

Get Set for Manufacturing

Visiting a Manufacturer Checklist

Make the most of your visit and make sure you gain all the information you need from your visit. Use this checklist as a guide.

Can I see the factory floor or workroom?

It is so important to see where the magic happens. This is the true indicator of how the manufacturer runs their business.

Is it neat and tidy? Are there organised compartments for things? Do the staff look happy? or harassed? What are they currently working on and what does the quality look like?

Can I take a look at the machinery

Take the time to see the machinery. Does the manufacturer have what is needed to produce your product? Is the machinery in good working order? Is it well maintained?

If you don't know what something does, don't be afraid to ask. Generally manufacturers love it if you take an interest in their factory.

Can I see samples of your work?

While you are in the factory, now is the time to actually see, and feel, the quality that the manufacturer is able to produce. Does it meet your expectations?

You may see something that they are capable of that you haven't considered but which could drastically improve the production of your product. It may also give you ideas for future development work.

What sort of quality control do you have in place?

Whilst you go round the factory this is your chance to find out what quality controls they have in place.

At what stages of the production is the quality checked? Do they have a gold seal sample to refer to as they go along? Is there some sort of final inspection process that takes place before the product is shipped out? What is the lighting like in this area? and does it look well-staffed?

Quality inspection is particularly important in factories making products for children and babies, where something like a broken needle being left in a garment could be a life-threatening situation.

What is the cost for prototyping and sampling?

I don't know many manufacturers that don't charge a premium for the time spent making a sample. Generally the rate is at least double what the production costs will be. Some factories will charge an hourly rate for development time and others will charge a flat fee.

The time to ask this question is when you're meeting face to face. It needs to be early on so that you can factor the development charges into your budget, but after you've started to establish a working relationship so the manufacturer doesn't think cost is your only priority.

Who would be managing my account?

You know the score. You go to a business and they put the best sales person in charge of the customer on-boarding. You're really impressed and decide to give them your order. They then put the junior in charge of your account and everything starts to go a bit skew-whiff!

If you are impressed by the owner when he shows you around then insist that it is him that you communicate with going forward.

Can you source components?

Though many UK factories are CMT manufacturers and will expect you to supply your own materials, it is likely that they have a contact book of suppliers. If you need help with sourcing they may be able to make some suggestions and recommendations.

Where will you store my materials?

As you will likely be supplying all your materials to the manufacturer, take the opportunity to see where they will be stored. Do they have enough room to store them properly? Is the area clean, dry and safe?

What information do you need from me?

Is there anything omitted from your tech pack that the manufacturer would like specifying? Now is a good time to check while you are face to face and can go through the tech pack together. Often the factory owner will involve the production or operations manager from the factory to be involved in this conversation - and that's a good thing. The more invested everyone in the factory is in your production the better.

What is your production schedule like - when are your quiet periods?

UK manufacturers tend to be busy, and their production schedules may be full at peak times meaning lead-times could be very long.

Take the time to find out what their production schedules look like, are there quiet periods you could take advantage of? Working together and collaborating like this will help you build a successful working partnership that will benefit you both.

How will you dispatch the finished goods to me?

Once the goods are produced how will they be packaged and sent to you? Will the goods be insured, packaged safely and ready for sale?

You are likely to be charged for the delivery, so make sure it's affordable for you and in a way that they get to you in good order, and at the right time.