

# At-home Fit Technology Is Helping Some Retailers Survive the Coronavirus

But companies and brands have one chance to get it right – or risk permanently losing customers.

By [Kellie Ell](#) on June 25, 2020



📷 A range of fitting options, including letting shoppers buy online and try at home, are helping consumers find the perfect fit. Shutterstock / Maridav

Fit [technology](#) is helping some [fashion](#) brands weather the storm caused by the [coronavirus](#).

At-home try-ons, Zoom fitting sessions, three-dimensional body scans and other digital fit technologies have accelerated during the pandemic. With stores closed, retailers had no choice but to rely on [e-commerce](#) platforms for revenues. And even as more and more retailers reopen brick-and-mortar stores, the trend is likely to continue well into the future.

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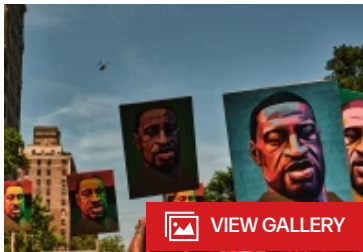
“One of the drawbacks to COVID-19 is that people are going to be reluctant to be in stores — even after they reopen,” Jessica Couch, an apparel fit expert and founder of her own consulting firm Luxor & Finch, told WWD. “It’s just changed how people view shopping.

“Traditionally, shopping was kind of social and consumers wanted to do it with their friends, to be out and about and all of these brands were inside physical locations,” Couch continued. “Now people want the same experiences online that they have in stores. Brands are removing the discovery process from being inside of a physical store and to the comforts of your home or cell phone.”

Demand for these digital services is evident. Just look at [lingerie e-tailer Cuup](#), where sales increased 700 percent in April compared with April 2019. Even more interesting is that the brand had to quadruple its virtual fitting sessions in April — which are done by way of video conference calls — in order to keep up with appointment requests.

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[Lingerie](#) brand [Adore Me](#) started a similar service the last week of April, connecting a [lingerie](#) specialist to a customer by way of Zoom for a virtual fitting. So far 65 sessions have been booked and [Adore Me](#) founder and chief executive officer Morgan Hermand-Waiche said sales from the video fittings bring in nearly the same revenue from stores that have been closed during the pandemic.

Since its conception, ThirdLove’s FitFinder has digitally fitted more than 17 million women for a new bra without ever entering a store. But during store shutdowns, conversion rates at [thirdlove.com](#) are up 12 percent, compared with this time last year, according to Heidi Zak, cofounder and co-ceo of the brand.



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“If you’re going to sell a product, like a bra online, you’ve got to offer some level of service that is equitable or better than that in-store experience as it relates to fit,” Zak said. “Those kinds of tools that help solve customer issues that they would normally try to solve in store are really, really important for any digital business.”

[Artificial intelligence](#) is one example of those tools. It can also drive topline sales, Pinar Dincer, head of fashion at Intelistyle, an AI-powered styling firm, which helps retailers increase revenues, said in a Euromonitor International blog post.

Intelistyle found that consumers who received online recommendations during [coronavirus](#) lockdown orders were more likely to buy than those who did not.

“This was an unexpected finding for us, but serves to prove that customers reward the efforts to personalize their online experience,” said Dincer, who added that brands that use [technology](#) to engage in personalized communications with shoppers, for example by way of text messages or emails, build loyalty.

“Self-isolated customers are more sensitive and anxious and belonging to a community has never been so relevant,” Dincer said.

The pandemic and subsequent quarantine orders may have expedited the need for similar services across the [retail](#) industry. But it’s not just COVID-19 that has heightened the desire for digital fittings. In general, people just hate trying on clothes.

“It’s just not something people like to do; It takes too long,” Couch explained. “So having the ability to try on at home is going to be a huge advantage for a lot of brands.”

But Couch had a preemptive word of warning for companies and brands that want to use fit technology: They need to make sure they do it right the first time — or risk losing customers forever. If the technology takes too long to set up, is hard to understand — or worse, doesn’t work — shoppers will be less likely to stick around.

“Brands will have to very much hyper-personalize the technology they choose, the same way they would hyper-personalize the experience they want their customers to have based on their branding,” she said.

To maximize time and the customer experience, Couch recommends brands do small pilot tests and collect feedback before a big launch. They also need to have a deep understanding of the products, the brand message and the customer.

“And if you don’t have that information readily available, or it’s not up to date, I wouldn’t advise anyone to just rush and integrate any type of technology,” Couch said. “You absolutely have to know that the technology you’re using helps to facilitate the current behaviors of your individual consumers in a way that is more efficient and optimizes their process and that leads to a purchase decision. You’re going to have to do something that complements the [the brand’s current] technology and creates some new experiences. You have to understand your customers’ behaviors: What gets them to the conversion? What makes them happy and feel confident? What builds trust?”

Couch added that there’s no one-size-fits-all fit technology, or that one technology solves the fit problems for every customer. And, if a new tool is difficult to use, brands shouldn’t assume consumers “will just figure it out.” (They won’t, she said.)

Instead, Couch recommends fashion companies and brands invest in research and development for fit technologies to see which ones work best for them and their customers.

“And don’t get disappointed when they don’t see the results right away. This type of technology integration is more of a long-term play,” she said.

Lingerie and [swimwear](#) brand Adore Me is no stranger to testing out new concepts. In addition to the brand’s Zoom fitting sessions, Adore Me allows shoppers to order from the web site, try on at home and return what they don’t like. They can also elect for Adore Me to curate a box of looks for them.

Hermand-Waiche said it’s a difficult model to execute, but one that is worth the return.

“You have to handle an extremely high level of returns,” he said. “Also, to do it well, you have to be very strong at curation. You have to make sure that your customers feel good about the experience, the same way she would in a store with a sales rep, helping fill her basket with suggestions. And those suggestions need to be extremely accurate. There’s a lot of algorithms behind that to make a match. But generally speaking, people like to try on clothes from home.”

Shoppers at Soma, the intimates brand owned by Chico’s FAS, have a choice between [the SomaInnofit bra](#) — a sports bra-like top with a computerized chip that connects a women’s measurements to a store associate from anywhere — and video fit sessions, called Style Connect, which can be done via e-mail, [social media](#) or text message.

Executives on [Chico’s most recent conference call](#) said the Style Connect tool helped all of its brands — including White House Black Market and TellTale — triple their online sales volume during the most recent quarter, compared with a year prior. It also helped convert store-only customers to at least part-time digital users.

Vanessa Dusold, senior vice president of merchandising and design at Soma, added that there’s been a slight uptick in the number of people on [social media](#) asking for digital bra fitting since the pandemic began.

“Having a smart bra tool like SomaInnofit allows us to continue to provide customers with personalized service while staying within the social distancing guidelines and is contactless between the bra fit expert and the customer,” Dusold said.

In addition to in-house fit experts who can be reached by phone, e-mail or social media, New York-based [swimwear](#) brand Andie uses an AI-powered fit quiz that asks questions such as: “what do you like most or least about your body?” or “What do you intend to do in the swimsuit?” Unwanted products that are returned are linked back to the consumer’s profile with reasons for the return.

“So the experience keeps getting smarter,” said Melanie Travis, founder and ceo of Andie. She said women who use Andie’s fit quiz are two times more likely to make a purchase than those

who don't take the quiz.

And, like Adore Me, Andie let's shoppers order what they like, try on at home and return unwanted products at no charge.

"You might think it's not good business, because it's so expensive to send things back and forth and the fees," Travis said. "But I think it's good business. Because even if you return your whole basket the first time, as long as it's an easy experience, you'll keep coming back to buy again. And if you have a customer for life, that's a lot more important than any single transaction."

Andie's approach might be part of what explains the brand's massive sales growth, up more than 600 percent year-over-year. Last year the three-year-old digital brand sold just under 200,000 swimsuits and is on track to more than double that amount this year.

Similar to Andie's system, intimates and swimwear e-tailer Shapermint's Fit Predictor asks consumers about other brands they wear along with their respective sizes in each. Based on those results, the Fit Predictor recommends a size.

Since Shapermint implemented the Fit Predictor earlier this year, conversion rates have increased by as much as 8 percent. But so too have other indicators of fit, such as the "Fit as expected" rate (up 10 percent), while return rates have decreased by 1 percent since January.

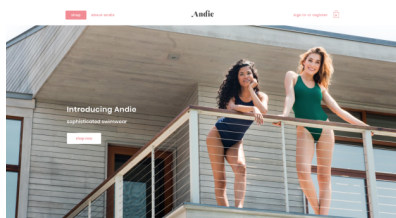
Moreover, Dincer of Intelistyle said virtual reality will play a greater role in keeping consumers engaged and helping them find the best-fitting products post-COVID-19. This will come not just in the form of virtual fitting rooms, but in the supply chain as well. Hence the advent of virtual trade shows and fashion weeks, such as London's first digital [Fashion Week](#) and the upcoming couture and men's shows in Paris and Milan.

Other methods brands can use to help consumers find a better fit include updating the content on a brand's web site to make it more user-friendly. Or, use algorithms to help curate the selection to individual shoppers, so not to inundate them with merchandise options, Couch said.

“Brands are going to have to do a better job of understanding purchase behaviors based on products and then offering technology that helps to resolve those issues,” Couch said. “This may seem cumbersome, but really, what else do brands have to do other than match customers to products efficiently?”

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