

Hope Global Manufacturing  
Emily Huber  
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Summary by Jacquelyne Vlahakis

Business, regardless of the industry, has changed greatly since the COVID-19 pandemic. This has led many companies to shift their strategies to counteract the negative impacts from the disruption. Emily Huber, a graduate of the TMD Master's program at the University of Rhode Island, spoke about the lasting effects she has experienced from the COVID-19 pandemic as a Product Development Engineer for Hope Global Manufacturing in Cumberland, Rhode Island.

Hope Global manufactures creative engineered solutions worldwide that are customized to buyer's needs. Their manufacturing locations are in Rhode Island, Mexico, Czech Republic, and China. They have diversified their product line since their founding in 1883 in response to the changing economy. Hope Global now manufactures for a variety of industries such as apparel, automotive, industrial, and the government. Some of the products within these lines are shoelaces, drawstrings, cords, mesh, carpet strips, netting, beaded profiles, and clips.

When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, it wreaked havoc on supply chain strategies and systems. The three main areas that were impacted from this disruption were labor, freight, and the supply of raw materials. With everyone stuck at home, it made it difficult to navigate manufacturing, which led to a limited number of workers allowed in factories at a given time. This directly led to longer lead times. Due to these labor shortages and high demands, ports became congested which led to more delays and costlier shipping due to rapidly increasing container rates. The combination of labor and freight issues made it harder to get raw materials, making them even scarcer, which resulted in an increase in the cost of raw materials. This makes it clear how a disruption in supply chain results in a domino effect.

Prior to the pandemic, Hope Global's production was nearly eighty percent automotive. When the market was disrupted, there were major economical and societal changes. This led Hope Global to react quickly to transition their existing production to support the new market. This allowed them to minimize negative consequences such as financial loss, which many businesses faced during this time due to spiked costs and changing demand. Mask production sales practically increased one hundred percent in the United States alone. With the challenges of sourcing overseas during the pandemic, domestic mask production was in high demand. Between the extremely high demand for face masks and domestic production, Hope Global knew this was a market they couldn't resist. Ear loops for face masks were an extremely viable product for them to produce, given their existing production. In 2020, Hope Global supplied over three million ear loops for face masks, which helped to reduce their reliance on automotive production.

Aside from new market research and entry, Hope Global also took additional steps to make changes to their business model. In order to further offset spiked costs, Hope Global also focused on reducing their scrap. This is because wasted material can add up to thousands of wasted dollars over the years. They considered production changes such as how to adjust their laser angle to be more efficient with cutting to better control the amount of scrap from each product. They also generated savings and improved profits through efforts like renegotiation of prices with existing customers or finding raw materials for less with new suppliers. Hope Global let the pandemic inspire innovation and embraced making changes to better position their business. Flexibility and adaptability are crucial for any business in order to navigate an ever-changing world.