Stitch Fix stylists reportedly quit in droves as the company leans on algorithms to serve customers

Stitch Fix stylists — who choose outfits for its customers — quit in droves after the company ended its flexible scheduling policy, according to a new report from *BuzzFeed News*. And at least one worker told *BuzzFeed* that employees felt like they were "training the algorithm" which also helps choose customers' clothing, suggesting the company may be heading toward relying more on computer-generated recommendations instead of human stylists.

During a call with investors after its June earnings announcement, new CEO Elizabeth Spaulding (who started the job August 1st) said Stitch Fix stylists "play a very active role in training our machine learning models with our data science team for outfits, which our ability to generate algorithmic outfits in a feed is, we think, a real source of differentiation that requires that human touch to help build

and train those models, as well as quality control."

Stitch Fix is one of several online styling services. Customers take a "quiz" about their personal style, clothing preferences, preferred price range, and sizes, and a stylist picks out clothing based on those preferences which are then shipped to the customer. The customer can choose to keep the clothing and pay for it, or send it back.

The company used to allow its stylists, many of whom work part time remotely, to choose their own schedules. Indeed, as of this writing, Stitch Fix's careers page says its stylists "love the flexibility to set a work schedule that fits into their daily lifestyle."

But earlier this month, *Modern Retail* reported that the company told employees via internal message that it was making changes, and that part-time stylists had to be available to work a minimum of 20 hours per week, between 8AM and 8PM local time. There was no guarantee the workers would get 20 hours weekly, however. Previously, stylists could indicate how many hours they would commit to working on a given day, but with the changes, Stitch Fix required that they specify exactly when they would work those hours.

According to the internal message, stylists had the option of committing to the new schedule rules or resigning and receiving an "exit payment" of $1,000 if they signed a nondisclosure agreement. About 1,500 stylists left after the updated policy was announced, *BuzzFeed* reported, roughly a third of its stylists.

Stitch Fix said in June it generated $535.6 million in revenue in its third quarter, up 44 percent from the year prior, and grew its active client count 20 percent to 4.1 million people.

The stylists who spoke to *BuzzFeed* said they noticed more customer orders being sent out with items chosen completely by an algorithm, with a human stylist involved only to write a

note to the customer or if a customer complained. “We knew from the beginning we were teaching the algorithm,” one stylist told the outlet.

Stitch Fix did not confirm how many stylists have quit over the new schedule rules, but said in a statement emailed to *The Verge* that its stylists were “instrumental in building relationships with clients and creating the highly personalized experience Stitch Fix is known for.” The changes to operations, the statement reads, will allow the company to “better align with when and how clients will most likely want to connect” with stylists. “These changes, made in conjunction with our broader future of work plans, also support our DEI efforts and allow us to grow our teams in new markets and in new ways.”

Update August 20th 12:17PM ET: *Added comment from Stitch Fix*

https://www.theverge.com/2021/8/20/22633846/stitch-fix-stylists-quit-algorithm-customers-schedules