



## Clothing sizes adjust for real bodies

Thursday, 14 February 2008

Auckland University of Technology

The angst that comes with the annual jeans hunt is not simply down to excessively picky females.

Researchers at AUT University have identified an international shift among clothing manufacturers toward the use of new sizing techniques based on body shape to combat ill-fitting garments.

Associate Professor Frances Joseph says huge demographic and lifestyle shifts during the past half century have resulted in changing body sizes and shapes but sizing standards and measurement techniques have not always kept pace with the changes.

"Ill-fitting garments have serious implications for customer satisfaction and for profits, so some companies are choosing to make serious investments in new technology so they can get it right," says Joseph.

In countries such as the US, digital body scanning technologies are being employed to bring clothing measurements in line with the modern body types.

American plus-size clothing company Lane Bryant has introduced a new line of Right Fit jeans based on scans of 14,000 customers. The data collected from the scans showed that a customer with a 34 inch waist could have hips that measured anywhere from 36 inches to 47 inches — a range that a single size couldn't cover.

The company's response was to build three different fits - "straight", "moderately curvy" and "curvy" - for each waist size.

Joseph says this sort of mass customisation will result in a new level of comfort and fit.

"Body scanning means it will be far easier for manufacturers to tailor to niche markets, so instead of offering a straight size 12, they might offer a 'youth fit' size 12 and a 'mature' size 12, reflecting the fact our bodies look very different when we're 14 years old versus when we're 44 years old."

While body scanning technology is not used commercially in New Zealand some of the country's larger apparel retailers have conducted their own surveys, using manual measuring systems, of specific market populations and changed their pattern grading systems as a result.

Manufacturers are also trying to develop consistent sizing standards which will be meaningful for "global shoppers" who want to purchase clothing from online retail sites.

Joseph says globalisation is a strong motivator for consistent, international sizing standards with clothing companies looking to sell into international markets.

"New Zealand size 12 means very little to someone from the UK and similarly, Italian size 44 will mean very little to a local shopper. If buyers can't understand the sizing, then they won't make the purchase so manufacturers are coming to see the need for more consistent sizing standards."

With increasing online sales, the right fit has serious implications for clothing manufacturers' bottom lines.