

BRINGING INNOVATION TO RURAL CLOTHING MANUFACTURER

ABOUT NAVAJO SPIRIT. Navajo Spirit Southwestern Wear (Navajo Spirit) opened in 1984. Located in Gallup, New Mexico, Navajo Spirit started by offering their Native American-inspired clothing line at prestigious Indian art shows such as the Santa Fe Indian Market, the Heard Museum Indian Fair, the Red Earth Festival and the Colorado Indian Market. Major retailers, including QVC and the Smithsonian Gift Catalog, have also carried Navajo Spirit skirts, vests and craft items over the years.

Today 90% of their sales are generated by their retail shop with the balance generated through wholesale, internet and juried art shows. Their business building has been set up to enable Navajo Spirit to design, cut and sew garments and to sell their Navajo Spirit clothing line under one roof with an average of 8 employees.

THE CHALLENGE. Navajo Spirit is working on balancing automation with existing manufacturing processes, by rolling out updated information technology. General Manager Carl Ballenger has moved the business forward using technology to digitize patterns and standardizing work processes. Carl, along with Virginia Yazzie Ballenger, Navajo Spirit's owner and designer, wanted New Mexico MEP (NM MEP), part of the MEP National Network™, to provide training that would help keep the business moving forward and increase production.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. New Mexico MEP provided changes in automation, provided cell and workplace organization, cross-training, and Lean 101 tools, increasing production with additional visual workflow information and work cells for sewing. Production increased by 18% with the work cell layout and continuous employee training with minimal overhead costs.

During a recent project with NM MEP, Navajo Spirit created a think-tank environment to design a use for scrap Pendleton blanket material. Staff came up with scrap conversion to income plan for making tablet covers, Christmas crafts gifts, golf covers, and makeup pouches from the remnants. They made use of automation for inventory, adding Apple tablets to track orders and internal messages for communication.

"In today's economy the business sector has had its challenges, many have decided to close business, much less grow. With the valuable assistance of New Mexico MEP staff, we have been led to our future with new life, prepared for growth. Change is difficult when it has deep roots in your business culture. With New Mexico MEP's training, persistence, guidance, and genuine care, we are making huge strides in change, allowing for growth to flow. If you manufacture in New Mexico and are not utilizing MEP services, you should be. They are a gold mine of resources for manufacturers."

-General Manager, Carl Ballenger

RESULTS



3 jobs created



20% increase in sales



18% increase in productivity

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