



SEAMUS GOLF

Continuing to Pivot & Fuel Change

INNOVATING FOR GOOD

Akbar showing off his goat caddy

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Interview with: Akbar Chisti, Founder
Seamus Golf



When you think of all the things being done in the fight against COVID-19, you probably aren't wondering how a "hipster golf company" (their words!) is helping. But as it turns out, there is room for everyone to jump in during these unprecedented times, including Schwabe's client Seamus Golf.

For those who aren't familiar, Seamus Golf is a woolen golf accessories brand that crafts top-line hand-made products for golfers, in the form of head covers, bags, and pouches. Headquartered outside of Portland in Beaverton, Oregon, Seamus Golf has carved out a name for themselves with their unique products that bring functionality and personality to the game. Like most companies, the COVID-19 pandemic unleashed a slew of worries and uncertainties.

On par with many of our clients in this series who chose to figure out how to use what they had to help—Seamus Golf was able to pivot their production to create masks for frontline workers, a need that was crucial in the early stages of the pandemic.

We sat down for a candid conversation with Akbar Chisti, Co-founder and President of Seamus Golf, to hear what was going through his head as COVID-19 became a reality for his company and employees, and learned how he realized they could fuel change, by pivoting production and innovating for good.

Please share a little background about Seamus Golf.

In our business, we make and distribute golf accessories in the high end space. We started out at the Bandon Dunes resort in Oregon back in 2011. Since then, our business has evolved to selling in national golf stores and eventually, we moved to ecommerce. A good chunk of our business typically revolves around destination resorts and events but once COVID-19 hit, people stopped traveling and a strange series of events followed.

We started to feel the effects of the pandemic early, as we'd programmed our selling strategy to surround the golf tour schedule, which runs all summer. We generally start taking orders in January, which starts our business year off at the PGA trade show in Orlando. But then the PGA tour started dropping events, which meant canceled orders, so we absorbed a pretty massive amount of loss of business right out of the gate.

Why do you think you were able to pivot quickly and respond and shift into the production of masks?

Seamus has gained a reputation in our space as being a company that you go to for custom work. That means, we've learned how to take something—an idea, if you will—and design it, and then push it through to start producing it. We have an in-house sewing team of 10 to 12 people, plus we work with a few other shops in town. With those capabilities we were able to pivot and produce a design that worked.



Seamus' meticulous designs are crafted to represent each individual golfer, their passion for the game, and their distinct style.

This effort accelerated when I talked to my brother Ali, a doctor. In February he said, "You should probably figure out how to make masks." Soon after, a few others followed with "figure it out and tell us how many you can make."

We have an awesome customer base thanks to our website, and we also relied on them. Once we started hearing about the need for masks, we started asking our customers. I sent an email out to them that said "Hey look! If you're out on that front line, and you need a mask, I want to hear what you think about it."

How did you develop the final design?

We used the internet to design the first iteration, but it wasn't really sustainable, so we gathered more feedback from people. Our production designer, started connecting with people and wound up with a design that looked a lot like a surgical mask, but still required some parts that we had to figure out how to source.

In the beginning of the pandemic, nobody knew where to get anything, and by the time someone figured something out,

it was gone. So we used fabric from our own resources, and if somebody asked us, "where'd you get that" because they needed it, we'd just send it over to them.

What did you implement within the shop itself as you made these masks to protect your own workers?

We were lucky because we moved into a new space that was too big for us right before the pandemic started. We spread out the sewing machines and took all the precautions that were suggested. This is the time when

we were hearing, "Unless your business is essential, you are not going to be operational."

We hustled, so if someone came in and asked, "what are you doing?" We could honestly respond with, "these are the masks we're making, and this is the person it's going to, and we're doing this as fast as we can."

What has been the biggest adjustment since the pandemic started for your company?

I think it's been a challenge to keep my team positive. They are absorbing a lot outside of the office, and it's really hard to read the news and then forget about it and go to work. It's the same inherent issues that are hitting everybody at the same time, and even now it's still coming out with more iterations of ways it impacts how people feel before they even start to work.

Given that your organization serves a national and global customer base, has your connection with the Pacific Northwest shaped your response or your business in any way?"



Seamus collaborates with other distinguished golf and accessory brands such as Pendleton Woolen Mills, Arnold Palmer, the NBA, and numerous collegiate trademarks.



Personalized golf head covers and accessories. Dog not included.

The Pacific Northwest is all I know. I was five when my family moved from LA to Beaverton, which is where I grew up. Our family would go to the beach or we would visit central Oregon. I went to Portland State. I've found all of my inspirations in the Pacific Northwest.

A couple brands that inspire my work are Pendleton, which is where my wife worked, and Nike, which is across the street. When I started following Nike, I started to peel back what that brand was really about, and their stories are of people that came out of nowhere and developed a talent for whatever sport they were in.

How would you encourage other companies to leverage their products, talents, or services for the common good, especially given these unprecedented times?

Not every company has an opportunity when things are going south to do something. We were blessed with a scenario where we thought we could help, and then we did it. We didn't stop the coronavirus, for sure, but we did make a lot of people happy and we created a set-up where they can have some protection via our face masks.



The Seamus Golf crest, hand-forged at approximately 2200° in a white-hot fire, using tools of the blacksmith craft.

The big thing for me happened one Sunday, when I came to the office to do a couple of things right after that week that was just a landslide. I looked at my shop and, if I was just looking at the numbers, I thought none of this is worth anything. But as I looked at these machines, and took into account our people, I thought, "Well, we might as well go out in flames and just freaking do something instead of just sitting

back and watching it go." Not every company can do that. If you're not making anything relevant it can be hard to do anything, but if you just say "Look, this year's going to be not that good. All right. I have all this stuff, what can I do?" I was almost to the point of thinking, "maybe I'll just go volunteer to go do something. I don't know what it is, but we'll just pay people to do that."

At the end of the day, we're going to do whatever we can during this. I think it's great to always think about what you can do for people, but then also remembering above all, acknowledging the customers that brought you to where you're at. Look at what they're doing, and what they're going through, and see what you can do for them—that's what I would encourage anybody to do.

Learn more at:

schwabe.com/innovating-for-good.



Fueling Change

Watch the videos! Plus, uncover our collection of interviews from Schwabe clients exploring how these companies are innovating for good during a worldwide pandemic.

