



Preparing for and Conforming to Every Situation

JK Adams, based in Dorset, VT, specializes in wood products for the kitchen and home. While known most for their Cutting and Serving boards and wine racks, JK Adams makes other kitchen and dining items like rolling pins, lazy susans, and serving utensils. The kitchen store offers other home items from pottery to foods to décor. JK Adams was founded in 1944 and prides itself on being the premier kitchenware business in the U.S. The business has received many accolades throughout the years. Two of the more recent include Martha Stewart giving them the distinction of the #1 rolling pin and America's Test Kitchen naming their Reversible Carving Board as the best in America.

CEO Daniel Isaac took over the company last year and he said JK Adams makes products for “people doing things in the home.” The company mainly sells products direct to consumers. He explained that historically the company served predominantly female customers, however in more recent years their customer base has broadened to a wider audience including more younger customers who are interested in cooking. JK Adams' products can be found at large kitchenware retailers like Williams-Sonoma, Crate & Barrell, and Uncommon Goods. They also sell some products wholesale with restaurants, wineries, and craft designers, although this is not their main area of business.

JK Adams took a very proactive approach to the Coronavirus shutdowns. When the outbreak hit the area, Daniel said the company wanted to be a part of the solution. So, they halted their wood items production, retooled their wood manufacturing machines, and started creating PPE. Through government contracts the company began making plastic face shields which kept them operating through the shutdowns. When businesses were allowed to gradually reopen, JK Adams restarted manufacturing their wood products, while simultaneously still producing the face shields. Even now the company is committed to making PPE though, production has slowed down since earlier in the year.

While the retail aspect of their business took a hit, their e-commerce aspect increased and has continued to build during the outbreak. A greater focus on e-commerce has enabled the business to keep going. An extra benefit of this was adding produce to their online offerings. With grocery stores having difficulty keeping items stocked, local residents used JK Adams to get grocery items which increased their revenue and fed the local community. The company has seen an increase in purchases of baking related products, while other items have remained steady. Due to the ability to make PPE and its increase in e-commerce, Daniel said the pandemic has not hit JK Adams as hard as other businesses.

To combat COVID-19 the company has followed Vermont's issued guidelines, instituted strict work policies, and has had clear plans for any cases within the company. JK Adams currently has

38 employees. Daniel said that all employees have been really cooperative with the new rules and responsive to the needs of other employees. “Everyone looks out for each other,” stated Daniel describing the JK Adams workforce like a family. The pandemic has brought about the need for space in the business as Daniel said, “Office space is at a premium.” The company has been working with ways to distance workers, especially in the “office-related” jobs of the company, since desks cannot be right next to each other. The company is also investing in plastic screens and ventilation for better airflow through the building.

Daniel listed several lessons learned through the pandemic so far, the first being that strategic planning is essential. The unexpected situation of a pandemic taught Daniel that a company must prepare for *every* possible situation and outcome, even something as unexpected as a pandemic. Being dynamic was another lesson as businesses must be able and willing to change based on a situation, something JK Adams has shown it can do through the Coronavirus pandemic. Looking after one’s team was another lesson that was reinforced to Daniel. Businesses should help out their employees in any way they can whatever the situation. The pandemic has not forced JK Adams to change its vision or goals for the company, rather they have incorporated the effects of the pandemic into their plans.

Efficiency was one of the strengths of JK Adams that Daniel mentioned. He used the word “lean” when describing the company referring to their ability to make a great variety of products in their space. Whether using older machines that have been in use for decades or new technologies such as CNC machines or laser engraving, JK Adams produces high quality goods in an efficient manner. He also gave Design & Research as another strength of business which helps them be successful.

JK Adams was one of the founding Vermont Wood Works Council members. Daniel and the team at JK Adams are willing to help and partner with other woodworks businesses. They have done it in the past and are supportive of the local industry. Daniel feels JK Adams brings a different perspective to the council. Daniel’s previous work background was in large urban areas in contrast to the generally rural setting of Vermont woodworkers. JK Adams being a larger operation also gives them different qualities and areas of expertise that they are open to bring to the VWWC.