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FROM BLANK TEES TO BIG BRANDS: INSIDE PREMIUM APPAREL'S HIGH-PERFORMANCE OPERATION

For a business like Premium Apparel handling 3-4 million garments annually, small inefficiencies multiply quickly. Luckily, its warehouse helps prevent that from happening. Behind all the cardboard is a fast-moving, agile business sitting at the intersection of fashion, function and scale – supplying everything from school uniforms and corporate polos to heavyweight streetwear and branded golf-day apparel.



MORE THAN JUST T-SHIRTS

To the untrained eye, a blank t-shirt is just that – a blank t-shirt. But as Premium Apparel's Service and Marketing executive Jack O'Sullivan explains, the devil is in the details – sometimes even one single millimetre.

"Whether it's the length of a sleeve or how it sits on your shoulder, that can be what differentiates us from our competitors."

Premium Apparel supplies wholesalers, printers and corporate clients nationwide. The core of the business is high-volume, repeat uniform orders, and it also stocks globally recognised brands, including American Apparel, Gildan and Adidas.

"You can't really differentiate on product as much these days," Jack says. "So, the way you do that is through customer service."

That means speed, flexibility and even answering the phone with "Hey Tony" instead of asking for an account number. When you're supplying large volumes, sometimes thousands of garments per order, efficiency is everything.



GROWING FAST – AND RUNNING OUT OF ROOM

Before 2019, the Premium Apparel team operated out of two much smaller warehouses in St. John's. The business was growing quickly – so quickly, in fact, that a dedicated employee was responsible for transferring stock between the two sites.

"It was economical at the time," Owner Nick Donald explains. "But we soon grew out of that as well."

In January 2019, the company moved into its new Highbrook warehouse.





GROWING FAST – AND RUNNING OUT OF ROOM

"It was kind of scary," Nick admits, after investing heavily in a brand-new building that they suddenly couldn't access for a period of time.

But the business adapted. When schools closed and corporate events stopped, Premium Apparel (with the help of the Goodman team) sublet excess space and took on 3PL work to keep cash flowing. Later it launched its own house brand, Urban Collab, and expanded sizing up to 8XL after customers asked for it.

"When you open that channel for someone to come in and buy something that fits them," Jack says, "they're now going to take a closer look at the rest of the product as well."



NEW WAREHOUSE IS THE PERFECT FIT

When Premium Apparel first moved in, its operations covered approximately two-thirds of the warehouse's footprint. These days, there's less spare room.

"We always hoped we'd grow into it," Nick laughs.

The racks rise to more than 11 metres, and very narrow aisle (VNA) equipment runs along magnetic strips embedded in the floor – designed during construction to maximise every cubic metre of space.

"You can't veer off," Nick explains. "When the guys are 11 metres in the air, they don't crash into the racks."



NEW WAREHOUSE IS THE PERFECT FIT

During the design phase, Premium Apparel worked with Goodman to adjust the warehouse layout to suit its operation, from the side roller door to the floor engineering required for its equipment.

"Part of the reason we ended up here was that collaborative design process."

Health and safety compliance was another big driver. A new building meant the team could "tick the boxes a lot easier," rather than retrofitting older sites.



SMALL ENOUGH TO CARE, BIG ENOUGH TO SCALE

Despite its growth trajectory, Premium Apparel still operates with the agility of a smaller business. And, over the past couple of years, that's been "our biggest strength," Jack says.

As the business has navigated recessions, pandemics and ever-shifting retail trends, it's done so without losing sight of the little things. Operating in a purpose-built warehouse in a sought-after location has helped. But the real story is Premium Apparel – a New Zealand company that stays close to its customers, and is constantly moving towards the 'what's next'.

In apparel, as in any industry, standing still isn't an option.









PREMIUM APPAREL®

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