

Euromonitor International Interview Series: Liz Tilatti, Co-Founder & CEO of ZipFit Denim

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Having found her knack for helping people find jeans at an early age, Liz began ZipFit Denim with the mission of finding the perfect pair of denim for everybody, wherever they may be. We discussed with Liz company's disruptive

business model, personalisation, convenience, and denim's role in an increasingly casual American workplace.

About ZipFit Denim

What is ZipFit Denim?

We believe everybody should be able to feel their best exactly as they are. We find the perfect fitting denim for every *body*, shape and size there is. We can fit anybody who walks through our door, and we pride ourselves on that. We carry every size that is made and with our tailoring techniques can make pants work for anyone.

We don't operate as traditional retail. Instead, we carry samples for you to try on in a fitting, and then we sync with our partner brands to give you options to all the colours they have in stock. We are not limited to what we physically have but instead have access to any colour made and available. The jeans you want are then tailored according to your measurements and delivered straight to you.

When was the service launched?

We began by testing a few different pop-up models, the first of which opened in October 2012 at The Shops at North Bridge in Chicago, IL.

How has the company grown since then?

We now serve the larger Chicago area. We have many partners throughout the city, ranging from offices to office buildings to residential buildings. We are everywhere! Some of our customers see us during the day at their office buildings, and then again at their condo building in the evening. Beyond Chicago, our team travels throughout the country for fittings. We host events in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, among many other cities. Our Chicago showroom is by appointment six days a week.

In general, we help our customers find the perfect fitting denim wherever it is most convenient for them.

Who is your target market?

We target customers who are looking for premium denim but don't have a lot of time to shop. They need tailoring or have specific challenges in regard to finding the right fit. Our customers value the convenience of ZipFit and don't want to have to go to the tailor over and over again.

How do you determine which brands to partner with and which products to offer customers?

We believe everybody should be able to find clothes that fit, so we make sure that we can fit anyone who uses our service by having a variety of fits and sizes available that will work for many different body types. The key for us is to make sure that we pick the brands that offer those unique fits so that everyone can feel amazing in their jeans.

Who is your primary competition and what do you do to compete?

I think any retailer who sells similar jeans would be competitive. Our delivery time with personalised tailoring is two weeks. If you're looking for perfect fitting denim to have as a wardrobe staple, then we are the perfect place for you. The access, the variety, the simplicity and the saved measurements all help us stay competitive.

How do you differentiate your service from department stores that offer complimentary tailoring?

Part of our service is that we'll fit you where it's convenient, whether that's your residential building, your office building, or right in your office. We also save your measurements, so every time you order from us that is all already on file.

Denim in the Workplace

Can you comment on the denim category in the US as a whole?

In the past year, we have seen a lot of larger, more formal firms beginning to allow denim in the workplace. The common phrase we've heard is "dress for your day," and with that comes the ability for employees to wear jeans. You may have seen announcements that EY, William Blair and Goldman Sachs now allow jeans. In general, jeans are now acceptable in the workplace. At the same time, no one wants their employees to wear 20-year-old jeans with holes in them, especially at the office. For that reason, American consumers are moving towards a more tailored fit that is work appropriate.

Are most of your customers buying denim specifically to wear to work?

Many of our customers wear jeans to work, especially darker washes. With more conservative firms we suggest dark blue or black denim. If it's a hip tech firm, of course they can wear a light wash or a white destructed jean.

For some office clients, we provide information sessions or "lunch and learns" about what's appropriate to wear in the workplace. For example, you may love the destructed jeans, but you cannot wear these to your law firm.

Have you found a gap in understanding as to what is and is not appropriate to wear to work?

Yes, I think there is, and it's also hard for some companies because rules can be abused, and nobody wants to be the jeans police! That's why they work with us, because not only are we able to find their employees the best-fitting jeans, but we are also able to communicate what is and is not appropriate through these information sessions.

What do you see for the future of denim in the US?

It's becoming more prevalent in the workforce, which is one of the biggest things we'll see over the next couple of years. In general, a lot of the jeans we're selling right now are softer and stretchier, although there are still some waves of stiffer denim or more durable denim. Almost all of our jeans are made in the US. I believe that denim will continue to be a staple in the American closet, but, just like a suit, it should be

tailored.

Empowering Female Entrepreneurs

What is a personal goal of yours beyond ZipFit Denim?

I don't know if you've seen any of the statistics out there, but around 2% of venture capital dollars go to female founders or female-run companies, which is really, really low. I believe it's moving in the right direction, but it still has a long journey ahead. However, we are seeing more and more success stories from women in Chicago. As we believe everybody - man, woman and everything in between - should be able to find clothes that fit, I believe the same thing should happen when you're starting a company, to not be judged based on sex, race, ethnicity, anything. I want to do anything I can to help that cause.

Is there a strong network of female entrepreneurs in Chicago?

Yes, I call it small and mighty.

For further questions or comments please contact Ayako Homma at Ayako.Homma@euromonitor.com and Benjamin Schneider at Benjamin.Schneider@euromonitor.com



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