

# Maker's Row: Connecting The New Manufacturers

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Maker's Row, [a website and free service](#) [1] that helps facilitate connections between designers and the small-batch American manufacturers that can help them turn a sketch into a real product, is on a roll. The New York-based technology startup has [recently secured \\$1 million](#) [2] in funding to help hire more developers, who will help expand the service and build in more features. The company's co-founder and CEO, Matthew Burnett, has been featured on the likes of [Fox Business](#) [3] and [NPR](#) [4].

The users are happy too — Tanya Menendez, COO and co-founder, was recently pleased to hear that an American manufacturer posted their company's profile and had a solid lead and a meeting in just two days.

The company launched its website in November 2012, with a focus on the jewelry and apparel markets, plus a relatively simple premise. On one end, designers sign up for the site and can search through the profiles of American manufacturers for one that would be a good fit. And on the other end, these small-batch manufacturers can create a profile of their operations and capabilities, fill in all the appropriate contact information, upload some images of the plant and previous work, and begin to field questions and requests from interested entrepreneurs.

The service is completely free for those aspiring businesspeople, and manufacturers have the option of paying a bit of money for an improved listing. And according to Menendez, this formula is already working. She says, "This type of quick match-making makes it really fulfilling to continue working on Maker's Row and we're really hoping that we get more and more factories on, too, to continue the momentum."

If there was anyone to begin a business like Maker's Row, Burnett and Menendez may very well be the best choice — they both know the pain and complexity of having to work with foreign manufacturers. Burnett's own history is perhaps the best type of story to tell, as proof of how using domestic — and even hyper-local — manufacturers can be an incredible asset to a fledgling company.

Burnett's background is in industrial design, making watches for Marc Jacobs, DKNY and other well-known brands. In 2007, he started his own watch brand, but ran into a plethora of problems when dealing with overseas manufacturers, "from language barriers to time zone differences, and then importing costs. A lot of those costs, you won't see."

Production runs took months, only for shipments to get trapped in customs for weeks at a time, and because he's not a supply chain expert, he didn't know how to get that process expedited. And if there was an error in the production, he'd have to send it all back. Once, he had a run of 3,000 watches, \$40,000 in cost, all show up

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defective. He says, "As a first-time entrepreneur, you can't take that type of hit on your business."

He was forced to fold the company, and started another, called Brooklyn Bakery, which specialized in leather goods. He wanted all the products to be fully manufactured domestically, so that he could visit the factory and meet the people who were going to be making his product. He sourced leather from Queens, and had everything produced in Midtown's garment district. He says, "That provided extreme transparency. I knew everyone that was involved in the process. It was a lot easier to detect manufacturing errors, because there were a few, but I was able to catch them the day they went into production."

One can begin to see the threads that now outline the mission behind Maker's Row. When Menendez came onboard Brooklyn Bakery, they were still taking months to find the right suppliers. She was the one who proposed what is now Maker's Row: a website where entrepreneurial people, who want to start a business and make a real product, can find the American factories who will make that happen with quality and price in mind. And based on the success they've had so far, it's clear that Menendez's idea was one many of those would-be small businesses were desperately in need of. They brought on Scott Weiner, who handles the service's technical challenges, as the third co-founder.

Since launching, with that million in funding aside, Maker's Row has helped numerous entrepreneurs make connections with domestic manufacturers, but Burnett says the interested parties haven't been limited to one-person operations — much the opposite, in fact. He says some of the biggest apparel brands one might find in big-box retailers have been reaching out to "branch into new industries or create new products, or even if they're just looking for a new type of textile."

And Burnett says the Maker's Row team is starting to work on plans to help these designers or businesses get the in-person help that they need to get their designs made — almost like a consultancy business on the side — but they're not quite ready to make an announcement on that front.

What's so compelling about Burnett's and Menendez's new role in the domestic manufacturing community is that they're seeing things from an all-new angle. They're directly in the middle of what could very well become a new era in American manufacturing, in which the boutique rules, and where manufacturing is within reach for essentially anyone with an entrepreneurial spirit. It could truly change the financial outlook of many smaller contract manufacturers, and enable a whole new generation of "makers."

Menendez says, "I would say a lot of people are taking their entrepreneurship more seriously. A lot of people are trying to transition out of their 9-5. We get a lot of emails from people that are really trying to ramp up their business, that are putting a significant effort to starting their own business. It's not just a DIY-type of hobby — these people are really serious about starting a business. We're really excited about that."

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And while many of the early Maker's Row users were funded via "crowdfunding" sites like Kickstarter, that has changed. Menendez says that their site offers a searchable category for manufacturers that are willing and able to work with "beginners" to the manufacturing world, and often don't need anything more than a technical sketch and some start-up capital. She says, "You can get a website up and going and you can get your first run of samples done. These smaller-batch manufacturers definitely allow for that."

The most compelling element to that scenario? Menendez says, "You can start a business with \$2,000 now." Or less, she argues, depending on the project.

And that seems to truly be the future of Maker's Row and the marketplace they're aiming to serve. If this type of relationship grows in popularity, thanks in part due to Maker's Row, we could see a whole category of start-up manufacturers that begin with just a few thousand dollars, and have nowhere to go but up. And as those businesses succeed, so will the domestic contract manufacturers who make their products. Truly, this seems like the beginning of a "maker" economy.

Burnett says that today, there's two main avenues for a hypothetical jewelry maker. The first is that the maker travels to China, finds a contract manufacturer, flies home only to fly back to China once the samples are done, and stays to oversee production. Expensive, and a hassle at best. The second finds a Chinese manufacturer on Google, sends over the drawings, and hopes everything works out. Not as expensive up-front, but it leaves far too much in the dark. And if those products, after a six-month wait, show up flawed, it becomes an expensive, business-killing dilemma. Both scenarios feel needlessly risky, and in light of the success of Maker's Row, obsolete.

Burnett says, "And now, hopefully, there's a third that goes on to Maker's Row and finds a domestic manufacturer."

*Learn more about Maker's Row at [www.makersrow.com](http://www.makersrow.com) [5].*

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[1] <http://makersrow.com/>

[2] <http://techcrunch.com/2013/07/19/makers-row-wants-to-give-u-s-manufacturing-a-boost-gets-1m-from-index-comcast-alex-ohanian-more-for-its-business-marketplace/>

[3] [http://video.foxbusiness.com/v/2586486016001/the-made-in-america-connection/?playlist\\_id=937116503001](http://video.foxbusiness.com/v/2586486016001/the-made-in-america-connection/?playlist_id=937116503001)

[4] <http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2013/05/09/181646847/Fashion-Site>

[5] <http://www.makersrow.com/>

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