

"Growing the Good": The Bernard Group Keeps People Distant and Essential Workers Safe

DAVE CASPER: Welcome to growing the good. I'm Dave Casper, head of BMOs, North American commercial banking business. We're working with our customers to help them through this incredibly volatile time. They're stepping up in so many ways, helping to keep commerce moving, and keep people safe. I have the pleasure of speaking with a number of CEOs running businesses in a variety of industries, hearing their personal stories about the challenges they're facing, and some of the very innovative ways they've adapted, and in some ways even thrive in these uncertain times. Today, I have the opportunity to speak with Matt Hanson, CEO of the Bernard group out of Minnesota. Welcome, Matt, thanks for joining. Maybe we could start out with you just describing a little bit for our listeners, about your business and your customer base.

MATT HANSON: Sure. Thanks, Dave. Thanks for the opportunity. Our business began 20 years ago. And it started serving high end brands and retailers with high quality graphics that they demand it, it's grown into providing more complex visual merchandising solutions in the form of fixture fabrication, and fixture environment design. 10 years ago, we launched smart press.COM And then more recently, we've also branched into other industries that have physical space in which brand needs to be managed. And that's brought us into healthcare and healthcare facilities.

DAVE CASPER: So the company works with a number of different retail brands. I'd be interested in how the new services that you've kind of described already, and how that's work as particularly as it relates to your response to the covid 19 crisis?

MATT HANSON: Yeah, things have definitely, definitely changed. And what we found that say more recently, our customers are, are asking the question, how do we bring shoppers back into store? How do we bring employees back into abilities? While the same questions we're asking ourselves well, and we're using our capabilities, which are substantial, to just solve new problems for the customers? So how do you keep things clean? So we're making sanitizing stations and things of that nature. And then the other big part of the equation is how to keep people distance. And those are the two big buckets. And we've always been providing graphics, and Wayfinding signage, but it's more important than ever, for customers to try to reduce the randomness of human movement, I would say. So directional signage, helps encourage distancing, or enforced distancing, has been a big demand for us lately, and one that were really leading, helping our customers have those problems, not only through our manufacturing capabilities, but also in our design of the physical. And that's been that's been fun to see, take shape, how to convert shoppers is, is a fun problem to solve in our world, but also, how to make those shoppers safe. And those employees say.

DAVE CASPER: now you're producing products that you probably didn't think you were going to produce sounds like even like two months ago,

MATT HANSON: Yeah, we're based in Minnesota. So we could see the situation that was evolving rapidly on the coast. And the the crisis basically emerging, even though we weren't feeling it directly. And there were faceshield acrylic facial designs that were published by people trying to do good out there in the world saying, Hey, here's some designs, if anyone wants to make these, and our employee base being alert, looked at those and said, this is something that we can do. There's something we can do right in our community here. So our people without any direction from me, you know, are empowered to take these things into their own hands. They did it. We made prototypes. Our salespeople talk to customers, customers said, Yes, we have the need. And next thing you know, we have, we're producing acrylic face shields for first responders and health care workers that didn't exist a week ago, and are being produced by the 10s of 1000s. And making a difference. And it was really interesting to see, essentially a product development lifecycle, go from start to end in about two weeks. Doing good and doing right, I think is in the heart of the company. And that's because it's in the heart of the people. And when these initiatives are taken, sure that business initiatives but they're having On fields, the meaning, and the importance of these initiatives, to see the pride that the employees add in what they were doing was extremely satisfying. There's a new level of meaning to the work that we're doing. But I feel really good about what we have to bring into this new world as we see it unfolding and, and help to define it a little bit. Now to make it safer.

DAVE CASPER: I feel like what you're doing and what others are doing is, we have so many clients across North America that are figuring out very quickly, how to survive, how to deal with the adversity and what is so critical, how they're actually helping others survive this and either stay safe at home, or stay safe as they get back into their regular life, which we will get back to at some point. So they'd like to you and thank you, thanks all the employees for not waiting for the CEO to tell him what to do.

MATT HANSON: Yeah, that is, that is a special characteristic. I appreciate the time, Dave.

DAVE CASPER: Matt, thanks so much for taking the time today and sharing all the great work that the Barnard group is doing to help keep people safe during these very challenging times. We appreciate it. Stay safe. Thanks again. Thanks for listening to Growing the Good. I hope you'll join me again for another conversation. Until then, stay safe.