

LION BRAND YARN

# Lion Brand Yarn Keeps Tabs on Its Sample Inventory

---

## Solution Overview

### Industry

Apparel

### Application

Inventorying and tracking sample items available for loan

### Teklynx Software Products

Data Collection Software  
BACKTRACK®

### Partner

Data support Inc., Nanuet, NY - USA

---

***Innovative tracking solution for sample crafts and knitted goods and crocheted items relies on BACKTRACK® asset and inventory tracking system.***

---

*The ability to efficiently promote products is essential in the craft and yarn industry. This requires the development, inventorying and distribution of innovative samples by top designers. The management of samples becomes a major marketing component that can directly influence a company's success. Lion Brand Yarns of New York City confronted this issue by instituting an entirely new way of controlling its sample inventory using the BACKTRACK asset and inventory tracking system.*

---

Lion Brand Yarn Company, the oldest American yarn brand, has been an innovator for all of its 124 years. The family owned business continues to create new products, offering more than 25 types of yarn in a rainbow of colors. It also innovates by finding new ways of conducting business. Lion Brand has taken advantage of technology in many ways. One example is its Web site, ([www.lionbrand.com](http://www.lionbrand.com)), which offers knitting, crocheting and crafts ideas, patterns, samples and a resource of information.

Yet, much of the company's marketing efforts are designed to reach its large network of retailers, including AC Moore, Hobby Lobby, Jo-Ann Stores, Michael's, Wal-Mart, Fred Meyer, Hancock Fabrics, and other leading chains. Lion Brand supports its retailers with a range of marketing programs. One of the ways is by loaning sample items, including garments, projects and crafts for store displays and promotions. In addition, Lion Brand uses samples for sales calls, as well as in items for labels, free pattern leaflets and the mail order catalog and its Web site. They also use samples for knitting and craft magazine articles, trade shows and other industry events.

Nancy Thomas, editorial director, heads up the company's design efforts. Thomas explains, "The sample program was created to give consumers ideas about ways

to use Lion Brand yarns. Whether it's to make garments, projects for the home, or knitted or crocheted items, it helps a lot to be able to envision the finished product even before looking for patterns and supplies." By using various channels of distribution, Lion Brand is able to reach a wide audience of both retailers and consumers.

In order to support this marketing effort, the company commissions designers to create innovative projects. The company has more than 800 garment, project and craft samples on hand. This inventory must be cataloged and tracked as it is loaned out. The inventory control challenge is complicated by the fact that item selections may be based on garment type, yarn type, color, designer or a range of other criteria. Managing this inventory became a major headache.

### **Manual approach not up to the task**

When Thomas joined Lion Brand in 2000, there were far fewer samples and an antiquated, manual logging system in place. The staff tagged items, but finding a sample was difficult. Even determining if an item had been loaned out was difficult and time consuming. The assistant keeping track of the items was the only person who understood the system and could easily find those items.

"When company management decided to substantially increase the number of sample items, adding 500 items in 2001 alone, it became clear that we needed a new system that gave access to everybody in marketing. We needed a flexible, easy-to-use tracking system that would identify the garment and collect a lot of other important information," said Thomas.

After a few months of studying the problem, Thomas and her team understood the parameters and knew what they wanted the new system to do. That's when she contacted Tom McDonald at Data Support Inc. of Nanuet, N.Y., who specializes in developing inventory management and asset tracking systems. Together, they worked out the specifications for a sample tracking system.

They designed the system to enable Thomas and her staff to locate items by description, yarn, tracking number, designer, skill level or other parameters. In addition, the tracking system had to have links to other source materials, such as the instructions, and diagrams and supplies needed. Finally, Thomas wanted to be able to include a digital picture of the item as part of each database record so that it would be easy for anyone on the staff to distinguish between similar items.

McDonald recommended the BACKTRACK asset and inventory tracking software package from TEKLYNX® International. He designed the system using five existing personal computers running Microsoft Windows NT and a laser printer. The labels have product descriptor information in both barcode and normal text formats. This use of off-the-shelf technology allowed Lion Brand to take advantage of its existing computers and network with minimal expense and no impact on the department's standard office and e-mail activities. A handheld scanner is used to read barcoded labels as items are checked in and out.

### **Current inventory presents a challenge**

There was a large time investment required to enter all of the samples into the database, however. Since the old approach was manual, each item had to be typed in. The assistant started by adding the 500 new designs, as they became available. Then she began adding all of the samples from previous years. "Our biggest challenge has been to enter all of the existing stock from before we started the project," said Thomas. "One person is responsible for entering all of the information. She fills in an on-screen form that specifies a unique identifier number, the designer, yarn type, such as HS for Homespun®, yarn color like Tudor or Windsor Blue, and a specific product name, such as "cardigan" or "throw." This takes a little time, but once it's entered, we're in business."

The system then generates a label tag. One side of the tag has a barcode that can be read by a scanner to check the item in or out. The other side of the label has a text description of the product with the designer name and other pertinent information, such as yarn and needle specifications. The label is laminated and is attached with a normal plastic tab.

In addition to serving as an item tracker, the BACKTRACK system also serves as the central repository for information on the item. The record is connected to two sets of instructions in separate Microsoft Word files. The first set is the directions provided by the designer. The second set is a technically edited version that is prepared by Lion Brand's internal technical editors. The tech editing finds errors, standardizes formatting and assures consistency. The sample tracking database also has built-in links to Microsoft Excel files for diagrams and illustrations.

"All of these attached files have to be properly indexed and absolutely correct," said Thomas. "Our sample database is the source for the patterns that consumers

**For More Information**

For more information about Teklynx products or services, please visit our Web site or call us at (414) 577-3900 in the US or Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact Teklynx at +33 562-601-080. To access information via the World Wide Web, go to:

Web Resources:

[www.teklynx.com](http://www.teklynx.com)

[www.lionbrand.com](http://www.lionbrand.com)

[www.barcodebook.com](http://www.barcodebook.com)

© 2002 Braton Groupe sarl. All rights reserved.

This case study is for informational purposes only. TEKLYNX MAKES NO WARRANTIES, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, IN THIS SUMMARY. BACKTRACK is a registered trademark of Braton Groupe sarl or its affiliated companies. Other product and company names mentioned herein may be the trademarks of their respective owners.

May 2002

use. We keep the original directions from the designer and the tech edited version as part of the database to make it easy to double check directions if a problem arises.”

**Sample program streamlined**

Now, anyone on the marketing staff can easily search by yarn, color, item number, designer name or other criteria. For instance, they could search to find all the items made with Homespun yarn or other specific descriptors. “There are occasions when we want to know how many cardigan samples we have in Wool-Ease® in the color Wheat, for instance. Now we can easily search against those criteria,” said Thomas. “Or, sometimes, since designers do some things that are quite distinct, we can search by the designer. It saves a lot of time and effort.”

The staff now knows exactly where each item is and they can easily scan the barcode to check it in or out. An added feature is a comments area in the record that allows them to record all of the uses for each item. In this way, the staff avoids sending the same or a similar item to a magazine for a photo shoot, for instance, or they can see which catalogs featured the item. The staff now has that information at their fingertips and can also print reports on almost any of the sort criteria used.

Now that the system has been running for a while, they are adding the photos to the records. “We can do quick digital pictures and then replace them with professional pictures when available,” said Thomas. “The picture pops up when we select a record. This makes it easy to be sure that we’ve got the right item.”

“From now on, if there’s a sample from Lion Brand, it most likely would come through our sample tracking system. This single marketing tool helps us to be more efficient and responsive which, in turn, helps increase sales for the company and our retailers.”