

MANUFACTURING WOOD-FIRED OVENS, EMPOWERING ENTREPRENEURS, AND BUILDING COMMUNITIES

ABOUT FIRE WITHIN. Fire Within manufactures traditional Neapolitan-style wood-fired ovens mounted onto custom-made trailers to help entrepreneurs launch their own mobile-oven-based businesses. In addition to customizing and purchasing an oven, customers can also attend Fire Within University to receive instruction on cooking and starting a business. The new entrepreneur quickly discovers the benefits the oven can bring to their community, whether by having a presence at the local farmers market, using the oven to raise money for their church, or catering a neighbor's wedding. As President and CEO Ajith Dharmawardhana says, "we are telling a story with this oven. This is, literally, people gathering around the fire." The Fire Within manufacturing facility is based in Fort Collins, Colorado, and the administrative office is in Aurora, Colorado, with three employees.

THE CHALLENGE. Fire Within had an appealing business model, but the manufacturing process was time-consuming and cumbersome. An individual order typically involved meeting with the client to assess their needs and specifications, then ordering the customized trailer from a third-party supplier and waiting for it to arrive. Once the trailer arrived, the Fire Within team would begin the process of creating the oven, but they needed to wait four to five weeks for the oven to cure before it could be mounted onto the trailer. From start to finish, the entire process easily took one to two months. Knowing that there must be a better, more efficient way to produce the ovens without sacrificing quality, Dharmawardhana applied for assistance through Manufacturer's Edge (ME), part of the MEP National Network™, as well as the Small Manufacturer's AdvantEDGE (SMA) program.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. The ME team toured the Fire Within facility and conducted a series of Value Stream Mapping exercises, which prompted an extensive overhaul of the production process. What they discovered was that the ovens can be built in advance and stored on trays in the facility until they are needed. Now, when a customer places an order for a mobile oven, the only wait time takes place between ordering the trailer and waiting for it to arrive a few days later in Fort Collins. Once that happens, there are already four or five ovens cured and waiting to be mounted on the trailer. The process of marrying the oven and the trailer only takes a few hours compared to the four or five weeks it used to take to build the oven directly onto the trailer. Following this method, Fire Within managed to cut their lead time in half and can now deliver numerous ovens in the same amount of time as it used to take to complete one. The company is benefitting from cost savings and stronger sales as result of the new process.

"When people ask me, 'what do you sell?' I tell them we sell freedom. We sell lifestyle. Show me a business in the US that you can start for under \$40k today and pay for it within the first year. Working with Manufacturer's Edge allowed us to cut our lead time in half, which means that we can turn exponentially more dreams into reality every year."

-Ajith Dharmawardhana, President and CEO, Fire Within

RESULTS



50% reduction in lead time



\$600,000 in increased/retained sales



\$290,000 in cost savings

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