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**SPOTLIGHT**

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## As Heard on “Marketplace” with Marta Miller, Owner of Lefty Productions

### “How COVID-19 Changed This U.S. Clothing Manufacturer”

October 19, 2020

Like many companies, **Lefty Production Co.** made a big pivot in March. As stay-at-home orders went into effect, the garment and accessories production company remained essential by producing masks, gowns and other personal protective equipment.

“Marketplace” host Kai Ryssdal talked with **Marta Miller, Lefty Production Co.’s co-founder and CEO**, about what the pandemic has meant for companies that make clothes in America. The following is an edited transcript of their conversation.

**Ryssdal:** So there you are, in February, March of this year doing your thing, and then the pandemic starts rolling across the globe. What does that do to Lefty Production Co.?

**Miller:** It was the craziest time. I mean, every time I opened my computer, it was like, “Let’s put a halt on that” ... “can I get my deposit back; we don’t want this stuff anymore.” We ultimately sew, and, in manufacturing, social distancing is pretty tough. So, while all these orders were canceling, watching the news they were saying, “We need masks, we need masks.” My husband and I started getting on the phone and we started to create the masks.

**Ryssdal:** The thing is, though, you’re making stuff in LA, but you now have relocated your family to Texas. So you’re running this company remotely? Talk to me about the CEO challenges there.

**Miller:** It’s funny, but I think every single member of my team would tell you that the company runs so much better with me a little bit distanced from it. It’s just been the biggest COVID silver lining.

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**Ryssdal:** Because you're down in the weeds of American manufacturing, how do you see this having changed or changing American manufacturing. You pivoted and now you're doing this thing, and you've moved, and the company is still thriving.

**Miller:** We've been seeing this need for American manufacturing to come back for a while now, mainly because retail has changed. It's easier to go overseas when you're producing five, ten thousand units of something. When you want to make five hundred units of something, being overseas just doesn't make sense anymore. Tariffs and the dollars stop working for you. We have the large retailers not placing large volumes of each style; then the brands don't place that amount of inventory into the manufacturing process at their factories anymore. What we're seeing with COVID is this emergence of smaller, more unique brands, and the amazing influence of social media where people love to buy a jogger from the YouTube person who is tie-dyeing it in her garage.

**Ryssdal:** So are you seeing that, instead of getting your \$50,000 order, you're getting the \$5,000 order from an entrepreneur who wants to make a jogging outfit or someone who wants to make shorts, etc.?

**Miller:** Yes. And it's not just a \$5,000 order. I have some clients who might have five, six or seven hundred thousand followers; and it's not that they just have followers, **they have an engaged social media following.** Their followers want to respond to inventory. They respond to questions like, "Hey guys, vote. Do you want blue or pink?" Therefore, if the 'vote' is blue, the owner goes ahead and makes 1,000 units. This need to not have so much inventory is really going to drive American manufacturing.

**Ryssdal:** How much of this do you think is permanent? Obviously, the economy is changing, and we don't know what it's going to be like in six months or a year. What's your guess?

**Miller:** I have to say, I was a little disheartened by the hospitals' reactions over time. At the beginning, a lot of the hospitals were like, "Oh my gosh, why haven't we been doing American manufacturing? It's so nice being able to develop something in our backyard!." *Then, the second China came back online, that story changed.* All of a sudden, we were not going to be making millions and millions of masks and gowns in America anymore. I don't know that the issue of 'price vs 'made-in-the-US' is staying, but I do feel like fashion and clothing manufacturing is definitely going to start making a big comeback to America.

Read Full Article:

<https://www.marketplace.org/2020/10/19/how-covid-19-changed-this-u-s-clothing-manufacturer/>

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