

Clothing Brand Launch Checklist

The sequence that gets a UK private label brand from legal setup to first delivery — 68 action items across six phases, in the order they actually depend on each other.

68 6 20–26

ACTION ITEMSPHASESWEEKS TO LAUNCH

Most clothing brands miss their launch date. Not because they ran out of time. Because they ran out of sequence.

Manufacturing depends on sampling. Sampling depends on a tech pack. A tech pack depends on a fabric decision. A fabric decision depends on a cost model. Miss one dependency and the whole launch timeline collapses forward.

This checklist is the sequence. Work through it in order. Nothing skippable.

SUMMARY

- A clothing brand launch has six sequential phases — each must be substantially complete before the next begins
- The most common launch failure is starting Phase 3 (manufacturing) before Phase 2 (product development) is finished
- Allow 20–26 weeks minimum from a standing start to first delivery for a UK private label launch
- 68 action items across six phases, each with a clear completion state

PHASE	DURATION	DEPENDENCY
Phase 1 Legal & Business Setup	1–3 weeks	None — start here
Phase 2 Product Development	4–8 weeks	Phase 1 complete
Phase 3 Manufacturing	12–18 weeks	Phase 2 complete
Phase 4 Brand & Digital	4–8 weeks	From Phase 3, Week 4
Phase 5 Pre-Launch Marketing	6–8 weeks	Phase 4 substantially complete
Phase 6 Launch Week	1–2 weeks	Phase 3 delivery confirmed
Total minimum		20–26 weeks

01 Legal and Business Setup

COMPLETE BEFORE ANY PRODUCT SPEND · 1–3 WEEKS

Business Structure

- ☐ Decision made: sole trader vs limited company (limited company recommended for brand protection and investor readiness)
- ☐ Limited company registered at Companies House — £100 online, same-day processing
- ☐ Business bank account opened in company name
- ☐ Bookkeeping software set up (Xero, QuickBooks, or FreeAgent)
- ☐ VAT registration assessed — mandatory above £90,000 rolling 12-month turnover

Intellectual Property

- ☐ Brand name researched — checked against the UKIPO register
- ☐ UK trademark application filed — Class 25 (clothing), £205 UKIPO fee for one class (from 1 April 2026), ~4 months to registration if uncontested
- ☐ Domain name secured — .co.uk and .com minimum
- ☐ Social media handles secured across all target platforms before brand name is public

Legal Documents

- ☐ Privacy Policy drafted and reviewed — UK GDPR compliant
- ☐ Terms and Conditions drafted for e-commerce store
- ☐ Returns Policy drafted — 14-day cancellation right under the Consumer Contracts Regulations 2013
- ☐ Cookie policy in place if website collects data
- ☐ Accountant or bookkeeper engaged

02 Product Development

COMPLETE BEFORE APPROACHING A MANUFACTURER · 4–8 WEEKS

Product Definition

- ☐ Hero style confirmed — one style, one fabric family, one target customer occasion
- ☐ Target retail price (RRP) confirmed
- ☐ Unit cost target calculated — minimum 55% gross margin at launch MOQ
- ☐ Size range confirmed for launch — start narrow, expand on reorder
- ☐ Launch colourway confirmed — one colourway only for first run

Tech Pack

- ☐ Tech pack brief written — garment type, construction approach, key measurements
- ☐ Tech pack designer engaged — freelance (£150–£500 per style) or in-house
- ☐ Technical flat drawings completed — front, back, detail views
- ☐ Measurements and size specifications documented
- ☐ Fabric specification confirmed — weight, composition, certification requirements
- ☐ Construction details specified — seam type, stitch density, hem finish
- ☐ Label and trim placement confirmed
- ☐ Artwork files prepared — print, embroidery, or woven label artwork
- ☐ Tech pack reviewed and approved — every field complete before sending to factory

Fabric and Trims

- ☐ Fabric sourced or confirmed from factory stock
- ☐ Fabric sample ordered and assessed — weight, hand feel, drape, colour
- ☐ Trim specifications confirmed — zips, buttons, elastic, hardware
- ☐ Woven label design approved — fibre content, care instructions, origin, brand name
- ☐ Swing tag designed
- ☐ Packaging spec confirmed — polybag, tissue, mailer box or equivalent

Compliance

- ☐ Fibre content label compliant with the Textile Products (Labelling and Fibre Composition) Regulations 2012
- ☐ Care instruction symbols confirmed — ISO 3758 standard
- ☐ Country of manufacture label confirmed — required on all UK garments
- ☐ Sustainability claims verified and documented — GOTS, OEKO-TEX, WRAP if applicable

Manufacturer Selection

- ☐ Manufacturer type confirmed — CMT or full-service
- ☐ Shortlist of three UK manufacturers identified — UKFT member directory is a good starting reference
- ☐ Initial enquiry sent with tech pack, target MOQ, and timeline
- ☐ Quotes received and compared — unit cost, MOQ, sampling cost, lead time
- ☐ Reference check completed — production examples at your volume tier
- ☐ Manufacturer selected and confirmed

Sampling

- ☐ NDA signed before tech pack is shared
- ☐ Sampling deposit paid — amount confirmed in writing
- ☐ Proto sample submitted and reviewed against tech pack
- ☐ Proto feedback sent to factory in writing — annotated images, numbered list
- ☐ Fit sample produced and assessed on correct body
- ☐ Fit sample feedback documented and sent — no verbal-only feedback
- ☐ Pre-production (PP) sample produced in confirmed production fabric and trims
- ☐ PP sample reviewed and approved against tech pack
- ☐ PP sample sealed — brand signs, factory countersigns, reference number allocated
- ☐ PP sample reference number included in purchase order

Production

- ☐ Purchase order drafted — price, MOQ, payment schedule, lead time, QC standard, PP reference, IP clause
- ☐ Purchase order signed by both parties
- ☐ Production deposit paid — typically 50%
- ☐ Production start date confirmed in writing
- ☐ Mid-production QC check scheduled — ~30% through run
- ☐ Mid-production QC completed — results documented
- ☐ Final QC completed against sealed PP sample
- ☐ Balance payment made on QC approval — not on despatch
- ☐ Delivery confirmed — address, courier, tracking

Labels and Packaging

- ☐ Woven labels ordered before production begins
- ☐ Swing tags printed and delivered
- ☐ Tissue, polybags, mailer boxes ordered and delivered
- ☐ All packaging received before delivery of production run

If you're at the manufacturer selection stage and need to confirm unit costs and lead times, speak to the Silk Routes team before finalising your purchase order — see silkroutes.co.uk/clothing-manufacturing-services/

Brand Identity

- ☐ Brand name finalised — trademark application filed or pending
- ☐ Logo design complete — primary, secondary, favicon
- ☐ Brand colour palette confirmed — HEX, RGB, CMYK documented
- ☐ Typography selected — primary and secondary typefaces
- ☐ Brand guidelines documented — minimum one-page style guide

E-Commerce Store

- ☐ Platform selected — Shopify recommended for DTC clothing brands
- ☐ Domain connected to store
- ☐ Theme selected and customised — mobile-first review essential
- ☐ Product pages set up — title, description, size guide, care instructions
- ☐ Shipping rates configured — UK standard, express, international
- ☐ Payment gateway connected and tested
- ☐ Returns, privacy, and cookie policy pages live
- ☐ Terms and conditions live
- ☐ Email capture form live — pop-up or footer
- ☐ Email marketing platform connected — Klaviyo or Mailchimp
- ☐ Welcome email sequence set up — minimum three emails
- ☐ Store tested on mobile — product page, checkout, confirmation email

Product Photography

- ☐ Photographer booked — half day minimum for a single-style launch
- ☐ Styling brief prepared — model, location, props, lighting
- ☐ Shot list confirmed — front, back, detail, lifestyle, flat lay
- ☐ Photography completed and edited
- ☐ Images uploaded — minimum four per product variant
- ☐ Images sized and compressed for web — under 500KB

Audience Building

- ☐ Instagram account live — bio, link, highlight covers set up
- ☐ TikTok account live if target audience is under 35
- ☐ Content calendar created — minimum 4 weeks of posts before launch
- ☐ Behind-the-scenes content filmed and edited
- ☐ Pre-launch countdown content planned
- ☐ Email waitlist promoted — target minimum 200 subscribers
- ☐ Pre-launch giveaway or offer defined

Influencer and PR

- ☐ Micro-influencer shortlist built — 5-10 accounts, 5k-50k followers
- ☐ Gifting brief prepared — product, brand story, content guidelines
- ☐ Gifting packages sent — arriving 2 weeks before launch
- ☐ Press contacts identified
- ☐ Press release drafted — 300 words, launch date, image attached
- ☐ Press release sent — 3-4 weeks before launch date

Paid Advertising

- ☐ Meta Business Manager set up
- ☐ Pixel / Conversion API installed on store
- ☐ Awareness campaign prepared — creative, audience, budget, dates
- ☐ Retargeting campaign prepared
- ☐ Budget confirmed — minimum £300 for 30 days; £600-£1,000 for meaningful data

Pre-Launch (Days -7 to -1)

- ☐ Stock received and quality checked against PP sample
- ☐ All units packed and ready for despatch
- ☐ Store set to password-protected with coming-soon page
- ☐ Email to waitlist scheduled
- ☐ Social posts scheduled — minimum three across channels
- ☐ Influencer content confirmed for launch day
- ☐ Ad campaigns set to launch on launch day
- ☐ Shipping labels system tested
- ☐ Customer service email set up and monitored
- ☐ Analytics tracking confirmed

Launch Day

- ☐ Store password removed — site goes live
- ☐ Email to waitlist sent at launch time
- ☐ Social posts published
- ☐ Ads activated
- ☐ First orders monitored — checkout, confirmation, payment
- ☐ First despatch completed — same day or next working day

Post-Launch (Days +1 to +7)

- ☐ Daily sell-through tracked
- ☐ Customer feedback monitored
- ☐ Ad performance reviewed daily
- ☐ Email open and click rates reviewed
- ☐ Reorder trigger assessed — on track for 60%+ in 90 days?
- ☐ Factory reorder conversation initiated if on track

"The timeline above is the minimum. Compressing it creates risk, not speed." — Silk Routes Manufacturing Team

Common Launch Mistakes

1. Starting manufacturing before the tech pack is complete

A manufacturer working from an incomplete brief produces a sample to their assumptions, adding four to six weeks of correction rounds. **Fix:** the tech pack must be 100% complete before any manufacturer is approached.

2. Ordering packaging after production is delivered

Mailer boxes take three weeks to print — ordering late delays despatch even after stock arrives. **Fix:** order all packaging at the point of production confirmation, not on delivery.

3. Building the store after photography

Shooting without a confirmed brand palette produces images that need reshooting later. **Fix:** finalise brand identity before booking the photographer.

4. Launching without an email list

Zero subscribers means total dependence on expensive, inefficient cold paid ads. **Fix:** build the waitlist six to eight weeks before launch.

5. No reorder reserve in the launch budget

A brand that spends its entire budget on the first run can't reorder a style that sells through. **Fix:** reserve 25-30% of budget as a reorder fund.

FAQ

How long does it take to launch a clothing brand from scratch?

A realistic minimum is 20 to 26 weeks from legal setup to first delivery and store live. The longest stage is manufacturing — sampling (8-12 weeks) plus production (4-6 weeks).

Can I launch a clothing brand in 3 months?

Only with a print-on-demand model. For genuine private label manufacturing, three months isn't enough for sampling alone — the shortest realistic timeline is 12-14 weeks with a completed tech pack and confirmed manufacturer already in place.

Do I need a limited company to launch a clothing brand?

No — sole trader is possible. But a limited company gives liability protection and credibility with manufacturers and buyers. Registration costs £100 online through Companies House and takes 24 hours.

What's the most commonly skipped item on a launch checklist?

The sealed pre-production sample. Without it, you have no contractual quality reference — and no basis to reject a production run that deviates from what you expected.

When should I approach wholesale buyers?

After your first run has sold through at least 60% at full retail price. That's the commercial evidence that shows a buyer you can supply, not just design.

Ready to confirm your manufacturing timeline before you set your launch date?

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