

An overhead view of two women in a factory or workshop setting. They are seated at a wooden table, examining and organizing numerous small fabric samples. The woman on the left is wearing a blue patterned top, and the woman on the right is wearing a white t-shirt and a blue apron. The table is cluttered with stacks of fabric swatches and larger sheets of paper. In the background, there are more tables, a red chair, and a desk with a computer keyboard and a water bottle. The overall scene depicts a busy, organized workspace for fabric sampling.

# THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO FABRIC SAMPLING

How to Improve Your Greatest  
Marketing Asset

**TRENDEX**

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# Sampling is the cutting of small pieces of fabrics and storing them in one place.

## The Importance of Textiles

Textiles have played a huge part in the security, culture and economy of humans throughout our history. When explorers traveled to other parts of the world they often brought back new fabrics in different colors and patterns. In the late 1700s, the industrial revolution streamlined manufacturing for increased efficiency and output.

## Samples Make Selling Easier

Soon after, the invention of the steam locomotive gave people quick access to different markets, shipping product across the country. This explains why the oldest sample books have been discovered around this time period. Salesmen needed an easy way to show many different materials to as many people as possible.





### Why do companies continue to do sampling today?

- Customers demand to see and feel the materials before purchasing, especially when it's for large uses such as carpet.
- It is more convenient than bringing huge rolls of fabric for customers to compare.
- There is no digital substitute. Images are not enough to convince the majority of consumers to buy material.



Great samples can help you stand out and communicate your brand, boosting sales in the process.

# Main Types of Swatches: Fan deck, Memo, Swatch card, Stack book

Stack books showcase large swatches in a professional and durable format and are often used in upholstery. They are better for showing large patterns and many different shades. However, they are more expensive to produce and use more fabric.

Swatch cards have small swatches on a paper stock that are easy to compare. They cost less than other samples but do not stand out as much and show less material to customers.

Fan decks are capable of holding many different small swatches on pieces that spread out. They make it easy to show customers a variety of colors but may be difficult for large patterns.

Memos are simply larger individual swatches that are sent to customers who want a specific pattern or color. They are highly targeted and inexpensive but do not show off all the varieties available.





### Industry Terms:

**Straight** - the edges are cut straight by the cutter without any additional techniques. It works for materials that don't fray such as vinyl.

**Pinked** - toothed edge or zig zag cut that is associated with fabric swatches. Works well with upholstery fabric and is named after the pinking shears used in sewing.

**Serged** - thread is sewn around the perimeter for a nice, expensive looking finish.

**Framed edges** - edges are framed by gluing paper stock on the back.



One difficulty in fabric swatching is preventing materials from fraying. Methods like pinking extend the lifetime of the sample.

**Feelers** - only the top of the swatch is glued so that you can feel the edges and back of the material.

**Waterfall** - swatches are arranged vertically and overlap. This makes it easy to compare colors and patterns as well as feel both sides of the material.

**Battle Ribbon** - swatches are glued right next to each other in a horizontal line. You can fit a lot of SKU's on this kind of swatch card.

**Island** - there is one large swatch that's easier to see and feel than the rest. It usually has the same pattern but different colors so you get to really feel the material but also see all the varieties.





**Surface mounted** - swatches are simply glued to the front of the card. It's common, easy and inexpensive.

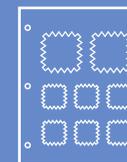
**Sandwich (window)** - swatches are glued in die cut windows between two pieces of stock. This makes sure the card is as strong as possible.

**Back printed** - if the material allows it, memos can have information such as the color name and dimensions printed on the back.

**Labeled** - when materials are not as receptive, they can be labelled on the back with a separate sheet.

**Ticketed** - a ticket is applied to the card stock with the logo on the front and the product information on the back.

**Chained and grommited** - swatches are drilled and have metal rings inserted before being linked by chain. this can be used to store a lot of different SKU's of memos and is often cheaper than a stack book.



Swatch cards can go inside a binder, case or ring page. This can give your fabric swatches the perfect finishing touch and really stand out.

# How swatching products are made: step by step of the process.

**Swatch card** - make a magazine, receive materials, spread out fabric, cut it into sheets, cut into size (pinked or not pinked), print and laminate card stock, score the stock for folding if there are multiple panels, glue down swatches, press them onto the stock, check for any irregularities, get the cards ready for shipping.

**Memo** - receive materials, spread out fabric, bust it into sheets, cut into size (pinked or not pinked) print labels and cards, glue label card to memo, send them to customers.

**Stack Book** - receive materials, spread out fabric, collate materials by size to be cut and bust into sheets, apply thermal labels to back of fabric, cut down (pinked or not pinked), collate all swatches together, make the case and print on it, put them inside case and staple them, lay dust cover, glue front cover, get the books ready for shipping.

**Fan Deck** - receive materials, spread out fabric, bust it into sheets, cut fabric into strips, glue strips on long piece of paper stock, die cut cards and punch them, repeat the process for the rest of the cards, create case or covers for deck, collate cards and place them within fan deck, put in metal post and string, get the decks ready for shipping.



## Types of market segments:

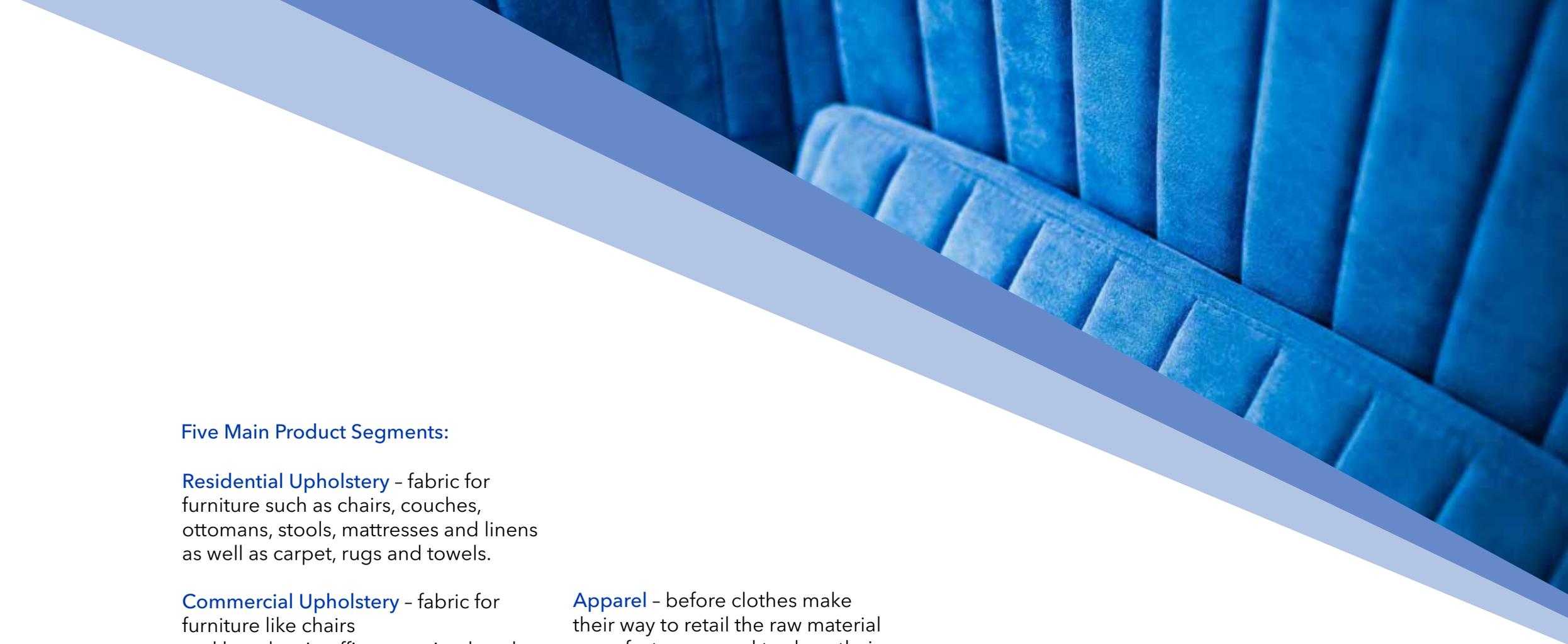
Although fabric swatching seems like a very niche industry, it entails working with many different kinds of clients and with many different types of material.

Sample makers may work with fabric manufacturers, distributors or even marketing/design agencies.

Some clients have lots of different fabric lines with many different uses and do sampling all the time, whereas others only have one or two lines and do sampling once a year.

SKU's for an individual order can range from 5 all the way up to 450.





Five Main Product Segments:

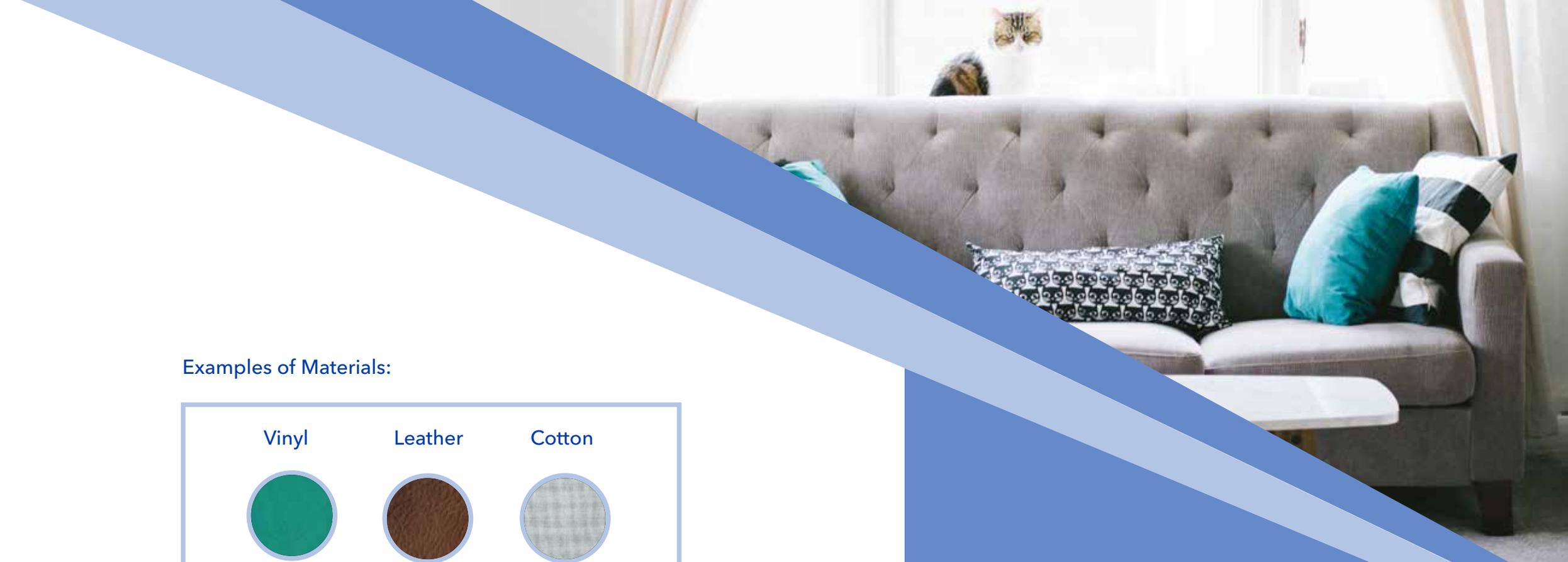
**Residential Upholstery** - fabric for furniture such as chairs, couches, ottomans, stools, mattresses and linens as well as carpet, rugs and towels.

**Commercial Upholstery** - fabric for furniture like chairs and benches in offices, seating booths in restaurants, pews in churches and linens like bed sheets, towels and pillows for hospitality.

**Auto/Marine** - fabric for seats, carpet, roof liner and shade.

**Apparel** - before clothes make their way to retail the raw material manufacturers need to show their products to the apparel designers.

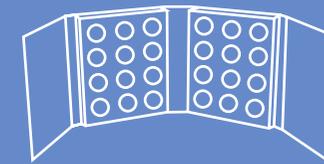
**Medical** - fabric made for hospital bedding, drapes, exam tables and scrubs. These materials need to have special sanitary properties.



Examples of Materials:



What can be sampled - upholstery, apparel, linens, bedding, carpet, drapes, curtains, wall coverings, wallpaper, rugs, towels, blankets, tents, hats, ribbon, shoelace, screen, shade, tarp.



Other items can be cut but they would need special cutters used by the customer. We could put materials like wood, tile and cladding in a sample kit.

# Problems in the industry

- Sampling is generally a pain for customers.
- It takes valuable time to get a quote and the materials sent to the vendor.
- Samples can be made with mistakes or delivered past deadlines.
- Fabric manufacturers want to minimize their material costs for samples, while their customers want to see the most material.
- Costs can be high because it is a labor intensive industry.



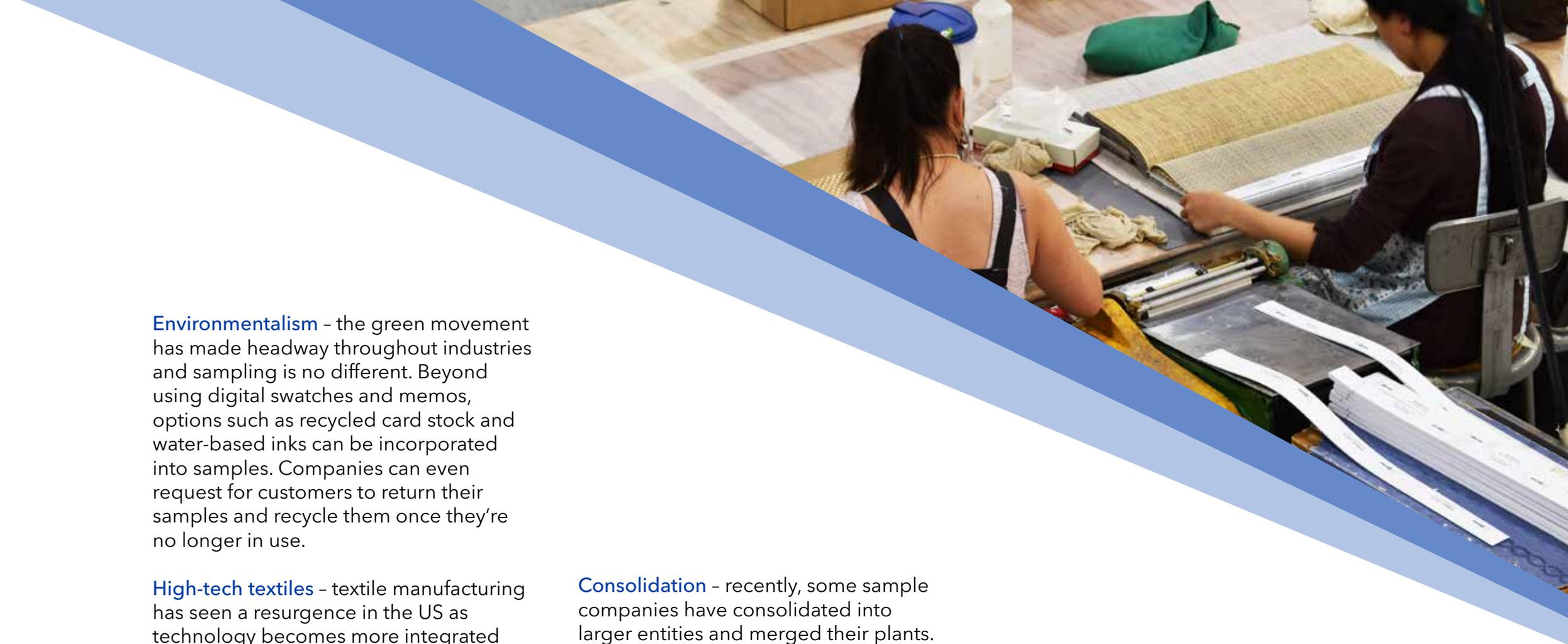
# Emerging Methods

**New equipment and automation** - investing in equipment speeds up the production process and makes product defects less likely. It also lowers labor costs which can be passed on as savings to the customer. The more automated the production facility is the more efficiently it operates.

**Digital swatches** - while physical swatches remain the industry standard, the advancement of digital printing technology has made digital swatching a more viable option. Customers of course prefer to feel the material, but now there's the opportunity to have one physical swatch for the feel and the rest digitally printed. This could drastically reduce production and material costs.

**Memos and facilitation** - another emerging trend is the use of memos. With the advent of e-commerce, many customers are choosing their materials in the comfort of their own homes. Memos allow customers to only receive the fabric they are interested in instead of large stack books. They can even be shipped by the sample maker, saving more money.





**Environmentalism** - the green movement has made headway throughout industries and sampling is no different. Beyond using digital swatches and memos, options such as recycled card stock and water-based inks can be incorporated into samples. Companies can even request for customers to return their samples and recycle them once they're no longer in use.

**High-tech textiles** - textile manufacturing has seen a resurgence in the US as technology becomes more integrated into fabrics. Used for the military, firefighters and athletics, these new fabrics can help better regulate temperature, track health or even change colors. When this segment really takes off the product will need to be sampled in ways that are most affordable for these high-cost materials.

**Consolidation** - recently, some sample companies have consolidated into larger entities and merged their plants. The chaos in production has made it difficult for them to fulfill customer orders, costing them time and money. This may force customers to seek multiple sampling vendors.

# How to pick a sample maker

## Can they deliver my product on time and error free?

The most important thing is that you receive your samples right when you need them. If they are delivered past the initial date then you are losing potential customers who would have been handling your samples. Errors are also crucial because they can delay the project and make your samples less professional.

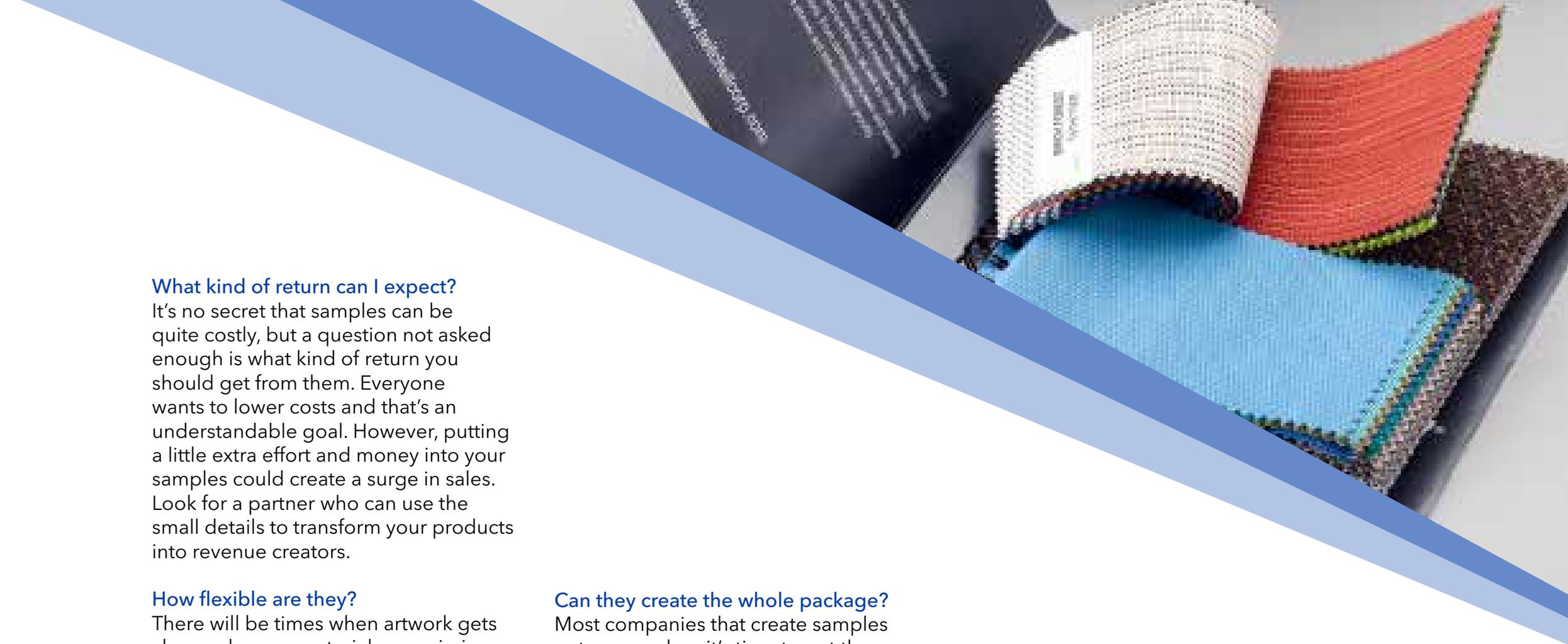
## Can they manage the project well?

Making samples involves a lot of elements such as estimating the costs, getting artwork approved, receiving materials from the manufacturer and making them in a timely fashion. In order to get your samples by the due date each deadline needs to be met and you need a partner to manage that process. It can take over 6 months sometimes to finish a project and you will become busy with other things, so make sure you find someone with a great process in place.

## Will they communicate my brand?

Most samples will end up in a retailer and have to compete with other samples for attention. That's why it is crucial to stand out and communicate your brand through the colors, medium and display of your samples. Find a company that will create the optimal solution for you and present it in a way that wows potential customers.





### What kind of return can I expect?

It's no secret that samples can be quite costly, but a question not asked enough is what kind of return you should get from them. Everyone wants to lower costs and that's an understandable goal. However, putting a little extra effort and money into your samples could create a surge in sales. Look for a partner who can use the small details to transform your products into revenue creators.

### How flexible are they?

There will be times when artwork gets changed, some materials are missing, the number of SKUs is altered or even adjustments in construction. The key is to have a sample maker that can roll with the punches and tweak things during the project. Some changes are more difficult than others but if the vendor is flexible enough they will be able to be implemented without severely delaying the deadline.

### Can they create the whole package?

Most companies that create samples outsource when it's time to put them inside of a binder or case. There are, however, a select few who can manufacture samples and the turned edge pieces. Having them made with the same vendor lowers the cost and makes the products more complementary without the issues of communication or logistics.

# Swatching Made Easy

Work with Trendex to overhaul your sampling program, so that you can get your samples done right and on time. We know how painful the process can be for some customers. That's why we work hard to make everything as simple as possible and manage expectations. When you choose Trendex you don't just get samples, you get a partner.

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