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Eve Norridge – How can we decide whether fashion brands MeasureUp?

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This blogpost was contributed by Eve Norridge, founder of MeasureUp.org.uk.

Rarely do many months pass by without a new scandal about working conditions in the fashion industry hitting the headlines. The [tragic fire at the Rana Plaza factory](#) in Bangladesh has been one of the most high profile recent examples.

[MeasureUp.org.uk](#) was born out of a desire to shop more responsibly in the face of some of these shocking stories – and out of a frustration at the lack of reliable and easily accessible information out there about how to compare the ethics of different fashion brands.

Human rights ratings of businesses have been designed by a variety of different organisations for a variety of different purposes. MeasureUp was designed primarily with consumers in mind. In just a few minutes, users can quickly and easily check how dozens of brands measure up against ten simple indicators.

The indicators provide a picture of how the companies treat workers in their global supply chain. They look at points such as whether companies have an ethical code of conduct, how transparent they are in telling us where their goods are made and how they check up on their supplier factories.

We have chosen initially to focus on the conditions of workers in factories, although we hope that at some point in the future we may have the resources to expand MeasureUp to consider environmental issues as well.

We grappled with a number of issues when developing MeasureUp's current ten indicators. There is already a lot of information out there about business ethics and some detailed studies of companies' performance. But what we thought was missing was a quick and easy way for consumers to check and compare the performance of their favourite companies – without having to do three days of research!

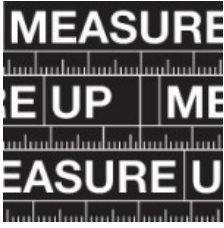
There are already a number of studies that rank companies according to their ethical performance – and often the results of these studies are presented in a simple way. However, when we tried to work out how the researchers had arrived at their conclusions, we found that they usually relied on detailed assessments with complicated weightings given to different factors. Often, there seemed to be many subjective judgements involved and it was not always clear that the information different companies had provided could justifiably lead to a fair comparison.

At MeasureUp our four key aims for our indicators are that they should be:

- **Simple and comparable.** That's why we've chosen questions that can be answered either 'yes' or 'no'.
- **Meaningful and readily understandable.** The indicators should cover key issues that ethical trading experts are talking about but, at the same time, you shouldn't need to be an expert in ethical trading to understand why an indicator is important.
- **Objective.** As mentioned above, we think there are already a lot of studies out there that require consumers to rely on complicated and often subjective assessments made by researchers. Any provision of information always requires some judgements on the part of the provider – but we've done our best to make the information on MeasureUp as objective as we can. As far as possible, the data we've gathered for each company is based purely on the facts and we always state clearly where we got the answer from.
- **An encouragement for companies to get better.** Information is crucial if we're going to make the right choices about where to buy our clothes. If we attack companies too heavily when they do provide information, they may simply stop providing it in future. We also risk penalising companies that are being more open about their ethical standards. So, for example, if we looked at the companies that publish their ethical audit results and highlighted the bad scores, we'd be making the companies who've taken the positive step of actually publishing their audit results look worse than the secretive companies who haven't bothered to publish any information about their ethics. We really do not want this to happen! So we've chosen indicators that encourage openness and honesty. These indicators are just a first step. We hope that one day it will be commonplace for every company to publish their ethical audit results. Then we can go to the next level of starting to distinguish between them on the basis of these results.

Of course, the indicators on MeasureUp do not and never will meet these aims perfectly. Attempting to provide information in a simple form inevitably leads to compromises and a focus on some issues at the expense of others. But we have done our best to strike a balance between making the website useful to consumers and fair to companies.

Eve Norridge



MeasureUp is an independent, not-for-profit organisation, funded entirely by donations from individuals. The website is free to use and has no links to any of the fashion brands which it assesses. MeasureUp helps UK consumers compare the ethics of their favourite fashion brands. In just a few minutes, users can quickly and easily check how dozens of brands measure up against ten simple indicators.

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