



Our business started as many do, from personal experience. My co-founder was training for his black belt in judo at a place called the Kodokan in Tokyo. It was the middle of summer and each day he'd return from hours of training with a blood-stained, wet, smelly gi, which he'd complain about having to get clean and dry again for the next day.

If you've ever trained in judo, jiu jitsu, karate, aikido or any other martial art, you'll have experienced the joys of wearing and owning one of these!



Traditional gi are made from heavy, double-weave cotton. They're used in the execution of moves and are designed to withstand repeated grabbing and pulling. They have multiple areas of reinforcement for durability, centimetre thick lapels, and weigh around 3-4kg. Dry.

The problem with them, is that they're notorious for being hot, heavy, and cumbersome to wear. They don't breathe, they retain odour and moisture, they shrink, fade, and rip. This impacts player performance, recovery, and enjoyment.

It's been the same
for 100 years ...

Largely due to tradition, these uniforms have been the same for 100 years!

Apart from the introduction of a blue gi around the time of the Sydney Olympics - which was to distinguish between contestants rather than aid player performance - there has been no real innovation in the category.

Every other major sport in the world has performance apparel and gear ... we figured it was time the world's most demanding contact sports did too!

So our idea was a simple one. To design and make a range of breathable, lightweight performance gi. It would all come down to fabric choice.



That's where the simplicity ended.

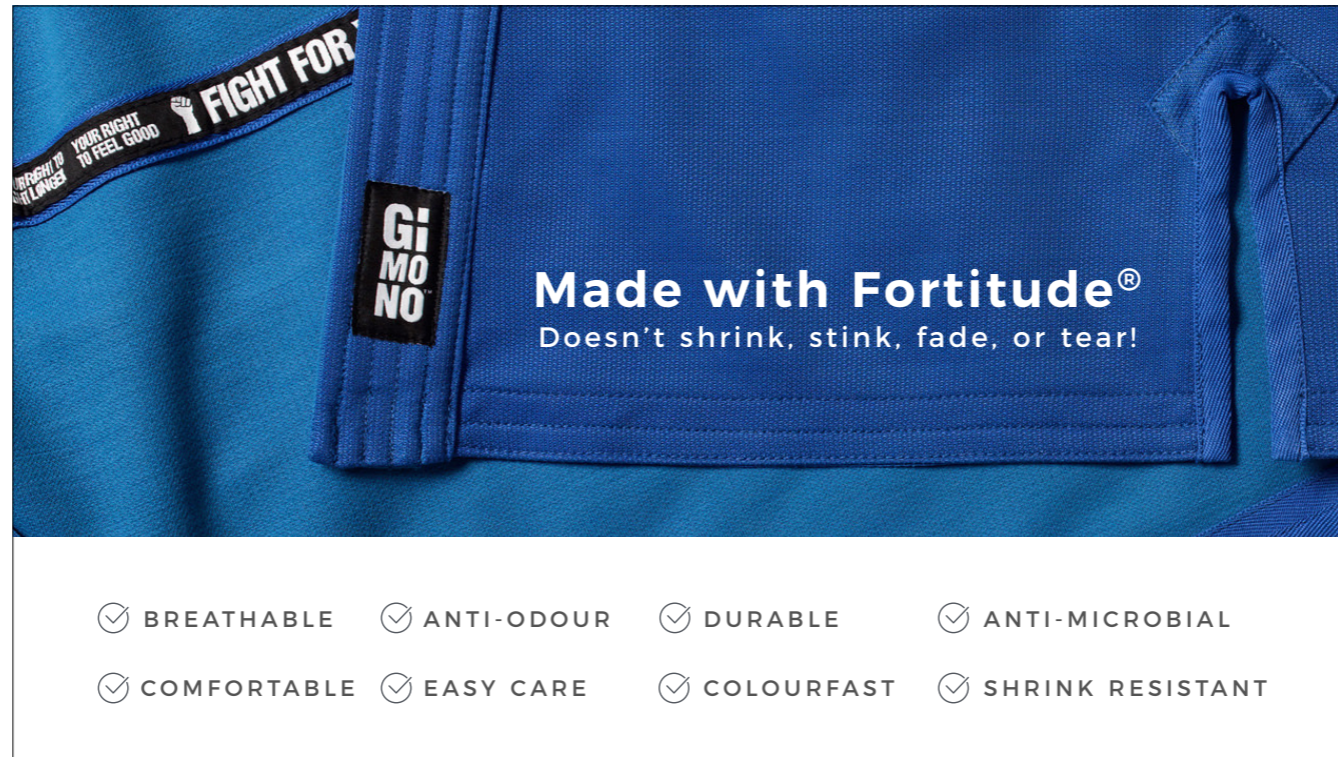
I only have a few minutes in which to distill a five year journey, so I'll cut to the cloth.

We searched worldwide for a suitable fabric to make our gi from, but failed to find anything suitable. We researched hemp, bamboo, organic cotton, kevlar, synthetics etc, but no single fabric met our criteria.

Let's design
our own
fit-for-purpose
textile!

So we decided to develop our own.

We had no experience in textiles or apparel, but it's amazing what you can achieve with single-minded focus. And a little help from friends.



In our case wool scientist friends from AgResearch, who we worked with to design a world first, merino-based fabric technology, which we call Fortitude.

I'm proud to say that we ticked every box on our design brief.

Fortitude is breathable, comfortable, and durable ... and as our tagline says, ... it doesn't shrink, stink, fade or tear!



Now in commercial production for Gimono, our fightwear brand, Fortitude is our secret weapon. Our gi are now being worn by customers all over the world, albeit in small numbers. Our challenge now is to find an affordable way to scale the business globally .. which may mean we end up working with an incumbent rather than trying to do it all ourselves.



For a journey that had no guaranteed outcome we feel we've at least achieved what we set out to.

At a third of the weight and bulk, and around 20 times more breathable, feedback on the product has been great!

As one customer said:

"Wow ... it breathes. It doesn't get wet and soggy. It's light ... temperature constant, doesn't stick to the body restricting movement. Wish I had it years ago."



So what's next for Fortitude?

Well, we're keen to explore licensing and/or sale of the technology for use in other applications.

There are four fabric structures in the range - all merino-based and high performance, but each has a slightly different weight, surface texture, or degree of stretch.

Any sporting uniform or good that requires the unique blend of mechanical and aesthetic performance characteristics offered by Fortitude could benefit.

So if you have an idea, or would just like to know more, get in touch.

FORTITUDE®

Doesn't shrink, stink, fade, or tear!

