



Environmental Measures Increase Competitive Advantage for Women-Led Company

Making your company environmentally friendly is not just good for the environment: It can also improve your competitiveness in domestic and international markets. That's something Iuliia Hurova and Iuliia Khorishko can attest to without hesitation. The two Iuliias co-own a small apparel company, SOHO Chic, in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro. Through collaboration with CUTIS experts, SOHO Chic has transformed itself into a more efficient business that is succeeding in the export market.

“Adopting environmentally friendly measures, which is still unusual for Ukrainian companies, has improved our economic performance. Personally, I have become more confident in our abilities.” —Iuliia Hurova, SOHO Chic

A major part of SOHO Chic's transformation involved addressing its wasteful and inefficient manufacturing process. With CUTIS technical support and subsidies, the company revised and modernized its production, focusing on labour, water, and energy efficiency. These measures reduced production costs, resulting in more competitive price offerings. This led to a Canadian business deal, and in 2019 the company started exporting to Canada.



Iuliia Khorishko and Iuliia Hurova at the 2018 apparel trade show in Toronto.

SOHO Chic was founded in 2011 by the two friends. Initially, the business involved reselling shoes and clothes imported from the United States, Turkey, and China. But they also enjoyed designing their own clothes—a hobby that has now become their core business.

“We always liked to design stylish outfits for ourselves. When we showcased some of our designs made from the imported goods in our shop, clients really liked them,” said Ms. Khorishko. This positive response convinced the two friends to focus on their self-designed clothes.

They started with a small production line and marketed it via social media. It didn’t take long for the business to grow and gain more customers, until they could finally afford to open a showroom in Dnipro.

SOHO Chic joined CUTIS’s U CAN Export program in 2017. After participating in a series of export-oriented business training and coaching sessions, the company developed its website in both Ukrainian and English and modified its clothing designs to better suit the international market. They also participated in the 2018 Apparel Textile Sourcing Canada (ATSC) international trade fair in Toronto. Attending this fair provided invaluable experience: They gained insight into the Canadian market and an opportunity to compare their products with other local and international clothing manufacturers.



A potential Canadian buyer meets with the SOHO Chic team in Ukraine.

At the trade fair, SOHO Chic’s co-owners realized their prices were not competitive. High production costs were a major export obstacle, and reducing costs without sacrificing quality was a key challenge. After consulting with CUTIS experts, the company decided to cut costs by reducing their energy and raw material use. They restructured their production process and acquired new energy-efficient equipment, including a cutting table and knives, industrial lockstitch and overlock sewing machines, an ironing table, and steam generators. They also reorganized their production facility to make it more efficient with newly purchased fabric rolls, shelves, and storage. This reduced the amount of time spent looking for items and the unnecessary purchase of raw materials while improving the production flow.

“After six months of operating with the new equipment, the results are very promising. Fabric waste has decreased by about 50 per cent. Electricity expenses have dropped about 30 per cent. The new overlock machines allowed us to use 30 per cent less thread, and the new cutting machine allowed us to cut fabric five times faster than before.” —Iuliia Khorishko, SOHO Chic

The company’s confidence in its ability and technical capacity has also helped it grow and adapt to the new COVID-19 reality, recently launching a non-profit initiative making reusable protective masks for the city of Dnipro.