



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

Stitching Together a Movement

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A year ago, the industry came together to debut the Alphabet Soup Collective, and this year, the first collaborative conference will be held, hosted by SEAMS and the AATCC organizations. We are excited to take the connections beyond the cocktail hours that have been hosted since and have more in-depth discussions and action plans.

This month, I wanted to focus on the brand and consumer point of view, and how the disconnect that exists can be improved. I believe that having more insight and looking at the industry through this lens for a moment can help us to better understand the end consumer, for it is **their** demands that drive buying decisions from brands, who are **our** customers. As suppliers, we can learn some things and apply that to our own messaging and create a better experience that aligns with the products, services, and expertise that we provide.

I'm pleased to have had the opportunity recently to discuss these messaging gaps with the CEO and Founder of the **Made in America Movement** (MAM), **Margarita Mendoza**.

For those unfamiliar with MAM, they are a mission-driven organization dedicated to rebuilding American manufacturing and strengthening the economy from the inside out, through supporting brands that produce in the U.S., advocating for supply chain transparency, and promoting workforce development, especially through trade schools and vocational training. Ms. Mendoza describes that the organization "support[s] companies at every stage of their Made in USA journey. Whether it's through storytelling, certification guidance, or consumer engagement, our goal is to bridge the gap between makers and the people who want to support them."

I was interested to delve into some of the themes that will be presented at our Fall Conference and thought that interviewing Ms. Mendoza would be a great way to tug at the gears turning. I've been following along with the organization's social media pages, their messaging around American brands, and buying American resonates with me both as a consumer, and as an industry advocate. The way we communicate matters. As Margarita puts it, "It's about creating real connections that drive awareness, trust, and action."

Xochil: How do brands story-tell authentically – creating a marketable story that is true but appealing? What are common topics/details that customers like to see from brand stories?



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Margarita: Authentic storytelling starts with why a brand exists and not just what it sells.

Today's consumers respond to transparency, purpose, and impact. They want to know the faces behind the product, the jobs you're creating, the materials you're using, and the communities you're investing in.

So, think behind-the-scenes content: your founder's story, the production process, or how your product solves a real-world problem. Keep it human, not filtered or corporate.

We've worked with dozens of brands to craft and translate these stories into social content that connects with the customer. When your messaging is consistent, value-aligned, and rooted in real people and purpose, it drives both engagement and long-term loyalty.

Xochil: With "Made in America" messaging becoming more popular, how do brands make their story stand out?

Margarita: "Made in the USA" used to be a differentiator. Now it's the starting point. To stand out, you need to go deeper.

I often tell clients to lean into their how, where, and why.

Where do you produce? Why did you choose domestic suppliers? Who are the people behind your products? Show the work, not just the label.

This is where digital content really shines. Our team helps brands turn their stories into platform-specific content, short-form video, behind-the-scenes reels, photos with real context, and newsletters that educate and inspire.

Done right, this content becomes a strategic asset, one that cuts through generic 'Made in USA' claims and creates a meaningful brand experience.

Certification, traceability, and educational content elevate your message. And when you connect your sourcing choices to values like job creation, sustainability, or economic resilience, your story sticks.

Xochil: There is so much work that goes into building a U.S. supply chain, so I agree that brands can and should absolutely lean into that, share the work! However, I hear this sentiment of perseverance over and over again from brands in talks, on podcasts, etc. Perhaps, when we hear those stories, rather than simply feeling inspired by the grit and tenacity of the brand to push through the noise, consider how we as suppliers can potentially make aspects of this a little easier on them. Not every start-up will be a success story; however, I think we can consider things that allow for an easier entry



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point. Let's not make it harder to do business than it already is – or we'll continue to lose brands who decide another road has fewer obstacles to overcome.

On that note, brands whose core values are grounded in this, will persevere. How can the Made in America movement become more attainable for brands who want to manufacture in the US but are faced with higher labor and production costs?

Margarita: Collaboration is key! Whether it's through shared manufacturing spaces, batch production, or partnerships across supply chains. But we need systemic change, policy support, regional manufacturing hubs, trade schools and broader education around the total cost of ownership.

At the brand level, no question, it's a challenge. But we've seen companies succeed by being radically transparent. They explain pricing, highlight durability and ethics, and invite their community into the journey. These brands have invested in content that educates consumers about the *true cost* of products, not just the sticker price.

Content plays a big role here.

When consumers see the difference, how something is made, the hands behind it, the impact on the community, they start to understand the price. We need them to get to that "Aha moment" where they get it.

We help brands explain this visually and clearly, using before-and-after content, "meet the maker" features, or sustainability breakdowns.

That education helps shift the conversation from sticker shock to long-term value. When brands clearly communicate the "why" behind the cost, customers are more likely to invest because they're aligned with the impact.

Xochil: I think the transparency aspect is so key here. People are willing to spend a premium on a craft cocktail or beer, or dinner, because they know cooking takes time and skill. When we believe and show the value of the skills involved in sewn product manufacturing, they will begin to see that too. Right now, the consumer by and large is so removed from that process, they don't understand it, and therefore it's hard to respect what you don't see. I think the supply chain companies can take this same idea, and showcase their skilled workers, their high-tech equipment (or the historic 50-year-old machine that is still going strong!), and walk through some of their processes. Content these days does not have to be high quality in production; it just has to be authentic and real.



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Do you have any “favorite” examples of brands who are doing storytelling well, and are attracting new and repeat customers?

Margarita: I personally love what [Bards Clothing](#), [NW Alpine](#), [Red Land Cotton](#), and [Origin USA](#) are doing. All four brands combine stunning imagery, authentic founder stories, and clear production transparency to build trust and pride.

Some highlight their supply chains. Others showcase who farms their cotton or sews their garments. They bring consumers into the story, making them feel like part of something bigger. We often reference these brands in our consulting work as case studies in authentic, impact-driven messaging.

Xochil: These are fantastic examples! And your shortlist includes a couple brands who have spoken at past SEAMS conferences, and one upcoming – Bill Amos, CEO of NW Alpine Gear. He will be speaking in October about his experience building a U.S.-made outdoor apparel brand, even operating his own cut and sew factory for part of that journey. I’m a fan of these brands and their marketing is very raw, very open, genuine and transparent into the inner workings of a sewn products brand. Pete Roberts from Origin USA recently launched a new series on YouTube, “American Made,” which highlights the daily grind, and lessons learned along the way.

Each of these brands above is a good example of this – but what advice would you give to those looking to successfully communicate to their customers that their higher-priced Made in USA products are worth the price? How can we better share the value vs the price?

Margarita: Reframe the price as an investment. It’s not just a product, it’s an investment: in jobs, ethical labor, quality materials, and a more resilient economy.

Tell the story behind the price. Who made it? What skills were involved? What difference did that purchase make?

Then amplify that message across every customer touchpoint.

I used to share my Made in USA jeans story to help consumers justify the price tag on premium jeans. I own (and still wear) a few pairs I bought back in the late 90s. At \$170 a pair back then, I knew I was making an investment. That investment has paid off in many ways, including motivating me to stay fit so I can still fit into them 25+ years later!

Make it personal. Say things like: “This jacket created three jobs in Pennsylvania.” Or “This purchase kept 2,000 gallons of fuel from crossing the ocean.” Now it’s no longer a transaction; it’s a value-aligned decision.



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When we help brands craft social campaigns, we build frameworks that connect pricing to values in a way that resonates emotionally.

And that human connection is what drives loyalty and conversions.

Xochil: The personal stories and educating the consumer about “cost per wear” are great ideas! I agree wholeheartedly with showing “behind the scenes” type content, what a modern factory looks like, how things are made – these things are incredibly interesting to people, and help them better frame the price vs. value.

Next, this can be tough. There is a mentality that brands have to “do it all” perfectly, whatever their ethos may be – there is backlash when they fall short. Not being perfectly sustainable, can be labeled “green washing” even when the intent is truly there. The same goes for US brands, who may make some of their products domestically, but maybe struggle with how to incorporate that into their brand story because they have a mixed supply chain. There are also many brands who assemble their products here but purchase some or all of their input materials overseas, whether due to costs, availability, or other factors.

If a brand isn’t (or can’t be) 100% Made in America, how can they communicate and convince customers that their brand has extra value? Do you think it has to be “all or nothing” for it to be a core value of a brand?

Margarita: No, not at all. Transparency beats perfection. It’s about honesty and progress.

Most savvy consumers understand that supply chains are complex, especially after COVID. What matters is being upfront. Share where your materials come from, explain the decisions you’ve made, and what steps you’re taking to increase your domestic sourcing.

We’ve helped many brands navigate this “gray zone” through smart messaging and thoughtful content strategies.

A sourcing video, a dedicated “Our Journey” page, or a simple, well-crafted FAQ can go a long way in building trust and boosting SEO.

Celebrate your wins and roadmap the rest. Consistency and progress build trust, and trust builds loyalty.

Xochil: I think this is so important to understand. That progress is the goal, not perfection. We can make great strides to achieve goals together. Rather than dwell on an imperfect supply chain or the low percentage of sewn products made in the USA of the overall textile purchases – let’s reframe this as an opportunity.



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If we want to move the needle from 3% to 5%, for example, that is very doable! It absolutely takes collaborative effort, buy-in from the consumers and brands, but with a shared strategy, we can see success. Once we get there, celebrate for a moment, and increase the goal again. Just like in sewing, you start with smaller parts. Each piece comes together in parts in time to form the garment, it doesn't appear from thin air. Likewise, we need to combine and compile our messages to form the story of our future.

Thank you, Margarita, for your valuable insights and candid answers.

I look forward to some fantastic speakers at [Fabricating the Future](#), and expanded networking with our conference partners, the [AATCC](#). I hope to see you there, ready to listen, learn, and lean into these opportunities.