



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

SEAMS Member Spotlight: Devium USA

In our latest edition of SEAMS Member Spotlight, [Devium USA](#) is highlighted. Sheri Benjamin, company Founder and “Wrangler-in-Chief,” answers our questions.

Company headquarters: Truckee, CA

Year founded: Flag Day (June 14), 2015

Primary specialties: 100% American-Made men’s vintage-inspired workwear and essentials.

Number of employees: Nine

Brief company history:

“It’s not a particularly pretty founding story, but it’s the real one. The year before we founded Devium, we had spent the prior year designing snowboard outerwear with our development and supply chain wholly in China. (Yes, that China – where they still torture dissidents and disappear political rivals.) Working with China was a lot less expensive. But we felt dead inside.

“So in the end we had a group moral reckoning where we chose to abandon that business model, cancel the contracts, pay our offshore suppliers what was owed to date, and start again from scratch. It was painful. And the exact right thing to do.

“In a perfect world, 100% American Made means our styles are conceived, designed, patterned, prototyped, milled, dyed, pre-washed and shrunk, cut, buttoned, zippered, labeled, hand sewn, embroidered and finished in the USA.

Our mission is to help rebuild the Made in the USA apparel ecosystem by crafting small batch original styles that are created of 100% American-Made fabrics and trims, and also are sewn and finished in the USA.

“We’re proud to say that we’re about 95% of the way there! Throughout the years, we’ve become quite good at sourcing Made-in-the-USA materials (both vintage and new finds) from partners – from the larger ones to the practically microscopic ones.”

Markets served:

“Our target market is men, 30-55, who care about curated, well-designed, vintage-inspired workwear and essentials and are willing to pay the price to buy American-Made, small-batch original apparel. (Or their wives and girlfriends and mothers.)

They are men who have obsessions – whether it be vintage cars or DIY or surfing – and we’re counting on Devium USA to become another one of their obsessions.



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“We have customers from every state in the nation, and surprisingly we have a good following not only amongst our Northern (Canadian) friends, but also Europe and Australia as well.”

Company’s challenges and opportunities?

“Sometimes we just have to laugh. We designed and developed an entire line in China and saw firsthand what it was like to manufacture offshore and were about to place our first collection order. However, we had a moral crisis of grand proportions. We dumped the business model, and founded what is now Devium USA.”

“The obstacles are epic. We’re not some multimillion-dollar, venture-funded corporation – we’re just a humble family and friends business, based in the small mountain town of Truckee, CA, with a distributed team working over three time zones, trying to do something fairly ambitious. As a serial entrepreneur, I look back at our founding and think, did we really have to choose all the most difficult components of a business model, and put them into one mission?

“For example, our mission is to help rebuild America’s small business apparel supply chain, one USA-Made garment at a time. We aim, for every Devium style to be 100% American Made – designed, developed, and produced – from American fabrics, dyes, thread, buttons, zippers, embroideries, cutting, hand sewing and finishing – at legacy small businesses throughout the USA.

“Most normal businesses would have stopped at ‘let’s do Made in the USA,’ knowing full well that as long as your sewing costs are the majority of your COGs, you could easily get away with saying Made in the USA while having the products assembled in America from much cheaper materials manufactured under iffy conditions thousands of miles offshore (and routed to the U.S. on pollution-belching cargo containers).

“To hunt down every piece of a garment to be Made in America is a herculean feat. We’re constantly networking with US businesses to find the next rolls of California-made fabric, sourced from North Carolina cotton fields, and sewn using North Carolina thread. USA wovens are definitely more difficult to source than knits.

“And the trims are even more difficult. There’s only a couple of bespoke zipper manufacturers in the USA, one small button maker that we can find that’s owned by a 75-year-old who I’m worried will retire soon, and well, don’t get me started on how difficult it is to source metal trims like grommets and snaps. Those old-line businesses don’t have websites and do all their business over the phone on practically a handshake. They’re as easy to find as a needle in a haystack, and we spend a lot of time playing Sherlock Holmes to find what we need.

EMPOWERING THE MADE IN AMERICA MOVEMENT



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“Our goal is to also stay true to our Small Batch Originals roots, and to continue to make our garments in small batches (usually less than 500 pieces per style). A key goal is also to remain a small business that will become a legacy family/friends-owned business. As a serial entrepreneur who sold her last business to a multinational conglomerate, my goal with Devium USA is to keep it small, and never, ever to sell it.”

Company’s differentiators:

“Part of that is answered above in our company mission, but our Made-in-USA partners are either other legacy small business – and sometimes much larger businesses – who have somehow survived the last few decades of fast fashion and the move to Asia. Our employees and freelancers love our mission – and also know that if they want to get rich they should probably be in another business. We want to change America by helping to rebuild something that was inadvertently decimated in the last decades, AND we want to do it our way, in small batches. Are we crazy? Absolutely. Are we a David to a bunch of Goliaths? Yep. Will we succeed? You betcha.”

Thoughts on the Made-in-America/Americas movement and your strategy to remain competitive in the U.S. and this hemisphere:

“The key to growing the Made in America movement is to treat it like, well, a movement. Before anyone will buy, they first must understand the totality of the issue, understand their part in solving the problem, and finally, putting their money where their mouth is and actually buying the product. Only then can they become evangelists for the next round of Made in USA diehards. It’s a big education job. And it’s a virtuous circle.”

Biggest challenges and opportunities for manufacturing in the USA:

“We seem to be in the sweet spot of The Hardest Way Possible, but please see all of the above for our thoughts on challenges and opportunities.”

Business outlook for Devium USA for the foreseeable future, as well as your future growth plans:

“We will grow incrementally and thrive if we stay small. Stay humble. Count on the neighborly-ness of others in our Made in the USA ecosystem to introduce us to that mom-and-pop metalworking business in upstate New York AND the CEO of that large wovens manufacturer in the South (who will let us “draft” off a larger customer’s 10,000-yard denim order to get us the small 1,000-yard order that we need).”

Thoughts on business conditions, opinion on the health of the apparel/textile/sewn products industry markets served and keys successful:



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“Just nine years into the business, we’re beginners at understanding all of the above. Business conditions in America today, as a whole, leave much to be desired. We’re hoping for better conditions soon, but hope is not a strategy, as they say. There will always be room for a niche company like Devium USA. The key is educating prospects, so they become buyers, and delivering a great product and experience so that a first-time buyer becomes a loyal customer, and eventually an evangelist for our company and our mission.”

Value SEAMS brings to Devium USA:

“I’d been searching for a SEAMS for a few years before I finally found them. What a WIN! They are invaluable to Devium. Nancy (SEAMS’ Business Manager) has taken us under her wing to introduce us to people and companies. The networking at a SEAMS conference or event, even our first one, felt more like going to a family reunion than a business meeting.

“Everyone is so giving of their time and knowledge, even when they know that we’re a small company and there’s probably not much we could possibly do for them! The people in the SEAMS organization, and the members in SEAMS, intrinsically value Made in the USA – no matter how difficult it is. I have BIG RESPECT for those colleagues and their companies that have beaten the odds and survived – and thrived – over the past decades. As a nine-year-old company, I want to grow up to be them!”