

Macedonian Masks, Face Shields, Sanitary Gates, Protective Suits: the Coronavirus Has Opened Up New Business Opportunities

By Petre Dimitrov, May 18th 2020

Due to the outbreak of the pandemics the professional photographer **Darko** from Skopje was left jobless. No one hires him for wedding ceremonies because all of them have been cancelled, just like baptisms and business events.

Together with a group of friends who have certain experience in sewing he has set his mind on making protective cotton face masks. He took advantage of his prior marketing experience and for the first time in his life he used a sewing machine. This is the story he told the journalist from *eMagazine*.

They started selling the masks online, and their business took off in no time and just some time ago a Macedonian company placed a large order with them.

‘It’s no time to cry. In such times of crisis, we all need some sort of aid and assistance. But, let’s get realistic. This aid and assistance won’t be sufficient to help all of us. Instead of complaining and moaning, we are to roll up our sleeves and find a way to earn something.’ he told us.

THE MACEDONIAN MASKS WILL ALSO BE SOLD AT AMAZON

These past several months, Darko’s example was followed by several textile companies throughout Macedonia, located in Prilep, Shtip, Kriva Palanka..

None of the afore-stated companies have previously produced protective masks. Prior to the Coronavirus outbreak, these protective masks were predominantly exported from China. Some of these companies have even made a step forward by commencing production of protective suits, which have never been produced in large quantities.

One such example is the company named *Comfy Angel* from Prilip, the primary range of products of which is quilts, pillows, bed covers...

With the onset of the Coronavirus crisis, this company, alongside with several other companies throughout the country, oriented itself towards production of protective cotton masks that were donated to hospitals, state institutions and others.

At present, all of these companies not only supply the domestic market with protective masks, but they have also expended to the international market and started exporting both cotton and medical masks.

‘For the time being, we produce 300,000 masks on a weekly basis. In order to commence production of face masks, we purchased two machines, and this period we are making an investment of additional 200,000 dollars into a new production line that would allow us to increase the production of medical masks to 1,5 million pieces on a weekly basis.’, stated **Mr. Jane Gjoreski**, the Operations Manager of *Comfy Angels* for *eMagazine*.

Our face masks are predominantly sold in domestic pharmacies, and the company is finalizing its strategy for large-scale export and to this end we have resorted to some new investments.

‘In the near future, and in cooperation with our partner from England, our masks will be available for purchase on Amazon as well’, stated Mr. Gjoreski.

The requirement that is to be met for export of surgical masks is possession of an EN 14683 Certificate, which the company shall obtain by the end of this month from an accredited laboratory seated in Austria. Furthermore, the management of *Comfy Angels* is working on securing a CE mark which is expected to be obtained in the course of the month as well. Having obtained it, the company would file an application for issuance of a license for production of protective medical equipment. The afore-stated application will be filed with the Macedonian Agency for Medicines and Medical Devices (MALMED).

Simultaneously, the company has commenced production of protective suits for which possession of a certificate is not required.

The quantity of protective suits ranges from 10,000 to 15,000 on a weekly basis, out of which 50% is exported mainly to Germany and Greece.

‘You remain longest on the market provided that you respond fast and adapt to what is currently on demand’, stated Mr. Gjoreski.

FROM LUMINOUS SIGNAGE TO FACE SHIELDS

Apart from the protective masks, protective shields are slowly but surely penetrating and becoming part of the everyday life in Macedonia.

Face shields are an essential piece of equipment for health workers, as well as for dentists, hairdressers, beauticians... Moreover, they are becoming increasingly more popular among ordinary citizens as well who are putting in maximum efforts so as to protect themselves against the Coronavirus.

Following the example of the textile companies, some other domestic companies have resorted to production of face shields primarily in the form of donation to healthcare institutions, and then for sale as well.

This is the case with the Ohrid-seated company *Pechat Plus*, the primary business activity of which is production of luminous signage, followed by production of wooden lights and cigarette cases.

Recently, for the first time they have commenced production of face shields under the name *Protect+*.

One of the primary business activities of the Skopje-based company *Multimedia* is also production of luminous signage, followed by branding of petrol stations and furniture production.

In the light of the newly imposed market circumstances, this company has also commenced production of larger quantities of face shields and protective Plexiglass screens.

The company representatives informed us that in the past they would occasionally produce such products, and having in mind the current demand, at present they are focusing on them.

MACEDONIAN SANITARY GATES

A similar case is the story with the Gostivar-based company *Univerzal*, the scope of business activity of which is production of catering and medical equipment. This company was among the first in Macedonia that commenced production of sanitary gates used for disinfection purposes of busy and crowded venues/premises.

Mr. Erzen Nesimi, a designer employed in *Univerzal*, stated that they got the idea from a company in Italy.

‘Prior to entering the building, people pass through a zone that is equipped with a dispenser spraying a product that disinfects clothing.

The interest in this product is on the increase, and we have been considering ideas for other products as well which are on demand due to the outbreak of the pandemics’, stated Mr. Nesimi who highlighted that the companies must adapt to the newly created conditions and market requirements.

‘In the light of the pandemics, the number of orders placed by the catering facilities that are some of our main clients have gradually started to decline. It is a well-known fact that they were the first that were shuttered due to the Coronavirus crisis.

Having ascertained that there was interest in such a product on the part of a number of facilities, we have decided to put in more efforts in this direction and in order to acquire a new source of income’, stated Mr. Nesimi.

Recently, some innovators from Kavadarci and Kochani commenced production of sanitary gates as well.

THE MACEDONIAN EXPORT IN PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT MARKED AN INCREASE OF 300%

According to the information from the Ministry of Finance the export in masks, protective suits and other protective equipment from Macedonia has marked an increase of almost 300% compared to the volume of export realized in April last year.

The vast majority of the protective equipment in terms of value has been exported to Germany, Qatar, the Netherlands, Belgium and Austria.

This period the total export of goods amounts to 390 million denars as opposed to the realized 135 million denars in the same period last year.

Another interesting fact is that even production of mask cases has commenced.

The Macedonian economy alike all the other economies globally was heavily impacted by the Coronavirus pandemics.

So far, the Government has announced three sets of economic measures the effectiveness of which has been perceived differently by the public. However, it is beyond doubt and it is the opinion of both the international and domestic financial institutions that Macedonia will experience an economic recession in the first quarter of the year.

Nevertheless, the afore-stated examples indicate that there is always a flickering light at the end of the tunnel and that the market is constantly open to novel and innovative opportunities for those that wish to make a profit and to survive.