

Sportswear Manufacturing Report Examines Key Criteria in OEM and ODM Factory Partnerships

how to choose right factory for custom sportswear

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Introduction

In the competitive sports apparel market, brand differentiation depends not only on design and marketing but also on manufacturing partnerships.

For brands seeking flexibility, speed-to-market, and consistent quality, OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) and ODM (Original Design Manufacturer) relationships offer significant advantages. The following are the core criteria we summarized after hundreds of inspection



Intelligent Material Sorting Systems

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The combination of bespoke tailoring and industrialized production allows everyone to wear a custom-made jersey.”

xinzheng hu

1. Manufacturing Capabilities

Why it matters: Manufacturing techniques and equipment determine product quality, customization breadth, and production efficiency.

What to evaluate:

- Printing methods: Seek partners experienced in multiple techniques—heat transfer, sublimation, screen printing, and digital printing. Heat transfer and sublimation are

ideal for vibrant, full-bleed designs and consistent sports numbers and logos.

- Cutting and sorting automation: Automated cut-piece sorting reduces human error, speeds up order fulfillment, and improves traceability—critical for multi-SKU or multi-size runs.

- Sewing and finishing: Assess skill level in technical seams, reinforcements, and athletic-specific

constructions (e.g., raglan sleeves, mesh inserts, bonded seams).

- Prototyping and small-batch capability: For iterative design validation, a partner that supports short runs and rapid prototyping preserves time and cost.

2. Customization Flexibility

Why it matters: Brands need the ability to tailor fabrics, patterns, logos, numbering, and trims to align with identity and performance requirements.

What to evaluate:

- Fabric sourcing and selection: Can the factory handle different performance fabrics (moisture-wicking, four-way stretch, anti-odor, UV protection)? Do they offer fabric testing and performance certification?

- Logo and graphics: Are logo placements, embroidery, woven labels, and print options supported? Can they handle complex multi-color or gradient designs?

- Pattern and fit development: Evaluate pattern grading, size-range flexibility, and the ability to modify block patterns to suit target markets.

- Numbering and customization processes: For team kits and fanwear, number application needs to be durable and uniform—validate the factory's experience with heat-applied numbers and variable-data workflows for personalization.

3. [Quality Control and Standards Compliance](#)

Why it matters: Consistent quality protects brand reputation and reduces returns, while compliance ensures access to markets with strict regulatory requirements.

What to evaluate:

- Quality management systems: Ask about ISO certifications, incoming material inspections, inline quality checks, and final audit procedures.

- Testing and certification: Can the factory facilitate or provide test reports for colorfastness, shrinkage, seam strength, flammability, and harmful substances (e.g., REACH, OEKO-TEX)?

- Sampling and approvals: Understand the sample approval process—how prototypes, fit samples, and pre-production samples are managed and revised.

- Traceability and defect handling: Evaluate how the partner traces batches, handles nonconformities, and executes corrective actions.

4. Lead Times, Production Flexibility, and Scalability

Why it matters: Market demand can spike suddenly (seasonal launches, sponsorships, tournament cycles). The right partner balances short lead times with the capacity for volume growth.

What to evaluate:

- Minimum order quantities (MOQs): Understand MOQs for different customization elements—fabric, printing plates, embroidered badges, or heat-transfer runs.

- Production scheduling and flexibility: Can the factory accommodate rush orders, staggered

deliveries, or mixed-size shipments? Are they organized to handle both high-volume runs and small-batch, custom orders?

- Capacity planning: Review the partner's equipment capacity, workforce stability, and ability to scale without compromising quality.

- Logistics coordination: Assess the factory's experience with global shipping, consolidating shipments, and handling customs documentation.

Based on the above considerations, we studied [Tonton Sportswear](#)'s newly developed intelligent material sorting system, which significantly improved the above production processes

Compared to traditional manual material sorting, it increased the upper limit and variety of garments that a single production line can process, increasing the number of cut pieces that a single production line can handle to 500,000 pieces, with an on-time arrival rate of 99%. It quickly and accurately delivers the cut pieces needed by each production line, and reduces the error rate caused by manual sorting, essentially achieving an error rate of less than 1%.

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