



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

'We have incredible American ingenuity on our side'

U.S. sewn products/textile/apparel producers proving their value add to nation

By Devin Steele

Here, in SEAMS' continuing series of stories highlighting some of our members who are rallying around the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) shortage, we are featuring three companies – OnPoint Manufacturing, Printcraft Co. and Gerber Technology – who have answered the call.

As the go-to resource for the sewn products industry, we appreciate those members who are stepping up to address the critical need for these products during the COVID-19 pandemic. As you well know, our industry plays a vital role in the health, safety and well-being of our citizens, and we're excited to call out these incredible efforts. We are proud of you.

If you are a member and would like to be recognized in a forthcoming article, please send your story to dsteele@etextilecommunications.com.

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OnPoint Manufacturing

OnPoint Manufacturing, founded in Florence, Ala., in 2015, decided to pivot into PPE production on a Thursday night and, by Sunday, it had switched its operations into full protective mask production, said J. Kirby Best, founder, president & CEO.

The company, which specializes in on-demand mass customization in a highly automated, advanced production facility, is now primarily making protective face masks but is also producing some hospital gowns and scrubs – all new products for the company, he said.

"As there were no guidelines or examples to follow, our team designed them themselves," Best said. "Since we specialize in one-off products, we felt we were stepping back into the Stone Age. We were carrying bundles around by hand. Masks and gowns are pretty simple products, so the sewing team was up to speed almost instantly. It took a few hours to dial in the cutting. Once the decision was made to transition a large percentage of the plant over, the pros in the plant just ran with it and did an amazing job."

OnPoint started by turning out 3,000 masks per day and is currently up to about 5,000 masks per day, he added. He pointed out that currently, no gaps exist, but he is concerned about fabric supply in the next two months.

The company has remained fully staffed over the last few weeks and is actually seeking to hire more operators, he said.



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“We are doing quite a bit of overtime, but otherwise it is normal,” Best said. “We could hire 10 more sewing operators today if we could find them.”

The company has worked with a combination of industry partners and customers on the PPE project. Once word got out, OnPoint started to quickly receive requests from businesses and healthcare systems that wanted a way to protect their employees, patients and customers, Best said.

“On a larger scale, we have a terrific relationship with (SEAMS’ member) Gerber, which formed a Global PPE Task Force that has brought together more than 600 manufacturers, technology partners and industry coalition partners to make PPE products available broadly around the world,” he added.

Best said he doesn’t know to where final products will be distributed, but it has had two major purchase orders and those two clients have distributed them.

“The team has been delighted to be involved, but there is no question that the concern for others and their families has been a bit overwhelming,” Best said. “It has been an honor to be involved, but we are not doing anything that anyone else in our position wouldn’t have done. Everyone is stepping up. It’s truly heartwarming.”

In the long run, Best said the pandemic has shined a light on the importance of U.S. textile and apparel manufacturing.

“Over the past 30 years the industry has gone through some massive changes,” he said. “We are going through another one again. North America has been myopic in its analysis of the true costs of foreign manufacturing. I hope we pause and take a closer look at these costs. We can’t silo them, so the big picture is ignored, including the environment. We have incredible American ingenuity on our side – now is the time to use it. Stay safe!”

Printcraft Co.

Printcraft Co., established in 1930, specializes in the production of many different forms of tags and labels ranging from garment tags (printed and woven), law tags, heat transfer, poly-film, to thermal transfer and everything in between.

So the Lexington, N.C.-based company has a natural role in the world of PPE production and, as such, is heavily involved in this effort during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Printcraft has been working tirelessly educating ourselves and developing new label products for PPE production,” said Ryan Smith, sales rep. “So many of our cut-and-sew customers as well as all of our military and medical customers have transitioned at least some of their production to help increase supply for PPE. Over the years we have learned that adaption is key to survival, which has encouraged no limitations to specific markets and industries, but yet embrace versatility, change and product developments.”

The company has been working with Bureau Veritas regarding compliance standards for PPE products and labeling.



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“Fortunately, we have stock material spec’d for these pieces and the capacity to handle all needs at this time,” said Smith, whose father Marvin serves as president & CEO of the company.

Printcraft is able to supply any and all labeling necessary for PPE products out of its North Carolina facility and has the capacity for quick-turn orders, he added. Currently, the firm is working with many manufacturers and companies supplying PPE products needed immediately in the market, and Smith said he is looking forward to the continued effort by everyone to help close the supply chain gap.

The company has adjusted employee shifts for certain departments in order to keep everyone working and to keep necessary spacing between employees, he noted. It has implemented these split shifts with safety in mind for all employees, suppliers and customers, he added.

“We have been fortunate to keep our staff employed through these trying times and feel confident we will keep our entire workforce on the back end of this pandemic,” Smith said.

Printcraft supplies printed and woven products to the apparel, home fashions, furniture, medical and military industries and has also dabbled in many others such as automotive, aerospace, food and beverage, forestry, etc. It has partnered with companies such as Standard Textiles, Angelica, Superior Uniform, Prime Medical, Fruit of the Loom, HanesBrands, Gildan and many more.

The company also has “great relationships” and meets frequently with retailers such as Walmart, Target, JC Penny, TJ Maxx Companies and many more, handling their compliance, according to Smith.

“To better understand their needs, we like to partner with our customers and suppliers alike to create stronger relationships over the years,” he said.

Smith said that pitching in on the PPE shortage effort is important for his company and others. “The entire Printcraft team is heavyhearted knowing the damage COVID-19 is causing to families, friends and colleagues worldwide,” he said. “We feel confident that America will come together to defeat this invisible enemy and, once again, prove how strong and tenacious the American people are. From Printcraft Company, please stay safe, healthy and strong through these trying times!”

Gerber Technology

What began as an idea at Gerber Technology quickly blossomed – literally over a weekend – into something big as it relates to addressing the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) shortage.

The Tolland, Conn.-based company provides software and automation solutions that help apparel and industrial customers improve their manufacturing and design processes and more effectively manage and connect the supply chain. So what it did next seemed like a natural fit for companies aiming to transition into PPE production.

Gerber already had recent experience helping to convert Chinese manufacturers into the production of PPE to address the COVID-19 mitigation plans in China. So Lenny Marano, the company’s vice president of Product Management and Marketing, thought it would be a good idea if the company pull



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together some patterns for face masks to make available to its domestic customers as the pandemic was beginning to reach the U.S. in larger proportions last month, he said.

That led to discussions with his colleagues, who advised that Gerber also had patterns and markers available for other PPE products such as medical gowns and Hazmat suits. So, in a matter of a couple of days, Gerber decided to put together the Gerber PPE Task Force and Resource Team to support its global customers and partners as they work to increase production or transition to manufacturing PPE.

Since its launch on March 24, the Task Force has more than 700 people sign up on its Gerber PPE COVID-19 Resource page. There, companies or individuals have a number of services and resources available, such as production-ready patterns, cut files, markers and tech packs; help with the setup of cutter parameters specific to the selected fabrics; training, software, equipment and service technicians to ramp up production; contact information for fellow suppliers and manufacturers through its PPE Manufacturing Matchmaking Program; and more.

“Our PPE COVID-19 Resource Page is a one-stop shop for all the information you need if you're converting over to PPE,” Marano said.

Gerber's global network of technology partners have provided comprehensive expertise and support to build an end-to-end “trusted supply chain” for personal protective equipment, Marano said. Gerber's partners include leading industry companies and associations such as: SEAMS, the National Council of Textile Organizations (NCTO), the American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA), the Sewn Products Equipment Suppliers of America (SPESA), the Industrial Fabrics Association International (IFAI), Elevate Textiles/American & Efid, Coats, Fashion for Frontline, Henderson Sewing Machine Co., Suuchi and Zilingo.

“We built a list of all the material suppliers and various producers that we know from all the different industry associations in which we're affiliated, whether it's SEAMS or SPESA or another group,” Marano said.

As part of the initiative, the company created the Gerber PPE Resource Team made up of dedicated experts who can offer advice, share best practices, support and technology to produce certain types of masks as well as protective apparel and accessories, including raw material procurement and onsite support.

“We've brought in experts from all of our different areas, whether it's multi-ply cutting, spreading, CAD design, tech-pack construction or something else and put them on this Task Force to really act as consultants to our customers as they make this transition,” he said.

Many of its hundreds of employees across the U.S. have pivoted into the PPE world, Marano said. On a daily basis, the company continues to “triage” customers by offering them guidance as well as providing matchmaking services, he added.

“Different manufacturers have different types of capacity for different things,” he said. “Some customers are saying, ‘I have a ton of orders that I can't fill. I can do three-quarters of it by myself but I need 25 percent. Who in my area can I work with that has Gerber equipment that you guys trust and has your software we could partner with to sub-contract it out?’ We also have customers who say, ‘I have 10 cutters but because of the product we have now, we have only 100 sewers. Do you know anybody that has the sewing capacity if I send them the cut business?’ We help with those kind of questions, for example.”

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Gerber also gets questions from companies converting into PPE and are seeking to ramp up production, but they need more equipment, he added.

“So we're working on getting equipment expedited in from our factory in Massachusetts or our factory in Shanghai, and we're trying to get that deployed as quickly as possible,” Marano said. “Then we will manage the installation of it, the support and the parts that go along with that.

“I have a person who works for me that, effective today (Monday), her one mission in life is to just manage all of the PPE equipment orders that we're getting in, from order all the way through installation,” he added. “It requires a full-time person.”

Gerber Technology has an installation base of several thousands of cutters throughout the U.S., so as part of this initiative it decided to develop a pre-packaged set of cutting parameters for all the different types of materials, Marano noted.

“We have put together that suite of tools,” he said. “If you're converting over, we'll give you all of the data you need to get that line converted.

“And then we found that people were looking for guidance on how to get orders, so we ended up getting on FEMA's RFQ for PPE that we forward to our users,” he added. “We put it all in that big resource page.”