



Why made in the USA works for small companies

→**THERE ARE TWO ENDS** of the consumer sales spectrum. There's the margin- and cost-pushing side of things, where a nickel of savings in wholesale price could get one brand bought over the next. And then there is the niche-factor, high-quality side, where price isn't the biggest factor in a customer's mind.

The latter is where "made in the USA" really is booming. Small, high-end outdoor companies are siding more and more with U.S. manufacturing for its ability to turn products quickly. A few are even pushing the made in the USA label to include all of their sourcing.

Kokotat (#33051), a personal floatation device and drysuit company, leverages both U.S. manufacturing and overseas production to increase volume while allowing a lot of flexibility. "Ninety-two percent of our revenue is from made in the U.S. products," said Steve O'Meara, the founder. The minority-international production leverages low offshore labor costs to help its capacity and allow it to produce some

of its highly customizable products at a lower margin in the U.S. "In 3-4 weeks, we can get someone a custom-tailored drysuit, something we couldn't do at that price overseas," said Lisa Kincaid, public relations and promotional marketing manager. O'Meara followed up: "We can move production weekly. If a SKU is selling better than we thought it would, we can cycle that product rapidly."

Goodhew (#32044), a higher price point sock company, has taken made in the USA to a whole new level, focusing on quality throughout the supply chain and sourcing almost everything in the United States.

Goodhew Partner Jim Markley is adamant on the benefits of having everything in the U.S. "Seventy-five percent of our wool is homegrown. I don't think that we will get to a 100 percent, but 95 percent is our goal. Right now, 99 percent of superwashing that wool and removing the scales from the fibers is done in China for other companies. Our homegrown wool is all superwashed here. Our carbon footprint

is reduced hugely in comparison to other companies. Plus, we aren't worried about whether we are doing \$4.99 a dozen; we are making a really high-quality sock. We aren't a big company, so we need to be nimble. Having a quick turnover gives us just that."

For **Bellyak (#PV535)**, an innovative liedown stomach-kayaking company, manufacturing 100 percent in the U.S. was a no-brainer. "Our reasons all surround quality control. In plastic molding, controlling the stiffness and durability is the key, and I have my hands in every part of it," said Adam Masters, the company's owner. "We tried some prototype stuff in China for our gloves, but the timeframe took forever and quality was an issue. I like to be able to talk to the factory; it makes the process faster."

The positives and negatives of onshore and off are extensive, but for these three companies, a quick turnover and higher quality led them to manufacturing in the USA.

--LORIN PALEY