

When was the last time a shoe factory opened in the US?

FootJoy, Inc. is a remarkable and long-lived company, which is at the forefront of golf shoe technology. It is also a company with some very traditional attitudes and its continuing success in world markets is in no small measure a result of this unusual blend. It is also unusual—if not unique—in opening a new purpose built shoe factory in the USA. So, what is the story behind this remarkable move?

Moving into golf

The company was founded in the 1860s in Brockton Mass as a general maker of footwear. In the 1920s it entered golf seriously, making shoes for the US Ryder Cup team and in 1955 it decided to make golf its sole focus. It is now the last shoe manufacturer left in

what was once a major shoemaking town and still makes about 100,000 pairs per annum of welted golf shoes on-site in Brockton. This is a small volume to make profitably and shoes made here are expensive to produce and sell.

In the 1970s, the company began to follow the Nike route and for the vast bulk of its production it became a virtual organisation, designing and specifying from the US and using contract manufacturing in Asia. Difficulty with the evolution of its golf glove programme as it faced rising costs in Korea, made FootJoy decide to build its own plant in Thailand. This was so successful that when shoemaking moved from Taiwan to China, the company decided to take a major



shareholding and ensure the plant was exclusive to them.

This approach has allowed it to undertake product development and to introduce products in greater privacy, as the whole process is undertaken in-house. It is also felt that there is greater control on quality and, possibly, also on inventories. New processes have been introduced in glove production to reduce lead times and enable the company to handle smaller repeat and fill-in orders mid-season. The same principles also apply to shoe production.

FootJoy's structure is unusual in the golf industry and Ecco is the only other producer of golf shoes with wholly-owned manufacturing plants. The company believes this structure of control via ownership has been an essential part in its growth in market share during the '90s. It currently enjoys around 60% of the branded golf shoe market in the US and some 35% worldwide. The brand also commands all the high price points.

A new shoe factory in Brockton

Parent company Acushnet is the only billion-dollar company dedicated exclusively to supplying golf equipment to the golf trade. It owns three major ➤

Stitching on the outsole



WORLD FOOTWEAR

brands, Titleist, FootJoy and The Cobra Golf Company. The Classics range is seen as representing the heritage of the FootJoy brand and a significant point of difference between it and its competitors. The range is widely used by golf's top players and some 80% of PGA Tour professional players are said to wear FootJoy shoes due to their performance and supreme comfort.

Classics golf shoes represent only 4% of FootJoy's total worldwide sales volume but carry a suggested retail price of \$300 plus per pair. Classics represent the flagship product of the FootJoy line and is a unique product range, offering the most precise fitting characteristics available in

FACTS AT A GLANCE

1857	Burt & Packard Shoe Co founded in Brockton. Renamed Field & Flint Co.
1927	FootJoy line is official golf shoe for US Ryder Cup team.
1945	First shoe count on US PGA Tour.
1957	Stone and Tarlow families purchase Field and Flint.
1959	Production moves to Field Street, Brockton.
1970	Company officially known as FootJoy, Inc.
1975	General Mills, Inc. buys controlling interest.
1977	General Mills acquires full ownership.
1979	Company enters golf glove business with Sta-Sof line.
1981	Socks become third core category.
1985	Acushnet Company acquires FootJoy, Inc.
1989	DryJoys golf shoes.
1995	Titleist/FootJoy (Thailand) Ltd glove plant opens.
1996	DryJoys Leather, IntelliGel Fit-Bed and FootJoy Laser Fitting systems.
1997	Marketing/OEM product alliance with SoftSpikes, Inc. FootJoy Europa Collection for women.
1998	FootJoy graphics and logo updated.
1999	Dry I.C.E. shoe made on last created from digital scans of men's feet by Laser Fitting system. Fast Twist insertion is standard on all non-Classics shoes.
2000	AQUAflex leather non-membrane waterproof technology.
2001	Women's Laser Last, Contour Series and Vari-Fit systems.
2002	GelFusion, iSuspension, Xdimension systems. FootJoy again number one shoe at Ryder Cup Matches.



Production in the old factory

golf footwear. The shoes are made by the traditional Goodyear welted construction and in the finest materials, with French calf predominating for the uppers.

Manufacture had taken place in the old factory ever since 1915, but it was only 46 ft (14 m) wide and 460 ft (44 m) long and designed for long straight production runs. It was certainly not suitable for modern manufacturing methods, as this configuration lent itself to batch loads, long cycle times, and large inventories. The production process occupied three floors, which led to pockets of work-in-process, shoes moving out of sequence, and problems with customer backorders.

Although improvements had been made over the years, the physical shape of the building restricted the gains that were becoming necessary in order to remain a viable operation. So, Acushnet took a bold step and decided to invest \$1.2 million to re-engineer the manufacturing process, retro-fit the adjoining 42,000 sq ft (3900 m²) single floor warehouse and move the entire Brockton production from its original building.

Important changes

Objectives were set, with the targets being reductions of repetitive motion, job consolidations, reduction of inventories and quality improvements. Reducing cycle time was a priority, as



Production in the new factory

golf shoes took between 27 to 30 days to produce, while dress shoes could take as long as 45 days. Faster cycle times provide a better opportunity to service customers, reduce work in progress, inventories and finished goods. The new plant is expected to achieve a 15 to 25% reduction in the immediate short term.

Engineers were brought in to perform process flow mapping, study every operation to establish task times for each activity, identify consolidation opportunities and design the most suitable layout. All best practices were put on the table and '5S' (sort, set in order, shine, standardise and sustain) was followed closely as well as the fundamentals of lean manufacturing and continuous improvement methodologies.

The majority of the workforce had been traditionally paid on piecework, which rewards by output regardless of customers or priorities. It is fundamentally a push-system and in direct conflict with lean manufacturing, which is a pull-system. The pace and flow of work would change significantly in the new layout and would not support being 'paid by the piece'. The labour contract was therefore renegotiated, with the union taking a key role in working out a fair conversion from piece-rates to hourly pay and achieving a win/win situation for its members, the company and the factory's future.

Classic Tour golf styles


The new factory opened on November 22, 2004. Also new in 2004 was the first new product in eight years—The Classics Tour. Product Development designed an outsole suitable for Brockton's Weltered process that adopted the comfort and flexibility characteristics of the GelFusion range. The new product offers all of the fit characteristics of Classics with the features and benefits of new

technologies from other outsoles in the FootJoy range. The shoe is proving popular with PGA Tour players moving rapidly to this new product.

"I wish we had invested the money years ago and forged ahead. It was absolutely the right call, based on early productivity success, and the employees like it very much," says Jim Connor, president of FootJoy.

Specialisation

This is a refreshing story which most definitely bucks the usual trend of factory closures in traditional shoemaking countries. What's the secret? Well, as previously mentioned, here is a company that has managed to combine forward thinking with traditional values. It has also maintained a specialist and indeed elitist product that is eagerly sought-out despite its high price, and is prepared to invest in its continuing future.

There is a lesson here. If we look at other western manufacturers, we can find many success stories built upon investment in technology (Rolls-Royce aero engines), superb engineering design (Ferrari cars), unique concepts (IKEA flat-pack furniture) and many more besides. FootJoy's factory at Brockton cannot be directly compared to these, but it does illustrate the same basic attitude and there is no reason why others in the footwear industry could not do the same. 

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