

# Well-suited for Success

Air Tailor trims online clothing returns

by JULIE KNUDSON

E-commerce fashion retailers know the pain of online returns: Customers receive their products only to discover the pants are too long or the sleeves are too short, and back the items come, usually on the retailer's dime. It's expensive, it's time consuming and it can hurt customer satisfaction.

In the world of digital shopping, Air Tailor offers a hands-on solution to all those returns.

After Joshua Adam Brueckner lost his job in 2012, interviews with prospective employers called for suitable clothing, which he couldn't afford at the time. A search of his closet turned up some possibilities that would surely fit the bill — if only they fit. "I taught myself how to take in shirts and hem pants," says Brueckner, founder and CEO of Air Tailor.

A box of wide neckties also looked enticing. "They were far too wide — I'm a skinny guy — and I thought there must be a way to make them into skinny ties that I could wear for a job interview."

A search for online videos and other tutorials got him going. The resulting tie, deconstructed and altered to suit his needs, was a hit, and soon Brueckner was selling vintage ties all over Brooklyn.

"People said, 'I love what you're doing, but I would really love it if you could alter my own ties,'" he says. "So I ran home and created a website, making it possible for people to mail their ties to me and I would alter them down to their preferred width."

Ties were a gateway item: Customers soon inquired about Brueckner's willingness to tackle other alterations, from hemming pants to shortening sleeves. A growing clientele full of busy people spread across a bustling city led to the launch of Air Tailor.

"I started a direct consumer company helping customers through text messages

with their alterations and repairs," Brueckner says. Eventually he outsourced some of the work to local tailor shops. "I would just walk it over every day," he says. "At the end of the week I would pick everything up and give it to the customers."

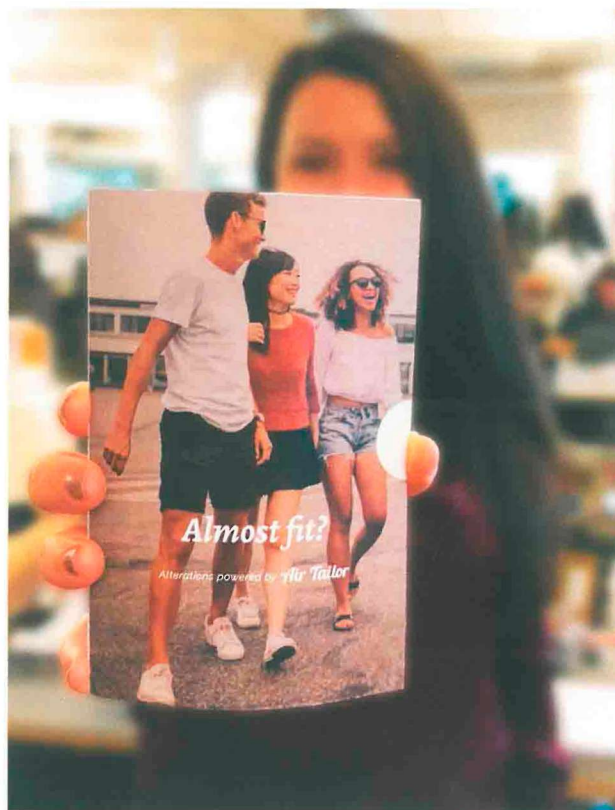
Brueckner brought on a co-founder with technical capabilities, and together they created a platform that enabled customers to ship their garments directly to the tailors Brueckner sourced all over the country.

"I think one reason people liked us is that it was really convenient for them to prep their garments at home," he says. "I would send them a safety pin and they'd pin where their pants needed to be taken up to."

Connecting with retailers was the next logical step. "They're not in the game of managing tailor shops," Brueckner says. "Air Tailor set out to create a simple app that would allow sales associates to place clothing alteration orders from the point of sale."

The process is easy for stores and customers alike, with flat nationwide pricing, an average turnaround of only a week and a stable of high-quality, hand-selected tailors. Luxury brands such as Steven Alan and REVOLVE now offer the Air Tailor service to in-store clientele.

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"We're providing small kits with safety pins and a poly bag that says 'Almost Fits?'" Brueckner says. Customers can then visit Air Tailor's website, select their garment and pick the alterations they need.

The ability to quickly and easily fix clothing items that aren't quite right "can be a make or break for the retailer in terms of sales," Brueckner says. "Now they're including that kit in all of their outgoing shipments and it's helping them decrease their returns." **STORES**

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