

A GALE FORCE OF INNOVATION THRUSTS TAILWIND NUTRITION TO THE FRONT OF THE PACK

ABOUT TAILWIND NUTRITION. Most companies have an interesting origin story—the “a-ha! moment”, the twists and turns, the ups and downs, the series of big wins and small missteps that eventually lead them to a successful, rewarding, and sustainable business. Few companies, however, have as interesting a story as Tailwind. Moments after finishing the renowned Leadville 100 ultra-endurance race, Tailwind founder Jeff Vierling had his “a-ha! moment.” Unfortunately for Jeff, it involved his body expelling everything he had eaten before the race into a trashcan at the finish line. Even more unfortunately, the entire thing was caught on tape, posted on YouTube, and made Jeff a bit of a minor celebrity.

Armed with years of endurance training, a wonderful community of athletes willing to act as guinea pigs, a curious and self-proclaimed “geeky” nature, and a familiarity with medical nutrition terminology thanks to being raised by physicians, Jeff set out to develop a delicious supplement that allows people to run at peak performance without wreaking havoc on their digestive systems.

THE CHALLENGE. After many months of research and experimentation, Jeff and his wife Jenny started offering samples of their powder to other athletes and then fine-tuning the product based on feedback. Jeff and Jenny were bagging the powders in their kitchen and handwriting the labels. They would even add thank you notes and words of encouragement to help their customers prepare for the feats ahead. In return, the customers and the community around them were giving back as well by sharing their stories, accomplishments, and helping to spread the word about the Tailwind brand that was allowing them to achieve goals that had previously been unattainable.

Through this process, Jeff and Jenny developed a close bond to their community and recognized how much that support system was baked into their success. In a town of only 2,300 people, however, Bayfield, Colorado doesn't offer them many options for relocation to expand. Although the facility restraints and workforce issues that come with operating out of a small town in southern Colorado are certainly challenging, the Vierlings did not want to uproot their brand and their family to relocate to a bigger town and leave their beloved community behind.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. Following a referral from the local Small Business Development Center and the La Plata County Economic Development Center, Tailwind partnered with Manufacturer's Edge, part of the MEP National Network™, for a variety of different engagements over the past few years. Through the Small Manufacturers AdvantEDGE program designed to address the needs of manufacturing companies with 20 employees or fewer, Tailwind has been able to address a wide variety of issues by using tools like thorough market research studies and facility layout services, thus allowing them to stay in their chosen community.

The Vierlings have also developed some innovative strategies for dealing with a small workforce pool. By cross-training the staff and themselves, for example, on a variety of different skills, the team is able to jump in and help each other out regardless of the task. Experimenting with different layouts, strategies, and approaches has allowed Tailwind to stay true to their roots and continue meeting the ever-increasing demand for the product line. It also frees them up to experiment with the really fun stuff like exciting new flavors. By all

RESULTS



\$100,000 in new or retained sales



\$50,000 in cost savings



\$70,000 in new investment

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accounts, the Colorado Cola and the Raspberry Buzz are amazing. Their soccer player daughter, however, recently vetoed the addition of an umami flavored powder and, evidently, the orange cream flavor tasted like a bitter Dreamsicle. But, as they have demonstrated from the beginning, Tailwind does not shy away from a challenge and they have the stomach to handle whatever comes their way!

"We really haven't changed much since our first year. We still make the product ourselves right here in our community, write the notes and personalize every bag that goes out the door to our customers, and believe in the power of our community to do incredible things."

-Jeff Vierling, Founder