

LEAN MANUFACTURING MAKES FORWARD MERCH MORE
EFFICIENT AND INCREASES CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

ABOUT FORWARD MERCH LLC DBA JSR MECHANDISING. Forward Merch, LLC is North America's premier entertainment merchandiser offering design, production, e-commerce, fulfillment, customer service and touring services all in-house. It was 1996 when Wes Bokley started printing t-shirts for rock bands out of his garage in Waltham, Massachusetts. He named the company Forward Merch, LLC and they grew quickly. In 1999 they left the garage and moved into a 25,000-square-foot facility in Dover, New Hampshire.

Then, in 2014, Wes and the other owner left the company and sold their shares to 4 managing partners. A year later the Broadway production of the musical Hamilton came out. Once they got the Hamilton production order they needed a much larger location. So in 2016 they moved into a 40,000-square-foot facility in Dover. With the business growing rapidly they needed to scale up again, acquiring more production space. That was in 2022, when they added a 30,000-square-foot facility in Somersworth, New Hampshire. Forward Merch now employs 87 people between the Dover and Somersworth facilities.

THE CHALLENGE. "It was 2021 and we were growing at a rapid pace," said Managing Partner and Chief Operating Officer Kristian Theodore. "We were scaling very quickly and noticing a lot of inefficiencies. Projects were not getting done in a timely manner because of the way we had things set up." Kristian and his partners knew they needed a system to get their products out quicker, with less mistakes, for less cost and increased customer satisfaction. After doing some research they learned NH MEP, part of the MEP National Network™, had a Principles of Lean Manufacturing training program and reached out to them for help.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. Forward Merch worked with a representative from NH MEP who led them on a Principles of Lean Manufacturing Training Program. Phase 1 focused on training 10 - 20 key members of the client's team. Shortly thereafter a value stream mapping training event targeted a specific product family, leading to a Kaizen training event focused on targeting and eliminating waste discovered during the value stream mapping process. The goal of this training was to mentor 2 key company employees in lean deployment methods while engaging other employees, increasing workforce skills and hands-on experience using lean manufacturing techniques.

"NH MEP's support has been transformative for our team at Forward Merch. Their expertise in value stream mapping and lean tools has empowered us to create a far more efficient working environment. The guidance they provided in streamlining our processes and reducing waste has led to significant productivity gains, allowing us to better serve our clients. NH MEP's commitment to understanding our unique challenges and tailoring solutions to fit our needs has been invaluable. We're grateful for this partnership and look forward to future collaboration."

-Kristian Theodore, COO/Partner

RESULTS



20 jobs created or retained



\$500,000 in new or retained sales



\$400,000 in new software investment



\$200,000 in cost savings



\$180,000 in new equipment investment

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