



How Australian companies pivoted

It was as much about survival as it was helping Australians in a time of need, as businesses used



Bike rack maker GripSport has built stands for hand sanitiser, while Engage Athletic owners Jenna and Paul McAlister turned their hand to mask-making.

Jon Weaving was already familiar with a career pivot, having left behind a life of writing novels and short stories to grow a backyard bike rack business into a three-factory operation called GripSport. When COVID-19 hit, his chief concern was for his staff of 11 and how they might possibly get through the inevitable economic fallout.

"Our bike racks are the industry standard for caravans; they're very popular," says Weaving, who with wife Marion had entered 2020 eyeing semi-retirement and a move to New Zealand.

"Five minutes before COVID hit, we were riding a fairly high wave," he says. "Within two weeks, our revenue dropped by over 92 per cent – it was like a tap being turned off."

The Weavings' workers have been with them for a long time, and the couple were conscious of the weight of that responsibility. Jon called the team together and threw down the gauntlet, asking them: "Can you think of anything that we can turn all of this expertise, equipment and knowledge to making, that we can get going quickly?"

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Jon Weaving

Somebody suggested stands for hand sanitiser bottles, and GripSport was reborn.

"It saved us," says Weaving. "We had it from design to prototype and on the market in under 10 days, manufactured in our factory in Thomastown."

Weaving is proud to have produced something that is attractive, simple, tough and cheaper than anything else on the market, but prouder still that within a fortnight his staff were all back working full-time making the many thousands of stands that have sold around the country. The first time he entered a supermarket, sanitising

his hands on the way in from a bottle held by a GripSport stand, was a moving experience.

"It was a little bit like walking into a book shop 25 years ago and seeing your novel on the shelves," he says. "It was very exciting."

The GripSport story is one of ingenuity in the face of crisis, just one of the many that impressed Australian Made CEO Ben Lazzaro after the iconic green and gold logo teamed up with the Australian Manufacturing Growth Centre's COVID-19 manufacturer response register.