



Case Study:
Leading Apparel Brand
Cuts Glove Returns by 48%

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

..... ■ A leading apparel brand requested our help to improve a glove style that was generating abnormally high returns and complaints by customers.

..... ■ This problem was damaging customer satisfaction for a brand that usually has very high brand loyalty.

..... ■ We diagnosed the problem and re-engineered the glove, implementing three manufacturing process improvements to solve the problem.

..... ■ In the 24 months that followed, the return rate was reduced by almost half.

Business Challenge

A leading apparel brand had “off the charts” customer loyalty. Consumers LOVED the brand, and the company could not risk tarnishing it with product that failed to live up to expectations.

However, on one of their best-selling glove styles, customer complaints were running at the too high rate of nearly 1% of sales.

This particular glove was tearing on a seam where a piece of looped webbing attached to the body of the glove. The loops were tearing off of the glove when repeatedly tugged.

At first glance, the quality of the webbing material used to make the loop was judged to be acceptable, as was the thread used for the seam.

How to solve the problem?

Solution:

It took a bit of detective work, but we used a 3-step troubleshooting process:

- ■ we reviewed design relative to function
- ■ we assessed materials and manufacturing methods
- ■ we developed options to improve a faulty process



Here's how we unraveled this problem:

Step 1:

The first question to ask when troubleshooting a glove design is whether the feature causing the problem is actually necessary to the performance of the glove. In this case, the “loop” feature was deemed important an important functional feature, for a positive user experience. Specifically, the webbed loop that attached to the glove at key points helped the wearer remove the glove from their hands in an easy maneuver. Redesigning the glove without the added loops was not an option.

Step 2:

Next, we turn our attention to the glove's materials and manufacturing methods. Our starting point is to inspect the gloves visually.

Upon examining the problematic style more closely, we discovered the root of the problem. The materials being used were satisfactory, but the current method of manufacture failed to compensate for the webbing fabric's nature to unravel when cut. Once pinpointing the dilemma, the challenge was to reengineer the existing glove manufacturing process to fix the problem.

Step 3:

We identified three ways to improve the glove's 'weak' spot:

1. “Hot cutting” the webbing material with a special tool: This fused the ends of the fiber together, to prevent the natural tendency of the woven material to unravel.
2. “Folding under” before stitching: This added a second layer to be stitched in stead of one, and secured the point of contact between loop and seam.
3. “Backtacking” to reinforce the point of connection: Backtacking is a system of reverse stitching on short segments of material at the beginning and ending of a seamline, for a more secure seam.

The manufacturing process now had three built-in safeguards to ensure better performance and durability: using a special “hot cut” tool, and doubling and backtacking the webbing at that seam.

All three methods were well within the factory's capability to execute.

The Results:

Since changing the manufacturing spec and implementing the revised cutting and sewing technique, returns and complaints were reduced by nearly half.

Returns fell from .0098 to .0051 within 24 months of implementing the revised manufacturing technique:

What We Learned: Plan Ahead for Quality

This case study makes a bigger point, which we want to underscore: Hindsight is always 20/20 in the aftermath of a problem. Where possible, it's best to anticipate problems before they occur.

..... ■ Could this situation have been avoided? Yes, and no.

Not every company has the resources to employ rigorous up-front testing prior to bringing product to market ... problems can and will occur. With more time or more knowledge at the beginning of a project, maybe this one could have been caught ahead of time.

An "ounce of prevention" is well worth it when possible. But one thing is for certain: both the retailer and our team will use the knowledge gained to avoid similar problems in the future.





Benefits of Working With Olympia Gloves

Every company CAN choose a manufacturing partner with the experience to avoid potential problems when possible, and a process and expertise to solve them if and when they occur.

Our team will help you to anticipate technical issues and challenges right from the start of a project, and provide support mid-stream when things go awry.

With over 70+ years of glove manufacturing experience, we're ready to help you meet all your quality, delivery and cost challenges.

Want to work with us? **Get in touch.**