



How to Find Wholesale
Fabrics in Small Quantities and
NOT Get Ripped Off
in the Process

”Where can I find fabric in small quantities decent prices?”

I hear this from my New Designer clients all the time. **ALL THE TIME.** Every week, in fact. Yep, I’m listening. And I wrote this report to help fashion startups with what is...

The single biggest challenge when you’re launching a line

Sure, there are lots of other big challenges - like money, getting samples made, working with a contractor, marketing, how to sell your line, finding customers, how to get it all done, costing and pricing...

And the main goal I have is to take you on...

The shortest path from creative idea to actually selling your line –

-- *even if you flunked math and know nothing about entrepreneurship.*

This report is just the beginning of what you [need to know](#) about launching a fashion line – and what I’d like to teach you! But finding FABRIC is a huge issue for most designers and you have to start somewhere, right? So I’m starting with fabric.

Here’s a little bit about me so you know where I’m coming from...



Jane Hamill

Some highlights about the author:

- Designed the **Jane Hamill** line for 14+ years and owned my boutique for the same time period (*cleverly named Jane Hamill*)
- Was approached by my 1st major department store (Marshall Field’s, now Macy’s) after only 2 months of launching my line – that was an eye-opener!
- Sold the *Jane Hamill* line in my boutique and wholesale to

Marshall Field's, Mark Shale, Bloomies by Mail, Saks, and hundreds of specialty stores around the world

- The *Jane Hamill* line was represented in 5 showrooms across the country
- Designed a line of bridesmaid dresses called Dress Fancy
- Got great press over the years including CNN, FOX national TV, InStyle, Lucky, Chicago Tribune, McCall's, Frommer's, the New York Times, National Public Radio, Entrepreneur Magazine, WWD

- Did an essay for NPR's This I Believe series - also in the book of essays. (The topic? Barbie, of course.) <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5419659>
- Sold design biz and retail store in 2007 – 14+ years and 2 kids later!
- Started consulting with retailers in 2007 (with Retail Mavens) helping with inventory control, cash flow, open to buy #'s, marketing their business, etc.
- Started Fashion Brain Academy to help design entrepreneurs in 2010 (www.fashionbrainacademy.com)
- Fashion Brain focuses on helping designers with **business aspects of their line** -- costing and pricing, time management, preparing your line for market (line sheets, lookbook etc.), how to [sell your line](#), marketing your business, how to approach a store, best way to craft a sales email, different selling avenues, planning and direction, how to NOT go out of business...
- Adjunct faculty at Columbia College - Fashion Studies Department
- Collaborates monthly with the Chicago Fashion Incubator

DISCLAIMER:

This report contains my opinions and suggestions for clothing and accessories designers. It is intended as a guide only, and is not an endorsement of any companies that I mention or their products. It's just one designer/consultant's opinion!

This report is divided into 8 sections

1. Who sells fabric?
2. What is wholesale?
3. Jane's list
4. Trade shows
5. Other cool stuff
6. What fabric is *what*?
7. Advice I wish I heard when I started
8. What to do next

Who sells fabric?

- Retail stores
- Online websites
- Jobbers
- Mills
- Converters
- Fabric Reps

Retail Fabric Stores

Retail stores are an obvious choice for new fashion designers. These shops can be a great way to get instant access to fabrics and feel the weight, drape, and hand of a fabric. It's a big bonus that you get to see and touch the whole bolt.

But there are 2 big problems with buying retail.

1. The prices are high
2. There is no continuity

As for #1, when you pay retail it really cuts into your profit margins and makes it very hard to make money with your line.

But here's a good tip... One thing you can do to reduce the price when you shop retail is tell them you are a business and ask for a discount. At the very least, if you have a tax ID # (a reseller's permit) you will not have to pay sales tax. Many stores will also give you at least 10% off as well. You can also ask if they have a warehouse where they stock more fabric. This way if you find a piece you like but there are only 7 yards on the floor, you can find out if more is available.

#2, no continuity, means you will not be able to re-order the same items. Many fabric stores buy end lots from mills and other sources so what's out it out – and that's the end of it. This is a problem if you plan to sell your line to retailers or sell it online. The sell to other stores, called selling wholesale, you need to create your sample line months in advance of actually shipping orders. This means that the fabric you sourced in April needs to be available to make your stock pieces months later.

Here's an example. You start making your Fall samples in February, show the line in April and May, and ship orders in September. You need the exact same materials for your samples (February) that you need for your production pieces (shipped in September which means fabric purchased in July or August).

Most **fabric stores will not have the same items** available in February as they do in July, which leaves designers in a bind.

My recommendation?

Skip retail altogether and buy fabrics wholesale if you plan to sell your line wholesale (to other retailers).

For where to buy wholesale fabric, read on...

What is wholesale?

Wikipedia's definition:

“Wholesaling, jobbing, or distributing is defined as the sale of goods or merchandise to retailers, to industrial, commercial, institutional, or other professional business users, or to other wholesalers and related subordinated services. In general, it is the sale of goods to anyone other than a standard consumer.”

Jane's definition:

The last line is great:

In general, it is the sale of goods to anyone other than a standard consumer.

It is **business to business** selling. Not **business to consumer**.

Buying fabric wholesale is when a business (a manufacturer or a designer, you!) buys fabric at a business that's NOT open to all consumers.

Here are 2 examples:

1) Wholesale

You sell your line to a boutique – this is called selling wholesale because they are another business. You'll give them wholesale prices that they can then mark up to retail prices when they re-sell the product to consumers.

2) Retail

You sell your line on eBay, Etsy, or at a craft fair. In this case, you are essentially the retailer and you're selling directly to consumers.

Online Websites

95% of the websites you see that are selling fabric online are simply the online stores for retail establishments. You want to be especially careful here so you don't get ripped off. A lot of these sites make it seem like you're buying at wholesale prices, but often you're not.

Mills

A weaving (or knitting) business that manufactures fabrics and textile products. The word mill also refers to the actual building and location where the products are manufactured. Mills are for the big boys, however, and generally have huge minimum orders.

How huge are the minimums? At least 1,000 yards in Europe, 2,000 yards in Asia & up to 3,000 yards in the U.S.

Converters

A company that purchases woven or knitted greige goods directly from a fabric mill, and then proceeds to dye, finish, print and/or wash the goods into a full line of finished fabrics.

Converters offer many new fashion colors, print designs, novelty finishes and the latest effects on fabrics. Their minimums are lower than dealing directly with a mill, but can still be too high for New Designers. However, occasionally a converter will take a 500-yard or less order, so you may be able to work with one at this point.

Sometimes you can order less yardage for a surcharge. For example, you may be able to buy 100 yards of an item (or even less) for a 30% per yard surcharge. This would make a \$7 fabric \$10 per yard. The advantage is you only buy what you know you can use.

Jobbers

A jobber is a company that buys large quantities of excess fabrics from mills, converters, and design businesses. They then turn around and re-sell them at wholesale prices to small design companies, manufacturers and retail fabric stores.

Most of the companies you'll find online with a google search are jobbers or middlemen. Typical fabric manufacturers and wholesalers do not have websites that are easy for consumers to find since they are selling to businesses, not direct to consumers.

Jobbers can be great for designers with a small business. Here are the pros and cons to jobbers.

Pro: You can buy small quantities from jobbers

Con: You get what you get. The stock is always changing – no continuity.

Pro: You get what you get, the stock is always changing!

Con: If you aren't familiar with what different types of fabrics typically cost, you can pay too much for something. I know jobbers will disagree with this, but that's been my experience. I've also gotten great deals from jobbers, however.

Pro: You get access to amazing high-end fabrics that you could never meet the minimum for otherwise.

Con: Sometimes you can get fabric that's in, ahem, "less than ideal" condition. It's not like working with a mill that will stand behind their quality. Most jobbers are fair, but not all.

Check each roll you receive before you cut into it! And do it fast – within 5 days – if you expect to return something that is damaged. Some jobbers are more reputable than others.

Sales Reps

A sales rep is an agent that shows fabrics from one or more fabric companies in a certain geographical territory. For instance, if the main company is in Los Angeles, they may have other reps in different territories of the US. Large companies have multiple reps but many have one rep located only in the same town as the company's primary location.

Fabric reps sometimes travel to the designer's studio or office to show their fabric line as well as exhibit at national and regional textile shows.

If you want to buy fabric from overseas, I highly recommend working with a US-based rep. European companies may also sell by the piece – which could be a roll of 90 -100 yards (or meters, which are slightly more than yards). You can always ask if they will just sell you one or 2 rolls. What's sample yardage for a larger company could be enough for you line's production run.

Trade Shows

Textile trade shows are a great way to find sources. There are multiple shows across the country and they all have something different to offer. Before you plan to attend a show, check it out *carefully*. You don't want to end up at a show that's geared for large manufacturers because no one will sell to you.

For a listing of shows:

<http://10times.com/usa/textiles-fabrics/tradeshows>

Here are 4 fabric shows I want to tell you about...

Los Angeles Textile Show

<http://latextile.blogspot.com/>

This is a good choice for independent designers. A lot of fabric people at this show are used to working with small businesses and understand the need for small quantities etc. A lot have high minimums and you will not be able to buy from them. I shopped this show regularly when I designed my line and recommend it to my private clients as well. It's a big show and can be overwhelming if you're brand new to this.

The LA show has terrific seminars, so allow a little extra time for them. You can learn a lot at these seminars, like the Fashion Brain [Seminars](#), and I've found them really valuable. They're generally free for fabric buyers or around \$20 if you don't have a business yet but want to attend.

The neighborhood around the Textile show has a lot of wholesale fabric, button, and trim stores. It's worth a stroll around the area to check it out and it can be a ton of fun too.

DG Expo Fabric and Trim Show

<http://www.dgexpo.net/>

This is a relatively new show and it's geared for designers who want LOW minimums!!!! Yeah! (*did you note the multiple exclamation points?*) I am thrilled about this show because it makes it so much easier to find what you're looking for when every vendor in the room will actually sell to you. I'm honored to have been included as a speaker at DG Expo.

If you're a true start-up, you may want to start with this show because it's small and manageable. The [Seminars](#) are also very good (*I mean the other speakers too, not just me!*). Currently, they offer shows in New York, San Francisco, Dallas, and Miami.

The founder of the DG Expo, Susan Power, is also the woman behind [About Sources](#). They publish excellent sourcing books – much more comprehensive than my list here, including **The Sourcer's Guide**, **The Designer's Guide**, Textile Sources Who's Who in the USA & Canada, By The Yard Resource Guide, and The Contractors. I used her books when I had my line and I recommend them highly.

Première Vision – Paris

<http://www.premierevision.com/en/>

This is the king, queen, and granddaddy of all fabric shows. The mecca, the promised land, the best way to blow \$2000 and 4 days. OK, you get the idea. **I do not recommend PV for start-up companies** – not at all. I just want you to know it exists and understand that it's a designer's dream come true. GORGEOUS European fabrics everywhere, beautiful French (and world!) people, stunning visual displays... a feast for the creative senses. Really.

I suggest you take a look at their website – they have fabrics on there and other information.

I've been to this show a number of times, and I always feel the same way. After about 3 hours of walking the floor, I feel I've learned more and *experienced* more than I could in 3 weeks. It's heaven and it's something I hope every designer gets to experience at least once in their career. The show itself is huge.

Held in Paris, usually in September and May.

Première Vision – NY

<http://www.premierevision-newyork.com>

This used to be called European Preview because it's sort of a quick view of what's coming at the show in Paris. If you're interested in European fabrics, this could be a good place for you. Even if you don't buy European fabrics, it's a great place to see trends and get inspired.

Held in NY, usually in January and July.

Jane's List

This is a list of some of my favorite places to get fabrics and trims wholesale – and NOT get ripped off. Please understand this is just a casual list – not an endorsement of these companies or their products. It's just one designer/consultant's opinion!

Atlantis Fabrics

<http://store.fabrics-textiles.com>

877.294.7111

Organic cottons

BNB Textiles

<http://www.bnbtexiles.com/>

800.542.2030

Tricots and stretch velvets – lycra fabrics

10 yd. minimums, lots of items stocked

Butterfly Fabrics

<http://www.butterflyfabrics.us/Default.aspx>

212.768.3940

Silks - 1 yard minimums so you can sample 1 yard of anything you like!

Calamo Silks

www.calamosilk.com

213.622.3800

Solid and printed silks – a good reputation for service.

Cinergy Textiles

<http://www.cinergytextiles.com>

213.748.4400

1 roll minimums – a little harder to work with for newbies. Usually must buy 50 yard rolls. Stocks a lot of fabrics – geared more for moderate pricepoints – a variety of fibers

Exotic Silks

www.exoticsilks.com

650.965.7760

Huge selection of silk prints – around 15 yd. minimums

Enviro Textiles

www.envirotextile.com

970-945-5986

10 yard minimum

Sustainable fabrics, hemp products, silk, jersey

Located in Colorado

Fabric Mart

<http://www.fabricmartfabrics.com/home.php>

800.242.3695

A jobber – higher end

A lot of knits, wools, silk

Fabri-Quilt

www.fabri-quilt.com

816.421.2000

Company is mainly geared for quilters but carries a great microfiber material for a raincoat-type products and VWR treated fabrics

25 yard minimums

Global Leathers

<http://www.globalleathers.com>

212.244.5190

Fantastic selection of leathers and skins

Jay Trims

<http://www.jaytrim.com/> - site under construction at the moment

888.529.8746

JB Silks

<http://www.jbsilks.com/gallery.html>

(877) 877-3069

You can request a free DVD from them, which has their fabric choices on it. They are a very organized company and nice to work with.

JKM Ribbon (carries JHB ribbons)

<http://www.jkmribbon.com/Store/catalog/home,1.htm>

Online site – more moderate -- and a huge selection

Mokuba Trims

<http://www.mokubany.com/>

212.869.8900

High end and GORGEOUS trims from Japan

Phillips-Boyne

www.philipsboyne.com

631.755.1230

woven shirtings

3 yard minimums

Renaissance Ribbons and Buttons

(530)692-0842

<http://renaissanceribbons.com/>

high end ribbons and trims – gorgeous!

Rimmon Fabrics

<https://makersrow.com/apparel/california/s-rimmon>

800.697.4666

11054 West Pico Blvd.

Los Angeles, CA 90064

A jobber

For small to medium size pieces of imported designer dress fabrics. Easy to work with. They also rep Liberty of London prints

Rockywoods

www.rockywoods.com

970.663.6163

fabric for outdoor gear – nylons, ripstop, cordura etc.

Telio

www.telio.com

800.361.0375

This is probably my all-time favorite textile company EVER! They carry just about everything a girl could dream of – and more. Usual minimum yardage is 25 yards and they're based in Montreal. A reliable company with great quality fabrics and terrific prices – *and no, I don't work for them.*

Sextet Fabrics

<http://www.sfknits.com>

Best email: barbara.ross@sfknits.com

Carries a great 11 oz., 58" knit rayon/spandex jersey (45 colors!) with low minimums - in-stock. Other knits and wool jersey too.

Shannon Fabrics

www.shannonfabrics.com

323.234.5252

"cuddle" fabric and faux furs – especially for children's

Easy to work with and VERY reliable – they always shipped me right away and did what they said they would when I have my baby blanket business.

Varun Textiles

www.varuntextiles.com/

213- 891-0772

This was my go-to place for rayon prints. Located in LA. Small quantities available but they don't ship too fast as I recall.

Zinman Textiles

<http://zinmantex.com>

514.276.2597

HUGE selection of linings including a great iridescent lining

Carries some fabrics too

1 roll minimums.

Very nice people and a very easy company to work with

Some independent multi-line sales reps with good reputations:

Jay Arbetman

<http://www.thesourcingdistrict.com/>

arbetman@hotmail.com

708.386.8586

Zipper, buttons, sustainable fabrics, lots of knits, reps KenDor Fabrics

Ivy Moya

Independent fabric rep in San Francisco

Email: ivyfabricsales@gmail.com

Phone: (415) 244-5841

Carries Robert Kaufman in San Francisco, Philips Boyne, Exotic Silks, Wimpfheimer/Tussah, Berenstein Textiles, Pacific Knitting and others

Diana Muzzy

finefabricsales@mac.com

312.953.5055

Reps trim lines, laces, buttons, London Textiles, Stylecrest, Tiss et Teint (from Belgium), Robert Kaufman, and more. Very easy to work with

Chris Wate

fabrics@prodigy.net

773.395.0770

Reps Mokuba Trims and a nice line from India in addition to some interior fabrics

Other Cool Stuff

[About Sources](#)

They have sourcing books and guides for designers – much more comprehensive than my list here. I used these books when I had my line and I recommend them highly. Titles include **The Sourcer's Guide**, **The Designer's Guide**, Textile Sources Who's Who in the USA & Canada, By The Yard Resource Guide, and The Contractors.

[Le Souk](#)

Le Souk is an online sourcing platform that helps you source directly from the world's finest mill and tanneries.

What Fabric is *What*?

Get to know your fabrics – here's a start...

Cottons

Flannel cotton is plain or twill weave. On one or either side there is a slight nap.

Flannelette is a soft cotton fabric with a nap on one side.

Gauze, similar to cheesecloth, is sheer and lightly woven.

Gingham is a lightweight, washable fabric that is woven in checks, plaids or stripes.

Muslin is a plain weave cotton fabric. It comes in all different weights and is usually natural.

Organdy is a crisp cotton fabric, known for being sheer.

Outing Flannel is soft cotton that is napped on both sides. Often used for sleepwear.

Oxford is shirting fabric with a lustrous, soft finish. It often has narrow stripes and is woven in plain or basket weave.

Pima Cotton, from Egyptian cotton, is one of the finest cotton fabrics in quality.

Polished Cotton has a shiny appearance due to a chemical finish. It is either a satin or plain weave cotton

Poplin is a plain weave fabric with a rib that goes across the cross grain

Sateen is a satin weave cotton fabric.

Seersucker is a lightweight cotton fabric crinkled into lengthwise stripes.

Terry Cloth is a looped pile fabric that is either woven or knitted. This material is used for towels and such due to its absorbency.

Velveteen is an all-cotton, short pile fabric resembling velvet.

Silks (and silk weaves)

Brocade is a jacquard weave with an embossed effect and contrasting surfaces.

Canton Crêpe is a soft crepe fabric with small cross grain ribs. It is similar to crepe de chine but heavier.

Charmeuse is a satin weave silk with a crepe back

Chiffon is transparent soft and light silk.

China Silk is a plain weave silk that most people identify as the touch of silk. This fabric comes in a variety of different weights.

Dourine is reeled from double cocoons nested together. The threads are uneven and irregular. It is identifiable by both touch and sight.

Georgette sheer crepe silk, is heavier than silk and has a crisper feel to it.

Organza is similar to cotton organdy, but it is transparent and is also made from silk.

Silk Shantung is a doupioni type of silk that comes from the Shantung Province of China. It is also irregular to touch.

Silk Broadcloth is a plain weave silk in many different weights; crisper than regular silks.

Silk Linen has a linen look and feel to it but is made with a nubby yarn in a plain weave. There are a variety of weights. It is different from doupioni in that the nubby lines run both lengthwise and crosswise.

Wool

Beaver Cloth is a napped heavy woolen overcoating; it is pressed down to resemble beaver fur.

Botany/Merino Wool is fine wool made from worsted wool yarn. It is soft and luxurious, resembling cashmere.

Broadcloth is an all woolen/worsted fabric that has a slight feel of velvet to it. Chinchilla Cloth is a heavy, almost spongy woolen fabric with a long nap that has been rubbed into a curly, nubby finish.

Felt fabric is a compact sheet of entangled, wool, fur, sometimes cotton fibers. The felt is made by processing a mat of fibers with moisture, heat, and pressure. It is not a woven fabric.

Flannel Wool is a soft, lightweight fabric with a small nap on one or both sides. gabardine is a tightly woven, high sheen wool twill.

Herringbone Wool is woven in a twill that is reversed at normal spacing; this will create a saw tooth line.

Hounds Tooth Check has a four pointed star check in a broken twill weave.

Lambs Doen is a heavy knit fabric that has a thicker fleeced nap on one side. It can be used for blankets.

Olden Fabric is thick, soft, waterproof and windproof wool used in outerwear.

Melton is a heavy, thick, short napped fabric without a finish press or gloss.

Tweed is rough textured wool, originally homespun and slightly felted. This fabric is sturdy with a mottled color.

Virgin Wool is wool that has never been processed into fabric and is usually an off white.

Advice I Wish I Heard When I Started

Starting a fashion business can be daunting and crazy and fun and scary and hilarious all at the same time. I urge you to take it slow and cover all your bases. Start with a solid foundation for your business – do your research.

Find a niche that can be profitable. To do this, you must know if there's a hungry market out there and you must know your costs and how much you need to sell to survive. Try not to get too caught up in the "cool" parts of your business and overlook these basic things. I wish I had heard (and listened to) this advice when I started!

And remember, I'm here to help. We have an active [blog](#) with articles and videos for creative entrepreneurs.

I was just like you when I started, trust me. excited and energized and scared to death. I built my business – at first from my living room – and you can too. I was able to make a nice living off of my creativity and that's my hope for everyone reading this right now.

What To Do Next

Think about what you're going to do NOW. You're armed with a good start for fabric sourcing (yay!!) But what about all the other aspects of launching a line?

Do you know the following??

- What business licenses you need and where to get them
- How much it's going to cost you
- How to choose a target market and where to find paying customers
- Who your competition really is
- How to find a sample maker and a manufacturer

- What you need in place *before* you approach a retail buyer
- What's important for your website to convert lookers into buyers

Now consider this...

- What if you could get the answers to ALL the issues listed above – all in one place, in a step-by-step course?
- What if you could learn best-practices from someone you trust who's done what you want to do successfully?
- Do you think having a mentor would save you time, energy, frustration, and money??

If you do, and you're serious about your business, then you're ready for your next step.

The New Designer Program online [course](#) is the blueprint for launching a fashion business. It's all online, at your own pace, available immediately, and it's what I wish I had when I started.

There are 9 modules of training in the form of videos, cheatsheets, PDF downloads, templates, and more. NDP focuses on the ***business side*** of things and you can do the course from your laptop, iPad, phone, or any device. Also, you get LIFETIME access to the course, so there's no pressure.

Click here to see the curriculum and check it out:

<http://fashionbrainacademy.com/training-courses/new-designer-program/>

Use coupon code: GOODREADER at checkout to **save \$100** off the price (full-pay option only).

Thanks for reading and please know I rooting for you ALL THE WAY!

Jane

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