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Why manufacturer Atlas 46 believes its found the pattern for success

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After 15 years in software marketing for the restaurant and food distribution industries, [Brian Carver](#) was ready for a change.

His desire for a new opportunity coincided with the start of his father's new company, [Atlas 46](#), which designs, develops and manufactures premium workwear and gear for the construction and related industries. His dad, [John Carver](#), had built up another company, tactical gear maker Eagle Industries, to more than 2,500 employees working in five manufacturing facilities across the country, and producing \$120 million in annual revenue before [selling it in 2009](#).

With Atlas 46, "we talked and I said, 'let me see what I can do with it,'" [Brian Carver](#) recalled.

[Brian Carver](#) came on board as president of Atlas 46 in 2015, one year after its opening, and immediately launched new initiatives for online sales and incorporated technology into the manufacturing process that led to the company boosting efficiency by 35%. It does direct-to-consumer sales, eliminating the middleman of department stores, which gets product to customers faster.

Revenue has skyrocketed more than 4,000% from \$171,000 in 2015 to an estimated \$7.2 million this year, with next year's revenue projected to be \$11 million to \$12 million. The company in March opened a new plant in Hillsboro, Illinois, and has gone from just three employees in 2014 to about 150 workers companywide.

Atlas 46's success comes at a precarious time for apparel manufacturing in the United States. Most is done overseas in Asia, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that employment fell 89% over a 25-year period ending in 2016, the biggest decline among all manufacturing segments, to about 107,000 employees.

The company has four subcontractors that handle the manufacturing, and it expects to have 10 by next year — all in the U.S. Even so, the low unemployment rate of 3.6% has made labor Atlas 46's biggest problem, Carver said.

"We have about \$700,000 in back orders," he said. "It's not easy to find experienced people who know how to sew."

But tariffs, technology that's increased efficiency and stymied waste, and a shift in consumer preference have made it favorable for a renewal in U.S. manufacturing, said [Jon Lewis](#), co-founder of St. Louis-based Evolution St. Louis, a high-tech flat-bed knit manufacturer in the Grand Center neighborhood.

"There used to be four seasons in fashion, now there's 16," Lewis said. "We need a much more proactive and reactive supply chain, which begs for domestic production."

This summer, after finding success with its premium jeans, Atlas 46 launched a new "work to weekend" line that will soon include flannels, socks and more. It will broaden its pool of competitors to the likes of workwear giants like Carhartt and Duluth Holdings, which reported fiscal 2018 net sales of \$568.1 million, a 20.5% year-over-year increase.

Jonathan Komp, a senior research analyst with Baird, wrote in a recent report that Duluth's risks include managing its growth, competition and consumer environment amid a period of low sales volume.

It could mean a chance for Atlas 46 to carve a bigger niche. Atlas 46 is targeting a 1% stake of the global construction industry's soft goods segment, what Carver says is a "rather lofty goal" but one that he believes is attainable.



DILIP VISHWANAT | SLBJ

Brian Carver of Atlas 46

John Carver is still involved in the company; he leads research and development at his home in Montana.

“Unless you invented the wheel or screw, all you do is improve stuff,” John Carver said. “I’m able to test new ideas in a true environment ... we can get to market with new products much faster than large corporations.”

More about Atlas 46

Founded: 2014 in Fenton

Company leadership: Brian Carver, President; John Carver, founder and head of R&D

Projected 2019 revenue: \$7.5 million

Revenue growth over the four-year history: 4110%

Number of employees: 150

New venture: Work to weekend line, which will add flannels, socks and more

Behind the name: Atlas symbolizes "the strength of the products" while 46 stands for the 46 parallel, where John Carver's home is located in Montana

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