



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

SEAMS Fall Networking Conference to focus on AI, domestic sourcing and the future of U.S. manufacturing

By Devin Steele

From artificial intelligence and domestic sourcing to the economic climate and the future of U.S. apparel manufacturing, SEAMS members will have plenty to talk about when they gather in New Orleans next month.

The SEAMS Fall Networking Conference will take place Sept. 15-17 at the Astor Crowne Plaza French Quarter in New Orleans, bringing together sewn products manufacturers, brands, suppliers and other industry leaders for three days of education, networking and conversations centered around strengthening American manufacturing.

Under the theme “Empowering the Made in America Movement,” this year’s conference will address many of the opportunities and challenges confronting the domestic sewn products supply chain — while giving attendees ample opportunity to connect with colleagues and potential business partners.

AI moves from buzzword to business tool

Artificial intelligence will be a major thread running through the conference, beginning with Wednesday morning’s keynote presentation by Joe Parrish, founder of upupdn.

Parrish brings the perspective of an entrepreneur, innovator and longtime creative leader who has spent much of his career asking a simple question: “What if we tried this?” He co-founded advertising agency The Variable and has been involved in a number of entrepreneurial ventures, including Sunshine Beverage, which was acquired in 2022. A previous SXSW speaker, Parrish now helps companies explore how AI can be applied to real-world business opportunities and challenges.

His keynote will look beyond the hype surrounding AI and focus on what the technology can actually mean for companies and their employees. For SEAMS members, the discussion offers an opportunity to consider how AI can become a practical business tool rather than something happening outside their operations.

The conversation continues Thursday with Mitch Cahn, President of SEAMS member Unionwear, who will present “Capacity Surfing with AI: Solving the Problems You Already Know You Have.”

Cahn will bring the perspective of someone operating in the trenches of domestic sewn products manufacturing. His presentation will focus on using AI to address familiar

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manufacturing challenges, including capacity, efficiency and the everyday problems companies already know they need to solve.

Also taking the stage will be Aidan Meany, Founder and CEO of Found Surface, with “Closing the Physical Gaps in American Manufacturing.”

Meany will examine a fundamental challenge facing domestic manufacturing: While digital technology has advanced rapidly, making physical products remains difficult and expensive to automate. His presentation will explore how real-time data, automation and closer collaboration among designers, engineers, operators and technicians can help close that gap and create a more competitive American manufacturing ecosystem.

Taken together, the sessions will move the AI discussion from theory to the factory floor — giving SEAMS members examples and ideas they can take back to their own operations.

Can domestic cut-and-sew thrive?

Another central question of the conference will be one SEAMS members confront every day: How can domestic cut-and-sew manufacturers not only survive, but thrive?

A Wednesday afternoon fireside chat featuring three SEAMS members will take that question head-on. Lionel Vargas Cruz of Industrial Sewing and Innovation Center (ISAIC), Kaia Rhodes of Anatar and Frank Henderson of Henderson Sewing Machine Co. will participate in the discussion, moderated by SEAMS Executive Director Will Duncan.

The panel brings together different perspectives from within the domestic manufacturing ecosystem, from production and workforce development to equipment, technology and entrepreneurship. The conversation will examine the realities facing U.S. manufacturers and what companies can do to compete, grow and capitalize on renewed interest in American production.

That theme continues Thursday morning with the SEAMS Member Supply Chain Panel, “Source Domestically – It Works!”

Panelists Denny Bogard and Cheryl Eckert of Fechheimer, Steve Hawkins of America Knits and Ron Roach of Contempora Fabrics will share perspectives from different links in the U.S. textile and sewn products supply chain, with Jim Hopkins of Hamrick Mills serving as moderator. All of the participating companies are SEAMS members.

Rather than simply making the case for reshoring, the panel will offer perspectives from companies that are actually sourcing, producing and doing business domestically. The



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discussion will highlight the capabilities available within the U.S. supply chain, as well as the relationships and collaboration required to make domestic sourcing successful.

The session puts the spotlight on something at the heart of the SEAMS mission: connecting the “soft goods” supply chain and demonstrating that a capable, collaborative U.S. manufacturing base exists and can work.

Putting the economy in perspective

Before companies can plan for the future, they also need to understand the economic forces shaping it.

Roger Tutterow, Ph.D., professor of economics at Kennesaw State University and holder of the Henssler Financial Endowed Chair, will present “On the Economic, Business & Political Climate” Wednesday morning.

Tutterow is a familiar voice on economic and business issues and will bring a broad view of the forces affecting manufacturers and consumers. His presentation will help attendees put current conditions into perspective as they navigate issues such as inflation, interest rates, labor, investment, consumer demand and the political environment.

The conference agenda also includes a Wednesday afternoon discussion on FutureTEX, an initiative to Revolutionize the American Apparel Industry. And has been awarded \$36 million in its first year with a ceiling of \$480 million over a decade. Thus, adding another forward-looking component to a program designed to help members understand not only what is happening in the industry today, but where it may be headed next.

Networking — New Orleans style

The educational program is only part of the Fall Conference experience.

SEAMS has built numerous networking opportunities into the schedule, beginning with a Welcome Networking Reception Tuesday evening and continuing with networking breaks, breakfast and lunch throughout the conference.

Wednesday evening, attendees will head into the French Quarter for a reception at Antoine’s, one of New Orleans’ best-known restaurants.

Thursday afternoon will feature the WOVEN Women’s Soiree, providing another opportunity for women across the industry to strengthen relationships, exchange ideas and expand their professional networks.

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Those staying through Thursday evening can cap off the conference with a special Mardi Gras World networking event. The evening will include transportation from the hotel, a tour of Mardi Gras World, mask making, an open bar and an authentic New Orleans dinner — giving attendees one more opportunity to make connections in a relaxed setting.

With the Astor Crowne Plaza located at the corner of Canal and Bourbon streets, attendees also will be staying in the heart of New Orleans and within easy reach of the city's dining, entertainment and culture.

Why attend?

For SEAMS members, the Fall Networking Conference offers something difficult to replicate through emails, video calls or social media: the opportunity to spend meaningful time with people throughout the U.S. sewn products supply chain.

The program is built around issues that directly affect members' businesses — how AI can improve manufacturing, how domestic producers can become more competitive, how companies can source successfully in the United States and how economic and political conditions may affect business decisions in the months ahead.

Just as important are the conversations that happen between sessions, over lunch, at receptions and throughout the three days. Attendees can reconnect with longtime industry colleagues, meet potential customers and suppliers and develop relationships that may lead to new business and partnerships.

At a time when domestic manufacturing is receiving renewed attention and investment, the Fall Conference provides a forum for the people actually making products in America to exchange ideas about what comes next — and how they can help shape it.

Attendees are encouraged to register and reserve their hotel rooms soon. The deadline to book within the SEAMS hotel room block is Aug. 31.