



Albuquerque Pair Elevates Production of Private-Label Products

By Claudia Serrano, Projects Coordinator, New Mexico MEP

When Karen Converse of the New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership met André and Keith West-Harrison, the Albuquerque men were manufacturing skin- and body-care products and marketing them to spas and salons from the garage of their Albuquerque townhome.

The self-described “chefs” used a KitchenAid mixer to blend their specialty natural and organic lotions, bath salts and balms. They then packaged and labeled the products for sale under their clients’ brand names.



When demand for their private-label products outgrew the pair’s minimalist operation, they contacted New Mexico MEP for help raising their production processes to match the business’s sophisticated marketing profile.

Getting Organized

The West-Harrisons opened Great Face and Body day spa in downtown Albuquerque after Hurricane Katrina drove them from New Orleans. They then launched My Sacred Fig to produce and distribute skin-care products for private-label clients.

The pair purchased a historical building and converted it into a production facility and wellness center. MEP advisers helped the partners decide how the building’s novel layout could support the multiple stages of private label production — label creation, product formulation, packaging and shipping — and still have room for other uses, including spa services and public performances.

MEP experts then worked with the owners to conduct a physical inventory of each product in the manufacturing area. They labeled shelves and created a bin system to simplify the search for materials. All materials and products were entered into an inventory management spreadsheet, and reorder levels were established so products and supplies were available as needed and shortages were noticed before they led to production stoppages and cash-flow problems.

This reorganization helped the pair internalize two related lean-manufacturing principles: visual management and inventory management. The first relies on visual observation to recognize what works and what doesn’t on the production line, and the second employs visual markers to help

workers decide when to reorder new materials or restock shelves.

The team created a visual board to manage and track orders through each stage and formalized all the steps into a standard operating procedure template for use in training new employees.

“The investments and improvements that were made to the inventory control process improved the turnaround of orders to My Sacred Fig’s customers,” Converse said. Establishing a system helps new employees navigate the system without needing constant supervision and “empowers employees to take responsibility” for production needs.

Help Where It’s Needed

The goal with My Sacred Fig — and with all of MEP’s clients — is to give business owners “simple solutions to make their manufacturing world class,” Converse said.

The West-Harrisons continue to reinvent themselves and introduce new skin-care products. “As a private labeler,” she said, “they have seen a significant increase in sales to spas and skin-care salons because of the services they provide with the private-labeling business.”

Small and mid-sized businesses that need help becoming more competitive are encouraged to contact MEP at newmexicomep.org or (505) 262-0921. The nonprofit organization offers expertise in results-driven systems and innovative technologies to increase profitability.

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