



MAKERS

Loftwall Is Thriving on Incredible Ideas and American Grit

LOFTWALL PROVIDES PRIVACY — SPECIALIZING IN SPACE DIVISION WITH PRODUCTS LIKE ROOM DIVIDERS, COUNTER SHIELDS AND SOUND CONTROL PANELS.

by Emily Clingman

Flashback to January. Dallas-based Loftwall had its sights set high for 2020. The company had a robust pipeline it was excited about, a lease had just been signed for its debut at NeoCon this summer. Everything was looking up, and Loftwall was on pace to double its business.

“And then all this happened,” said Bryce Stuckenschneider, CEO of Loftwall. “For about two days, I was scared and depressed, unsure, then I kind of woke up from it, and I wondered why can’t we be part of the solution? I don’t know why this has to derail us. So, we pulled together the leadership team, and I presented four or five things that I thought we could do to thrive through this.”

Loftwall provides privacy — specializing in space division with products like room dividers, counter shields and sound control panels. Anticipating hospitals would be overwhelmed by the Corona virus crisis, Stuckenschneider and his team, in the course of two weeks, restructured “everything,” he said. Before the pandemic, health care sales accounted for about 10% of Loftwall’s sales. Now, health care business accounts for about 90%.

“When Dallas County issued a shelter-in-place order a few weeks ago, we had to determine how essential we were,” Stuckenschneider said. “So, I had to talk with people in government ... eventually I connected with my state rep, who answered my call out of the blue, and he talked with me for 45 minutes. He talked me through the situation, what his interpretation of the order is, etcetera. Then I explained to him what we do, and he deemed us absolutely essential, and he said he was going to prove that. Think about it. Government and local officials are being leaned on to solve problems they never had to solve before — like commandeer the convention center and transform it into an infirmary. I told him we can do that with our products, and that we are a good U.S.A. story — we’re staying open, we are helping the cause. Then the flood gates opened.”

Loftwall is focusing on three main products for immediate health care assistance — pods, walls and counter guards.

“We’ve always sold walls like this, but usually with acoustic finishes and pretty designs,” he said. “In this case, we had to come up with something that could be made fast, cheap and bleach cleanable. It was a pivot on materials, but the core of what we did for the pop-up spaces was already in place.”

The counter shield, or sneeze guard to describe it better, was developed in two days. It’s a product that already exists in Loftwall’s line, but a customer called wondering if it was available in a miniature version for her retail location.



Loftwall Healthcare makeshift facility

“And we thought, this person is not alone,” Stuckenschneider said. “We spent the entire day working on making it to scale and affordable — because people don’t want to pay \$500 for these things right now. Wednesday morning, we launched it, and it’s Thursday afternoon right now, and we have 100s of orders for them. That came out of the last 48 hours.”

Speed is key right now.

Loftwall already was proud of its lead times of five to seven days, which is “lightning-fast” in the industry, Stuckenschneider said, but that’s not fast enough today. “Now we’re shipping things in 24 hours, which is like the speed of Amazon,” he said.

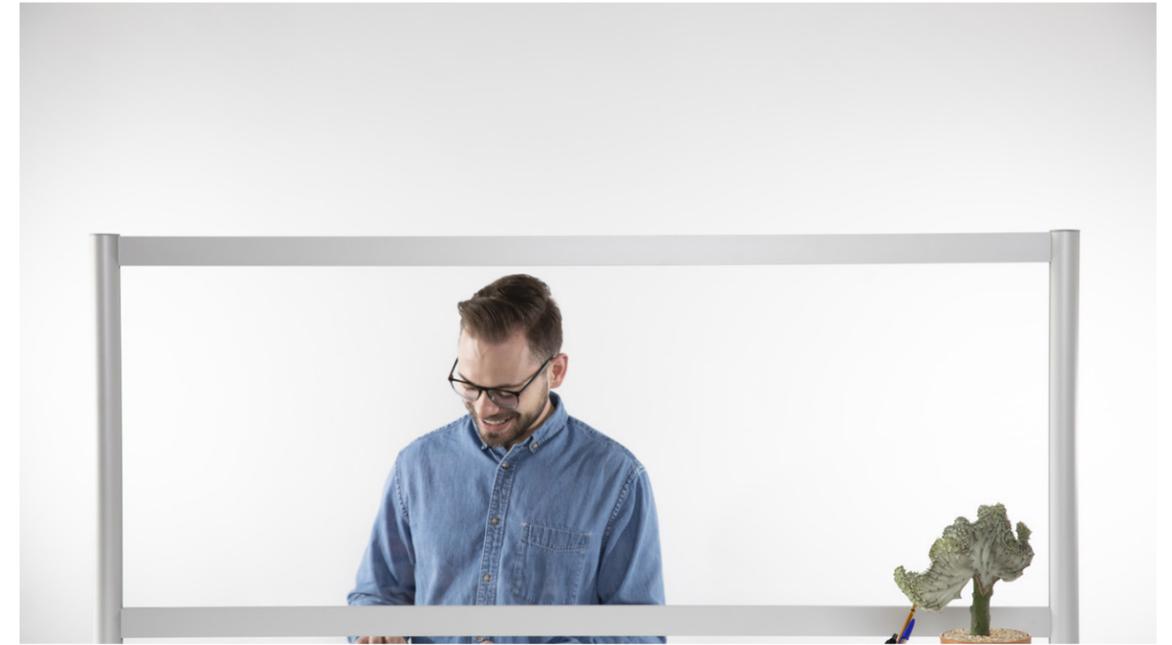
Stuckenschneider noted because people aren’t buying desks, chairs and conference tables, the market is on Loftwall’s side right now, and there’s an opportunity for smaller companies. “If they can deliver with speed and flexibility, they will win bids over larger companies that can’t regroup and retool so quickly,” he said.

Stuckenschneider said the key for the team at Loftwall, “is to be completely willing to completely abandon the thing you did yesterday.” Luckily, he says, the team is willing to roll with the punches and its mantra is “whatever it takes.”

“We’re believing in what we’re doing,” he said.

When thinking about what the future holds for the industry, of course, Stuckenschneider is unsure, but he anticipates a disruption.

“This will be a 9-11-type event where you date time by it, meaning things



Loftwall CounterShield

were a certain way in the world before 9-11 and then certain ways changed afterward,” he said. “But I don’t think the world was worse after 9-11. In a lot of ways, our world got better and safer. It’s incredibly sad to know as many people will get sick and die for us to change some things that we probably should have changed all along.”

So, what does it mean for our industry?

“I’m not positive, but I think our industry was ready for a shake-up anyway,” Stuckenschneider said. “Realizing people need on-demand things, I’m curious to see who can solve problems quickly and be willing to be wrong. It’s hard because there is a lot at stake. If we weren’t willing to be wrong, we wouldn’t have made a lot of decisions we have made in the last few weeks.”

Stuckenschneider suggests looking to one’s team for new ideas moving forward.

“I’d say the last 10 good decisions we made in the past few weeks, eight or nine of them came from places I would not have expected,” he said. “And I don’t know that, if things were normal in the world, I would have stopped to listen. I haven’t always been a great listener. When I think of a few things we’ve done in recent weeks, like pumped up the sales team in a certain way, and made a few changes to the website, none of those were my ideas. It was maybe because I was so desperate for us to survive and thrive, that I was interested in any idea. So, remember, you’ve got a whole workforce that probably has some incredible ideas.” **BoF**