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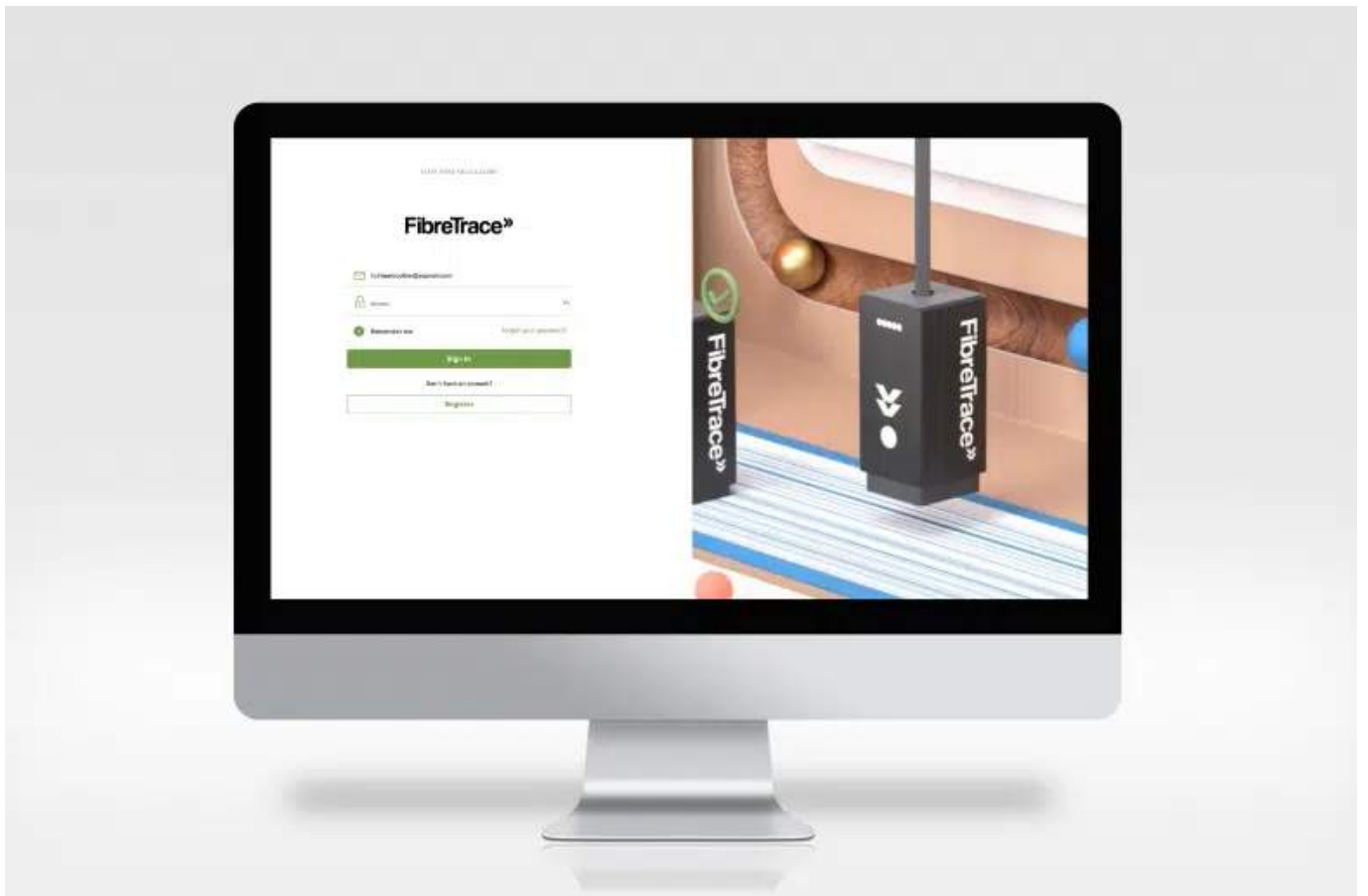
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Deep Dives │ Fashion

Brands Can Start Tracing Their Supply Chain with FibreTrace's Free Blockchain Platform

by Megan Doyle   │   Jan 17, 2023

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Without visibility over their value chains, it's incredibly difficult for brands to ensure that the sustainable material they get is what they've paid a premium for. Fibers can be

fraudulently mixed throughout the manufacturing process, especially as organic and other certified materials become more in demand.

According to Fashion Revolution's 2022 Fashion Transparency Index, 250 of the world's biggest brands scored an average of just 21% on the traceability of their supply chains across manufacturing, processing facilities, and raw materials. No longer is this just a reputational risk — new legislation is cracking down on brands that don't make traceability a priority in 2022.

Now, Australian-owned company FibreTrace is launching its new traceability solution, MAPPED, and offering brands the ability to start their traceability journey for free.

Introducing Traceability Tech Company FibreTrace

In 2017, Danielle Statham and her husband David joined forces with inventor Paul Stenning to build FibreTrace as a solution to trace cotton back to the farm level and prove the provenance of each fiber. It started with a physical tracer solution inspired by the anti-counterfeiting security measures built into passports and cash. FibreTrace VERIFIED embeds an indestructible luminescent pigment into fibers at the raw materials stage so that handheld scanners that sit throughout the supply chain can read it — even if the material is recycled.

"Our mission is to build a platform where every fiber tells a story," says Shannon Mercer, chief executive of FibreTrace. The company started out with a focus on cotton but has since expanded to cover a range of natural and man-made fibers.

To tackle the unauthorized blending of fibers, such as organic with conventional cotton, FibreTrace scanners have a built-in light that indicates whether or not the fibers have been tampered with. "It can pick up whether or not [the pigment] is in there, and the lights on the scanner dilute if the illegal blending has occurred. If you've mixed different cotton in, the intensity of the signal drops, and we can inform the brand that this isn't what it's supposed to be."

Currently, FibreTrace works with cotton farms, gins, and mills in Australia, the U.S., and India, with expansion plans for Turkey and Brazil. For man-made fibers like viscose and recycled polyester, the company has a presence in Vietnam, Indonesia, India, and Europe.

Trace Your Supply Chain for Free with MAPPED

For sustainability and production managers, traceability can be an expensive and time-consuming headache to attempt manually. Prior to the emergence of digital sustainability platforms, brands would attempt to keep track of their supply chain through a mix of paper forms, spreadsheets, and email chains. This creates a disconnected web of documentation that quickly spirals out of a company's control as they attempt to trace more products and materials.

FibreTrace is expanding into digital traceability with its new MAPPED platform, which streamlines the complex task of tracking products from fiber through to retail. "It's a Chain-of-Custody software platform that digitally tracks and maps products, certificates, purchase orders, shipping documentation and more," explains Mercer. "It uses blockchain to record those processes to provide an irrefutable ledger of what has occurred in the supply chain."

MAPPED is a universal system that can house all of a brand's information in one place. "Once you have uploaded your company details, you can start being transparent by inviting the next person in the supply chain and the next person to them on any given order," says Mercer. "It helps you build out the movement of your products — think of a relay race where you hand the baton to the next person."

The platform is based on three stages of traceability: *Good*, *Better*, and *Best*. The entry-level solution, what Mercer calls *Good*, allows brands to map their supply chains for free to kickstart their traceability journey for a year.* "Giving it away for free removes those barriers to entry and can help any brand from a tiny start-up to an enterprise client in the first step of mapping their supply chain."

However, blockchain-supported supplier mapping alone is not a silver bullet, it has to be backed up by supplier auditing and physical traceability too. "One of the biggest [misconceptions] is around blockchain — people think if something is on the blockchain it's got to be right," says Mercer. "But if it's self-reported data, all you've done is verify that the data is wrong." The next step, *Better*, helps brands to audit their suppliers to ensure the accuracy of data input into the system. It requires every player in the supply chain to verify what they receive from the supplier before them, flagging any data discrepancies in real-time.

Once a brand has begun auditing its suppliers, the *Best* solution fuses digital traceability with FibreTrace® VERIFIED's physical tracer technology at the raw fiber point, bringing all the data collection and storage in-house.

The free service will be offered until 31st December 2023, at which point the number of digital audit credits available to free accounts will be limited.

The Business Case for Traceability

Traceability is no longer a voluntary nice-to-have addition — it's a must-have. "What's happening now is that there is actually a financial burden if you don't have traceability,"

says Mercer.

While fashion lagged behind many other industries in legislation for years, it's finally catching up. Laws impacting fashion brands include the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which aims to prevent cotton produced using Uyghur forced labor in China from entering the U.S., and the French Duty of Vigilance law, which requires companies to identify social and environmental risks in their supply chains. If they don't comply, brands face huge fines and costly shipment delays.

FibreTrace MAPPED has a consumer portal that allows brands to easily share product information with customers, too. "We allow brands to turn on and off the amount of information they want," he says. "If they just want to turn on the mapping component they can, if they want to turn on the additional stories about who made their clothes, they can upload that too." Consumers are increasingly demanding transparency when it comes to their clothing. "Traceability shouldn't be seen as a cost — it has far more appeal to consumers than we think," says Mercer.

He says that one FibreTrace client, the Los Angeles brand Reformation, actually sells their products at a higher premium because of the deep level of traceability they're able to share with customers. "Pioneering companies like Reformation have shifted how they engage the consumer and they've benefitted from having a traceability solution because it builds trust," he says.

Streamlining Traceability for the Future

FibreTrace wants to become a one-stop shop for the digital sustainability needs of its brands and suppliers by replacing third-party auditing schemes. Offering auditing in-house could help brands to declutter the number of certifications they have to maintain. "You have to ask yourself, do I really need to get an organic cotton certificate when this platform is an auditor and will tell me through technology what this fiber is, for free?" Mercer says.

In an increasingly saturated market of digital traceability platforms, FibreTrace sees its dual expertise across both physical and digital solutions as an edge against competitors. "We don't want to be just another software platform for someone else to put more data into. We are building our technology stack in a way that can integrate with any other partner so that all of that data can come in and then we start to build out an industry standard for traceability."

Traceability is heading for fashion, whether brands are ready or not. Taking the first step with a solution like MAPPED gives brands the opportunity to start slow, without barriers or the cost of entry, and build out an understanding of their supply chains. Whether you want to ensure your brand meets compliance standards or be able to confidently tell your

customers more about your products, FibreTrace's new solution is a good place to start your traceability journey.

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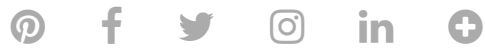☐   EcoCult NYC

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