Spencer make on their suppliers before approving a product for production. I also think, that it is an



FIG. VI Fabric being examined at Desmonds.



indication of the lengths which Desmonds will go to in an effort to win an order from their only customer - Marks and Spencer.

Each manufacturer is responsible for sourcing all of the component parts in each garment. Desmonds have several textile laboratories where they test all of these component parts to ensure that they are of sufficient quality to withstand a long period of service to the wearer. Desmonds, in their mission statement,

Seek to develop mutually beneficial relationships with those suppliers who share our concern for quality.

(Appendix P.52).

In their laboratories they test the fabric which they receive from their suppliers for washability, sewability, shrinkage, dye loss, pilling and several other problems which may occur in the production cycle or when the garment is worn by the consumer. (Fig. VI).

In order to "deliver products to the highest standards of manufacture, performance and safety", (Appendix P.52), Desmonds subject their proto-type samples to wearer-trials which involves the garment being worn for approximately 100 hours and subjected to a number of washes to ensure that it can withstand normal wear and tear.

When an order is approved, Desmonds bulk order their component parts. These orders are kept to a minimum to avoid wastage. The fabric is usually the most expensive part of the garment. Desmonds estimate that out of every



FIG. VII A section of the Drumahoe Cutting Room.



FIG. VIII The fabric being laid up by machine on a specialised cutting table.

pound they earn 37.8p is spent on fabric (Appendix P.54).

As a result of this, Desmonds lay planners, that is, those people who are responsible for deciding the most efficient method of laying out the pattern pieces to incur the least amount of waste, must achieve a minimum of 80% efficiency before Desmonds will approve their lay plan. In order to keep their pattern technology modern and efficient, Desmonds have invested millions of pounds in a computerised system which enables them to monitor waste levels and keep them to a minimum.

Planning is one of the most important elements in mass production. Good forward planning is essential to ensure that the garments will be ready for delivery to Marks and Spencer when they are required. It also identifies many of the problems which could arise during production so that they can be resolved beforehand, thereby, saving the company considerable time and money.

CUTTING ROOM

The cutting room is considered one of the most crucial areas of the production process as it is at this stage that an entire order could be destroyed if care is not taken. Desmonds have two large centralised cutting rooms, one at headquarters in Drumahoe and the other at the Irvinestown Leisurewear Factory. (Fig. VII). Each has several specialised cutting tables which are at least 35m in length. Highly skilled staff operate the machines which lay-up the fabric. Each operator is extremely conscious of the quality of their work and is

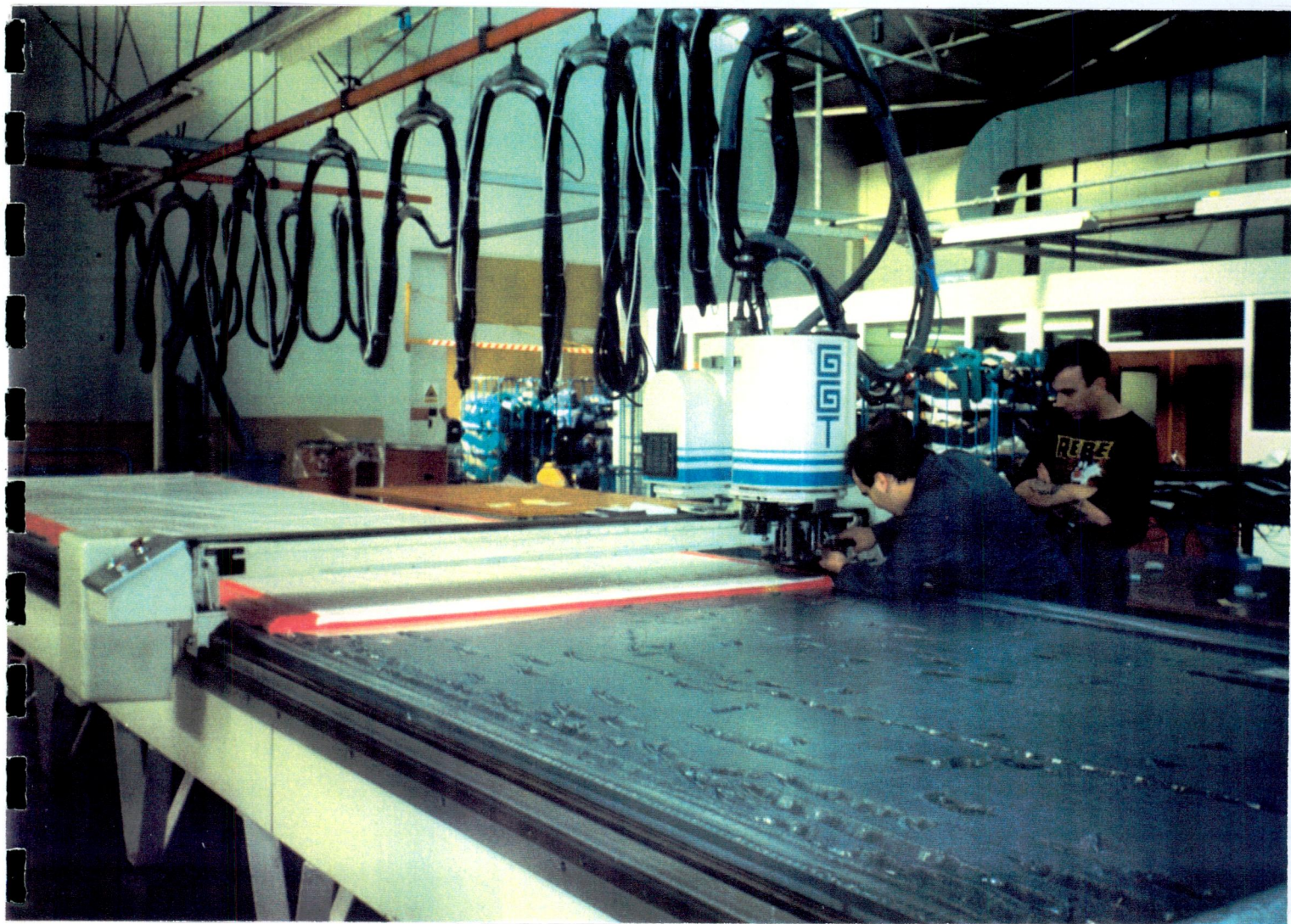
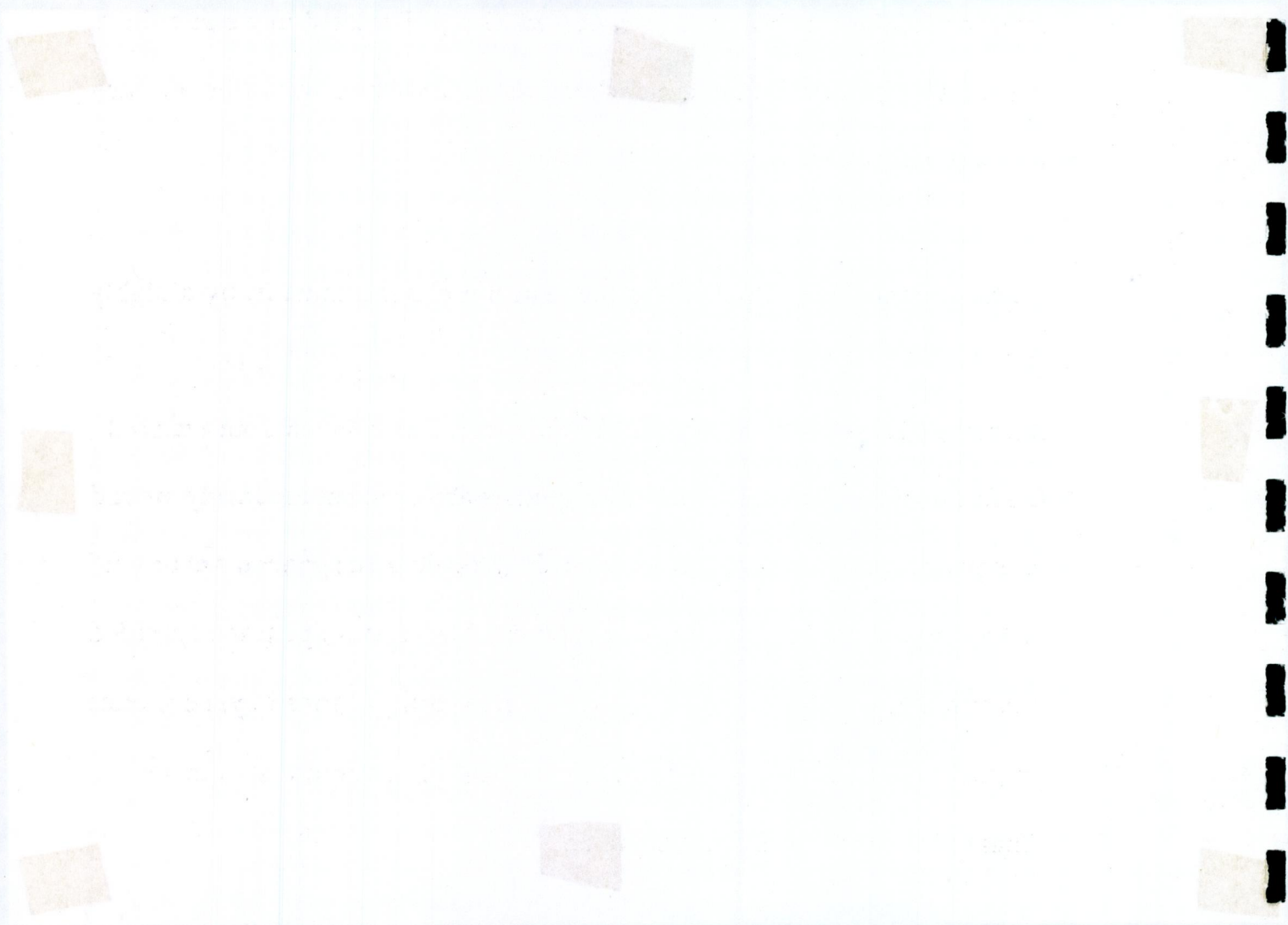


FIG. IX Desmond's computerised cutting machine.



continually alert for flaws in the fabric as it is being laid up, such as holes, tears, shading or narrow width (Fig. VIII). If such faults passed unnoticed, they could cause problems further up the production line, or leave the company unnoticed passing into the hands of a Marks and Spencer quality controller, thereby depleting the confidence which Marks and Spencer have in Desmonds as "an excellent supplier of clothing". Bearing this in mind, the relevance of the Bench-marking project, which we discussed in chapter three, becomes even more important, when we see the knock-on effect of each person's work on the next.

When a marker is complete, it is then cut out either manually, by a highly skilled cutter, or by the new computerised cutting system (Fig. IX) in which Desmonds have invested millions of pounds. If it is being cut out manually, the future of the entire order lies in the cutters ability to cut accurately around each pattern piece. If he cuts out too much or too little, the garments at the end of the production line will not comply with Marks and Spencer's specified measurements. On the other hand, the new computerised system, once programmed will not only cut out the garment pieces accurately but several times quicker than the manual operator.

From the cutting tables the garment pieces are passed onto the bundling area. It is at this point that all of the component parts of the garment are assembled. The correct amount of trims are counted out and placed with the relevant amount of garments. Failure to use the correct trims will result in severe problems on the assembly line. Once all of the components of the garments

have been organised, they then proceed onto the assembly line where they will be sewn together.

GARMENT ASSEMBLY

Due to the number of people and factors involved at this stage of production, it is vital that the production line is balanced correctly. Production line balancing ensures that the work flow is continuous and in one direction only. There is a supervisor on each line assisting and advising each operator on their method of work. To ensure that the standard of work is of the high level required by Marks and Spencer, Desmonds have a Quality Controller assigned to each production line checking the work of each operator.

Desmonds have introduced, in association with T.Q.M., which I discussed in chapter three, a system of controlling the quality of workmanship at the needlepoint known as Statistical Process Control or S.P.C.⁽¹⁾ This system involves a quality controller taking a fixed number of garments from a fixed number of operators, and examining them for faults. At the end of each examination she records her findings on a chart. Any faults detected will be recorded beside the operator's name and the total number of faults is then used to plot a graph illustrating the quality level for that examination or process.

Present on the graph is a 'Control Line' which represents the number of faults that management are prepared to accept from a process. If the graph goes above the control line, then the process is deemed 'out-of-control', and it is then the responsibility of the Production Supervisor to take corrective action to ensure that the situation does not happen again. (Desmonds Company Newspaper, July/Sept., 1991, p.3).



Seconds Merchandise - Yearly Comparison

Percentage of Production

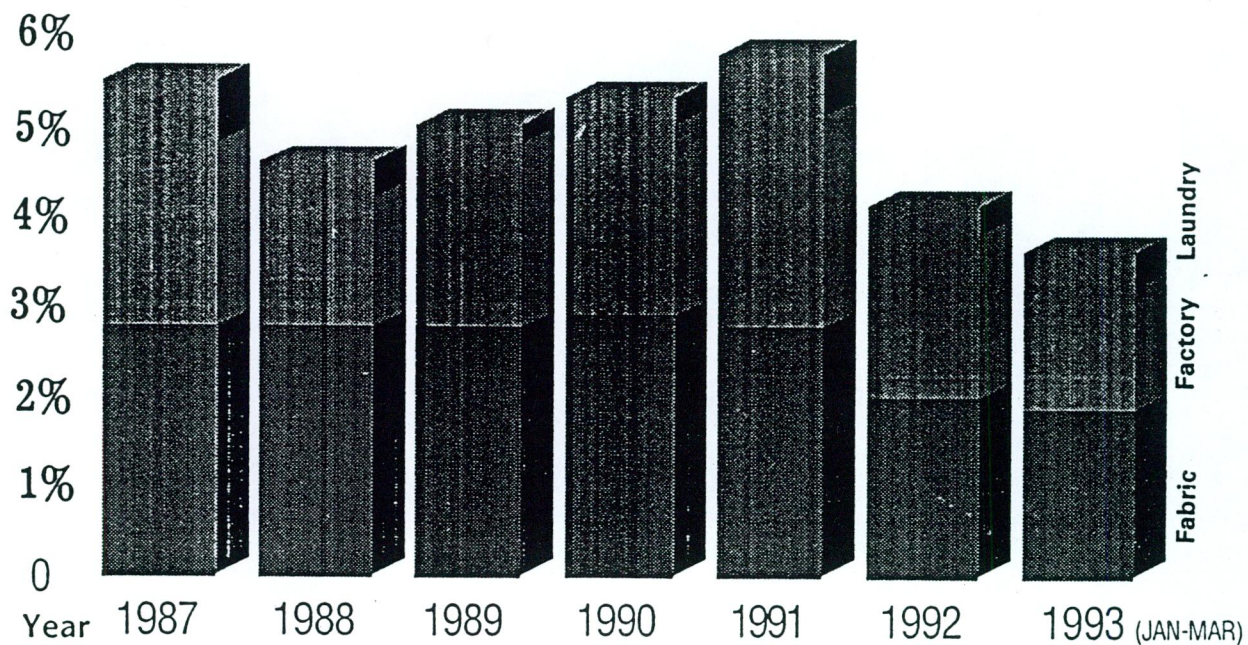


FIG. X Bar chart depicting Desmond's seconds merchandise.
(Behind the Seams, July 1993 p.2)

As a result of this T.Q.M. Desmonds seconds merchandise have fallen from 6% in 1991 to just over 3% in 1993 (Fig. X). Such quality control improves the service and quality which Desmonds give to their customer increasing the confidence which Marks and Spencer have in Desmonds to supply them with quality merchandise. It also provides an incentive to the operators to concentrate on perfecting the quality of their work as no individual wishes to see a fault recorded beside their name on a chart prominently positioned within the factory.

Marks and Spencer advise and assist their suppliers with regard to the best sources of materials to use and the best methods of production to employ. They also have stringent safety procedures which must be carried out by their suppliers. If for example a needle breaks, the operator must locate all the needle parts before requesting a new needle from her supervisor, otherwise the entire bundle of work which she was working on must pass through a metal detector to ensure that none of the broken needle parts have become caught up in the garment. Such procedures are designed to protect the consumer from injury, and of course Marks and Spencer from liability. Desmonds take great care to ensure that the garments which they design and manufacture are not only fashionable and comfortable, but also safe to wear.

When the garments reach the end of the production line a sample of 10% are subjected to a quality audit, meaning that they are physically measured to ensure that they comply to Marks and Spencer specifications. If not, they will be deemed as seconds and sold in Desmonds factory shops. The finished



FIG. XI A section of Desmond's computerised warehouse.



FIG. XII
Garments hanging
on computer
controlled rails in
the warehouse.

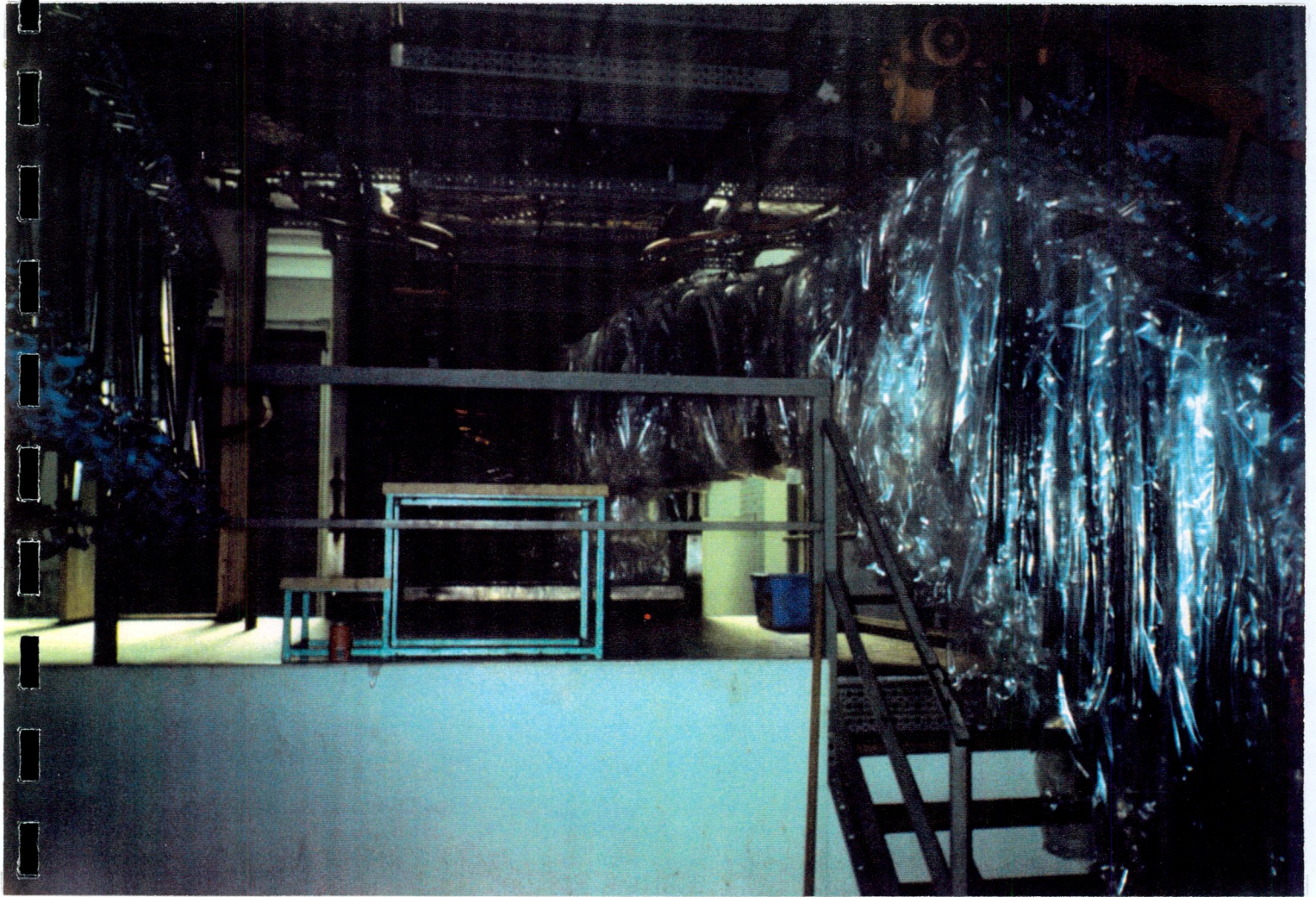


FIG. XIII Garments passing along the computerised hanging system into the back of an awaiting lorry.



garments are then ironed or steamed and placed on hangers ready to be sent to Desmonds warehouse in Drumahoe.

STORAGE

From the production line each garment is placed on a hanger and hung onto a rail. The rails of garments are then transported from the factories to Desmonds centralised warehouse in Drumahoe. Upon reaching the warehouse 10% of incoming garments are examined by warehouse quality controllers in a final bid to detect any remaining faults which have gone unnoticed in the factory. This is the last time any individual garments will be handled by Desmonds, because from then on it is only the rails of garments which are moved and not the the individual hangers.

Desmonds warehouse in Drumahoe is the most modern warehouse in Europe. It is entirely computerised and as a result needs only a minimum number of staff despite its size. (Fig. XI). Each incoming garment is recorded by the computer and each rail of garments is attached to an automatic hanging system which is controlled by a computer (Fig. XII). When Marks and Spencer call off an order, the information is fed into the computer, which in turn selects the appropriate rail of garments and transfers them along the overhead hanging system straight into the back of an awaiting lorry to be transported to Marks and Spencer (Fig. XIII). The fact that individual garments don't have to be handled ensures that they don't get creased or soiled.

This warehousing facility allows Desmonds to keep effective control of their

stock while quickly and efficiently supplying Marks and Spencer. In addition to this, Desmonds warehouse system is compatible with that of Marks and Spencer, so that when the garments reach Marks and Spencer they pass onto their hanging system thereby avoiding handling and possible damage.

STAFF

Marks and Spencer demand a high level of quality service from their suppliers. Desmonds expansion throughout the North of Ireland was a quest to locate the personnel capable of providing this service. It is their staff who are responsible for the success of the company, as it is their dedication to speed and quality which produces 150,000 garments each week and leads to an annual turnover in excess of £90m.

Desmonds in their mission statement place an emphasis on people,

To invest in the education, training and development of all our people to realise their full potential in line with company requirements

(Appendix P.52).

Each new recruit must learn to achieve quality in their work before they can attempt to reach the level of speed required on the production line, as quality is one of the most important words of the Marks and Spencer culture. Desmonds recognise that the job of an operator is difficult and that there is enormous pressure on operators to work quickly, yet to maintain high quality levels to ensure that their customer receives high volume, quality merchandise on a regular basis. Workstudy officers are constantly timing operators to ensure

that they are working to their full capacity, while quality controllers are continually checking each operator's work to ensure that the quality is perfect. The profit margins under which Desmonds manufacture are so tight, that a breakdown in either of these two areas would result in a reduction of the quality and output of garments and hence in the final profit itself.

In effect, manufacturing exclusively for Marks and Spencer has meant ever increasing demands being placed on Desmonds workforce in their constant striving to produce a product which will outclass their competitors. To ease this pressure Desmond's provide many facilities for their staff such as subsidised meals, basic rest-rooms and numerous work aids. Their workstudy officers are continually seeking faster and simpler ways of doing each operation. Much of Marks and Spencer's success can be attributed to the quality of their staff and the loyalty which they receive from them. Marks and Spencer provide many facilities for their staff to ensure that their jobs are as stress-free as possible.⁽²⁾ Not only that, but Marks and Spencer encourage their suppliers to treat their staff likewise.

to assure themselves that conditions of employment in their suppliers factories conformed to their own ideas of what a good employer owed his workmen.

(Rees, 1973, p.137).

Therefore while Desmonds recognise the value of "people" in the workplace and have made many efforts to reduce pressure on their staff thereby, lowering absenteeism and increasing performance levels in the workplace, they have also shown Marks and Spencer that they hold the same values as that

company.

FACTORY LAYOUT

Marks and Spencer advise their suppliers on all aspects of their business including the layout of their factories and "the most effective use of the labour available to them" (Rees, 1973, p.137). Desmonds factories are laid out in such a way that they methodically follow the path of the garment through production. This ensures that the flow of work through the factory is continuous and in one direction only so that time is not wasted in trying to locate the next bundle of work.

Like everything else in Desmonds business, their factories are furnished to meet the needs of Marks and Spencer. For example, all of the light fittings used are identical to those used within Marks and Spencer's stores. This ensures that Desmonds see their garments in exactly the same light as Marks and Spencer. Marks and Spencer personnel are constantly visiting Desmonds factories. For this reason it is important that the factory gives a good impression of the company as it is in a sense assuming the role of a salesroom. An unfavourable impression could influence Marks and Spencer in the placing of their future orders. After all, if there is little difference between Marks and Spencer's top suppliers then, it is the small details which become important in differentiating one company from the rest.

This chapter sets out the characteristic stages in mass-production and establishes how Desmonds relate to these. From the beginning, the influence

of Marks and Spencer is evident, as Desmonds gear each stage of their production to meeting that company's needs in an ever-improving manner. Total Quality Management, Statistical Process Control and the Bench-marking Project are all components of Desmonds production process which are designed specifically to improve the level of service which they offer to Marks and Spencer. Such innovative systems, undertaken by Desmonds, are unique within the clothing manufacturing industry of this country, and underline Desmonds commitment to achieving excellence in the production of their garments.

Endnotes

Note 1: According to Desmonds Company Newspaper, S.P.C. can be summarised as follows:

Statistical ~ examining samples of a fixed size.

Process ~ dealing with groups of operators rather than individuals.

Control ~ limiting the number of faults which they are prepared to accept before taking corrective action.

Note 2: In my interview with Libby Gribben (Appendix P.55 - P.59) the facilities which Marks and Spencer provide for their staff are discussed in greater detail.

Conclusion

In the course of this thesis, I have shown how James Desmond's decision to supply Marks and Spencer exclusively from 1956 changed the future of his company irrevocably. After 38 years of collaborating and combining their strategies with that of Marks and Spencer, Desmonds business has been transformed into a microcosm of Marks and Spencer. This has come about by their efforts to keep their customer satisfied, and by Marks and Spencer's attempts to cast Desmonds in the mould which would be most beneficial to their business.

As a multi-conglomerate, and more importantly, sole customer of Desmonds business, Marks and Spencer know that they are in the position of authority. Throughout this thesis I have analysed how Desmonds are working to re-address the balance of this power. I have shown how their commitment to "innovative design" and "responsive manufacturing", (Mission Statement, Appendix P.52), has resulted in their company becoming Marks and Spencer's 10th biggest supplier and their largest supplier of denim-wear. The more responsive Desmonds are to Marks and Spencer's needs, the more reliant will Marks and Spencer's become on Desmonds. If Desmonds succeed in their latest drive to become Marks and Spencer's top supplier, they will find themselves in a much more advantageous position. Marks and Spencer would then depend upon them to manufacture such large orders that, without Desmonds co-operation, Marks and Spencer would be left without enough merchandise to meet their customers demands.

It should be remembered however, that Desmonds have over 700 competitors who are also aiming to become Marks and Spencer's top supplier. As stated earlier, Desmonds are unique among Marks and Spencer's top suppliers, in that they supply Marks and Spencer exclusively. This, of course, makes the danger of losing an order to a competitor very alarming for them. On the other hand, despite having over 700 suppliers, it would be difficult for Marks and Spencer to find a replacement manufacturer for Desmonds that could match the personnel, technology and dedication unique to Desmonds.

With only one customer Desmonds position will always appear, to the outsider, to be somewhat precarious and in many ways this is true. The reality however is that for 56 years, Desmonds have supplied Marks and Spencer with quality garments and for 38 of these years, they have dedicated themselves to fulfilling the needs of that one customer exclusively. I believe that their success in a difficult business can be attributed to the unique relationship which they share with Marks and Spencer. Since their decision to supply only one customer and their discernment in choosing that one customer, Desmonds company has gone from strength to strength and looks set to continue in this manner for the foreseeable future. In choosing an unorthodox position for their business, Desmonds were aware of all the dangers associated with that position. In a sense the danger element has been the catalyst which has driven their company to the forefront of Irish clothing manufacturing today. Their success as a manufacturer committed to innovative design, backed up by the equipment and personnel capable of materialising that innovative design to

the highest possible standards of manufacture, has set an example to clothing manufacturers throughout this island.

Today 38 years after deciding to supply Marks and Spencer exclusively, Desmonds are still totally committed to that decision. The fact that they have transformed their company into a microcosm of Marks and Spencer itself in order to ensure that the relationship between the two companies succeeded is, in itself, an indication of their level of commitment to James Desmond's decision. It should be remembered that Desmonds, in becoming a microcosm of Marks and Spencer, have chosen to become a microcosm of one of the world's leading retailers. In coupling their own strengths with those of a hugely successful multi-conglomerate, Desmonds have developed the expertise necessary to progress their company to the position of Marks and Spencer's 10th biggest supplier. Furthermore, I have no doubt that given their history of success and their determination to succeed, that Desmonds will through time, become Marks and Spencers number one supplier.



Appendix



MISSION STATEMENT

Desmond's aim is to be recognised as an excellent supplier of clothing through both manufacturing and sourcing.

Excellence will be achieved through commitment to Total Quality principles. The Core Values form the basis of our Quality Improvement process and are the guiding principles by which the business is managed.

These are:-

CUSTOMER SERVICE

To achieve the highest level of customer satisfaction by anticipating their requirements through innovative design, responsive manufacturing and sourcing, and prompt delivery.

PEOPLE

To invest in the education, training and development of all our people to realise their full potential in line with Company requirements.

PRODUCT QUALITY

To deliver products to the highest standards of manufacture, performance and safety.

Managers will demonstrate commitment to the Core Values and the Quality Improvement process by their actions and leadership.

People at all levels in the Company will be encouraged to participate and become involved in Continuous Improvement activities. Their views will be sought and their contributions valued. Achievement and participation will be recognised and rewarded.

We will seek to develop mutually beneficial relationships with those suppliers who share our concern for quality.

We will continue to be a socially responsible company with a concern for the community and the environment.

D. F. DESMOND

Chairman & Managing Director

MARKS & SPENCER COMPANY INFORMATION

COMPANY PRINCIPLES

- ◆ TO SELL MERCHANDISE OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY AND OUTSTANDING VALUE.
- ◆ TO OFFER THE HIGHEST STANDARD OF CUSTOMER CARE IN AN ATTRACTIVE SHOPPING ENVIRONMENT.
- ◆ TO IMPROVE QUALITY STANDARDS CONTINUALLY THROUGHOUT OUR OPERATIONS.
- ◆ TO SUPPORT BRITISH INDUSTRY.
- ◆ TO PURSUE MUTUALLY REWARDING LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS WITH SUPPLIERS.
- ◆ TO ENSURE STAFF AND SHAREHOLDERS SHARE IN OUR SUCCESS.
- ◆ TO NURTURE GOOD HUMAN RELATIONS WITH CUSTOMERS, STAFF AND THE COMMUNITY.
- ◆ TO MINIMISE THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF OUR OPERATIONS AND MERCHANDISE.

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MARKS & SPENCER • COMPANY INFORMATION • COMPANY PRINCIPLES • PAGE 1

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M&S



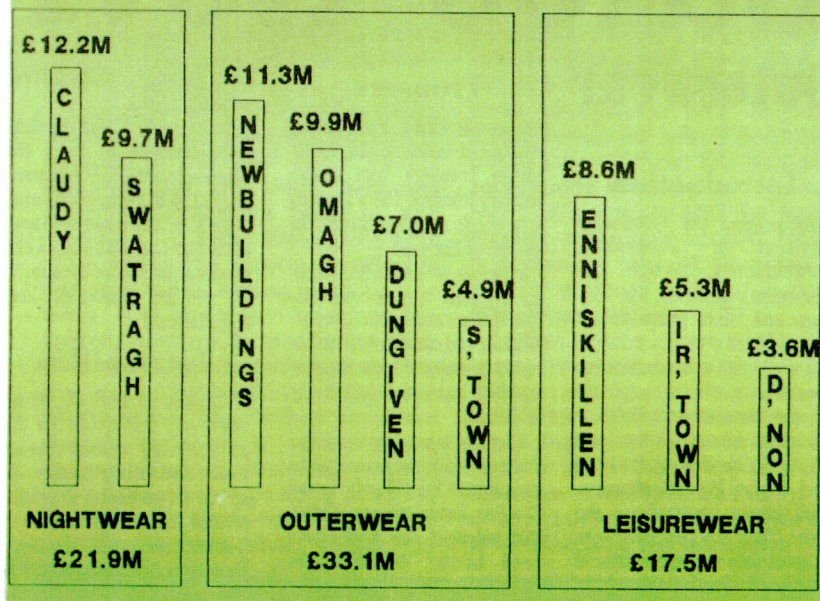
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SPENCER



WHAT HAPPENS WITH EVERY £1 WE EARN

FABRIC	→ 37.8p	→ SUPPLIERS
TRIMMINGS	→ 11.2p	→ SUPPLIERS
EMPLOYEE COSTS (SALARIES, WAGES, SOCIAL COSTS)	→ 32.6p	→ EMPLOYEES
FACTORY COSTS (WAGES, SALARIES, ENERGY COSTS, TRANSPORT COSTS, ETC.)	→ 5.9p	→ SUPPLIERS
DEPRECIATION	→ 2.7p	→ RE-INVESTMENT FOR THE FUTURE
DESIGN & MARKETING (SALARIES, SAMPLES, SALES COSTS, LONDON OFFICE)	→ 0.5p	→ SUPPLIERS
DISTRIBUTION (WAREHOUSE & DISTRIBUTION)	→ 1.3p	→ SUPPLIERS
ADMINISTRATION (HUMAN RESOURCES, ADMIN., DATA PROCESSING, ETC.)	→ 2.1p	→ SUPPLIERS
INTEREST	→ 1.9p	→ BANKS
TAXATION (COMPANY TAX)	→ 0.6p	→ GOVERNMENT
DIVIDENDS	→ 0.5p	→ SHAREHOLDERS
RETAINED EARNINGS	→ 2.9p	→ FOR FUTURE GROWTH

TOTAL VALUE OF GOODS PRODUCED = £72.5MIL. BY FACTORY



Interview with Libby Gribben, Personnel Manageress at Marks and Spencer's Mary Street branch in Dublin. (December 1993).

Q. What is the background of Marks and Spencers in the Republic of Ireland?

A. Marks and Spencer came to the Republic of Ireland in 1979. In the beginning business was good but, after the initial novelty trading became slack as people were reluctant to change their custom from Dunnes Stores or Penneys. Due to increased advertising however, the public came to recognise Marks and Spencer as a supplier of quality goods at outstanding value. Today Marks and Spencer in Ireland, is as successful as any of it's British counterparts.

Q. Who do Marks and Spencer view as their customer?

A. Marks and Spencer are continually aiming to lower the age-group of their average customer. The average age of a Marks and Spencer customer is 45, but this tends to be lower in Ireland. They are usually middle-class and could be classed as the middle market as they can afford to pay more and appreciate extra quality.

Q. What is the criteria for store layout?

A. The layout of the store is calculated by how much sales each product is likely to turnover per square foot of shop floor. The merchandise is then displayed accordingly. Naturally, the physical attributes of the building will dictate to the layout of the store. In general, the fastest sellers are

placed near the front of the store. Complimentary departments are placed near each other e.g. horticulture and food while certain departments are kept separate e.g. mens department and the lingerie department. Some items such as toiletries require a lot of space but don't necessarily have a high turnover. Childrenswear is upstairs, and while this may be awkward for mothers with pushchairs, it results in the mother (and most customers are women) having to pass through the entire fashion floor in order to reach the childrenswear department upstairs. The mens department is usually also situated upstairs as men generally don't browse, they know what they want, they locate it and buy it.

Q. Do their ranges change completely from season to season or do they aim to achieve a continuity of style?

A. Some of the range would be completely changed but items in the new range would be designed to co-ordinate with the previous season's "look". Some garments never really change. A woman's blazer, for example, may change with regard to colour or slight style features, but the basic blazer will always remain unchanged. This type of classic garment is almost guaranteed to sell regardless of fashion trends.

Q. In the past, Marks and Spencer provided health care, hairdressing, canteen and dental facilities for their staff. Do they still do this?

A. Yes. There is a hairdresser, doctor, dentist, occupational health nurse and a chiropodist all of whom work part-time at the Mary Street branch. In

addition to this, there is a canteen which provides meals at a low cost to employees. All of these services aim to make life easier for the sales assistant who is standing all day and under a lot of stress. A reduction in the level of stress in the workplace results in a decrease in the level of absenteeism and ensures a better quality of work from all concerned.

In England Marks and Spencer are, at the request of the shop assistant, reducing the number of services available to staff and instead offering staff a share in the profits of the company.

Q. In the 1980's Marks and Spencer set out to change their image from "safe and steady" to "fashionable and dynamic". Why was this, how was it achieved, and was it successful?

A. Marks and Spencer had to change their image in order to keep ahead of their competitors. In Ireland, they achieved this by using the media in a limited way and by participating in fashion shows such as "*The Head to Toe*" fashion show. They were successful in this respect.

Q. Despite having large window areas in both of their Dublin stores, Marks and Spencer don't rely heavily on window displays to sell their merchandise. Discuss.

A. Window displays are usually based around themes dictated by Head Office in London, so that all Marks and Spencer windows will appear similar. Head Office also stipulates when the displays should be changed. All of this, combined with a tight budget for display, can limit the creativity of the display artist. The display artist also is responsible

for styling the mannequin's and positioning posters and point-of-sale material within the store.

Q. How do Marks and Spencer promote themselves in Ireland?

A. In the beginning, because they were new to Ireland, Marks and Spencer advertised widely and participated in fashion shows. They are now at the point where they, like their British counterparts, don't actually need to advertise themselves such is the volume of their customers. Apart from the obligatory seasonal sales, Marks and Spencer view the holding of sales as a last resort to attracting customers. As Marks and Spencer feel they have adequate customers, they don't hold additional sales during the year. One of the remaining few ways in which they promote themselves in Ireland is by holding customer evenings for established and potential customers.

Q. Despite having many customer comforts within the store such as, wide walkways and a good layout of their merchandise, the in-store promotion within the store tends to be very low-key. Discuss.

A. Marks and Spencer deem it more important to create a store which is spacious, uncluttered, bright and clean, than to crowd their walls and floor space with posters and promotions. The walls within Mary Street branch have wooden panelling which is clean looking and creates a spacious atmosphere, while all clothing racks are mounted on wheels to facilitate cleaning purposes and ease of movement. While there are a few in-store promotions these are perhaps, to some extent, dwarfed by the size of the store itself.

- Q. Marks and Spencer's labels do not contain the price of the garment, why is this?
- A. This is unnecessary administration work which is of no real benefit to the consumer. Prices are clearly displayed in the stores. If garments were individually priced this could lead to pilferage, as some unscrupulous customers may swap price tags. Above all, Marks and Spencer have not received requests from their customers to individually price-tag their merchandise.
- Q. While Marks and Spencer claim to be committed to the communities in which they operate, they have two stores in Ireland yet very few Irish suppliers. Discuss.
- A. This is because it is difficult to obtain Irish suppliers who are big enough to invest in the equipment needed to reach the consistent standards of quality required by Marks and Spencer.

Interview with Leonora Curry, Design Consultant to the Irish Trade Board and close friend to Michael Donnellan (December 1993).

The following is a brief account of Michael Donnellan's career as recounted by Leonora Curry.

Michael initially studied at Trinity College with a view to becoming a surgeon but, after his mother died he left Trinity and went to study fashion at the Institution in Picadilly. After Picadilly Michael went to work at the house of Lachasse. He later opened his own couture house at 2 Carlos Place in London, and built up a reputation for being Britain's best designer.

Edward Sieff, Chairman of Marks and Spencer at that time, invited Michael to work for Marks and Spencer as a design consultant. Michael accepted the position and subsequently acted as a consultant to their business for over 12 years.

He took to their business his expertise in design, cut and styling. Marks and Spencer's cutters and technicians were often to be seen at 2 Carlos Place learning the subtleties of couture cutting. He showed them how, high round darts in a skirt make the leg seem longer. With regard to bodices, he demonstrated how the shoulder-line when moved slightly forward and the apex of the bust dart moved up, the bust would appear higher and therefore younger. Needless to say, this was important to older women, who are largely Marks and Spencer's customer. His success in working for Marks and Spencer

was such, that his own clients became addicts of the double-knit, tunic style, jersey dress from Marks and Spencer which became a hallmark of that company.

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