

TAG! SIGN MANUFACTURER FINDS KAIZEN IS “IT” FOR TRANSFORMATION AND GROWTH

ABOUT NATIONAL MARKER COMPANY. National Marker Company (NMC), a subsidiary of Justrite Safety Group, manufactures high-quality safety identification products. The Rhode Island company has been helping make the world “a little bit safer” since 1934. The company serves a variety of markets that require support with workplace safety, including the construction industry. NMC’s portfolio includes signs, labels and tapes, hazard communications, facility products, COVID-19 pandemic signage and safety tags.

THE CHALLENGE. Tags produced at the North Smithfield, RI, location made up roughly 15% of the NMC revenue on an annual basis. The team wanted to be ready to take on more work, however. “We’re in a small building, and the company’s growing,” said Plant Manager Brandon Castaneda. “Even through the pandemic we’ve seen nothing but growth. Where are we going to put new machinery? Where are people going to work as we increase our workforce? Those were some of the things that we didn’t really have the answer to.”

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. National Marker hired Polaris MEP, part of the MEP National Network™, to conduct a kaizen that ultimately would consolidate the Tag work areas. Kaizen is a term that refers to activities which continuously improve a business. In this case, the kaizen training event nearly came to a full-stop before it truly started for two reasons.

First, the complexity of Tag production. Polaris MEP Project Manager Nathan Bonds quickly simplified the challenge by identifying the highest-volume workflow, which covered about 80% of Tag-related processes. “He jumped in and guided us down the right path,” said Andrew Ellison, Vice President of Operations, North America.

“We had associates who’d been doing things for a long time in a certain way and they felt that because they’d been working like that for so long, it must be the best way,” said Castaneda. Bonds approached the facilitation with perseverance and respect for people. Employees who had been against the effort ended up being the biggest advocates of change afterwards.

“After doing the kaizen... not only have we seen the growth, but we’ve also been able to reduce the cost. We’ve also added a lot of velocity in the lead time. We were able to improve our throughput by about 25% in the process while taking labor out of the work,” said Ellison.

“Polaris MEP is so well-respected in the local community, and we have a lot of respect for the project managers and the team that are at Polaris. We’ve gotten comfortable with the group that’s there because of the results they have helped us achieve.”

-Andrew Ellison, Vice President of Operations, North America

RESULTS



5 jobs retained; 3 skilled workers re-assigned within the facility
Sales increased



\$25,000 in unnecessary investments avoided



25% increase in throughput in Tag area



8% reduction in direct costs



7% increase in sales

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