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Zara Adopts Distribution Optimization System

Senken Shimbun—December 25th, 2007

By adopting the distribution optimization system developed by a team of American college professors, Spain’s SPA (Specialty Store Retailer of Private Label Apparel), Zara, successfully increased its sales by approximately €100 million in the first half of the year with almost no incremental costs.

The developers of this model are Professor Jeremie Gallien of MIT and Professor Felipe Caro of UCLA. They published their theory on a system that delivers the optimum quantity of optimally sized products at the optimal times to outlets, taking the restrictions facing distribution as well as customer needs into consideration. “Following our proposal to implement and prove our system’s worth, Zara, which we had used as our example, showed interest and agreed to launch a pilot test immediately,” says Professor Caro.

The pilot test was conducted last during the last fall, winter season from July to November, in approximately 60% of all Zara outlets in Europe. The model in question was implemented in parallel with 15 other conventional models, with the model resulting in a 3-4% increase in sales. Professor Caro points out that, “Since the improvements are made within the system, there is no shortage of inventory or incurrence of delivery costs, and thus the increase in sales translates almost entirely into profit.”

With these results, the team of professors and Zara implemented the model at all Zara outlets globally during the first half of this year. The exact increase in profit is not yet clear, but is approximated to be €100 million.

Professor Caro added that, “This model can be used for any organization that is vertically integrated and has direct access to the data of all outlets,” and that “Zara was unique in the sense that its policy was to pull off the remaining quantity of a product when the size M of that product went out of stock.”

Currently, the team of professors and Zara are working on, “building a sales optimization model that estimates when and how which items at what percentage of discount should be distributed to which outlets, and at what speed the price cut should be implemented.”

Zara’s sales last year totaled €5,352 million. If this year’s sales are as forecasted, and the model is successful, approximately €200 million in profit will be generated at almost no cost.