

Outsourcing to China

Naish International was the first Maui water sports equipment manufacturer to outsource kite production to China. Starting in the early 1990s, Robby Naish, owner, and Don Montague, designer, sent their kite work to a factory in Chenzhen, near Guangzhou, the former Canton, to take advantage of low cost labor. Some 1,000 young women aged 20 to 24, mostly emigrants to the big city from rural farms, produce not only kites but bags, accessories, and so forth for Naish and numerous other companies. Using computers, the Internet, and modern telecommunications permits cheap and easy communication between Maui and Chenzhen. Via e-mail and phone images, design specifications are transmitted instantly. Ideas become products.

“It’s surprising how many parameters there are in a kite; a kite is extremely complex,” says Montague. “A one millimeter change in the trailing edge creates a completely different kite. Naish designs and tests 300 prototypes a year. When we have completed a kite design in three dimensions, correcting for angle of attack, profile, aspect ratio, and outline, we forward it to the factory and it is laser cut and sewn within eight hours. The finished kite arrives here from Shenzhen three days later. The main loss of time for us is Fed Ex delivery.”

Montague tells of quality control: “Every kite Naish makes is inflated for eight hours at the factory as a quality check. The bladders are tested three times and flying lines are checked by five different people. If a line is off by just a few millimeters, this shows up when the control bar is manipulated. We cannot afford any kind of failure. The factory----four three-story buildings----is like a doctor’s office. It’s absolutely spotless. There is a fulltime cleaning crew and windows are washed inside and out daily. We cannot have a speck of dust get into the fabric. All the girls are very talented, but only eight are allowed to do the supercritical parts, like the struts.”

“I’ve been going to China several times a year for many years now,” says Montague, “and most of the cultural and language problems are long since solved, although there are always blips like the Sars epidemic. The Chinese are wonderful, extremely talented people.”

Don Montague (far right) of Naish International sets up the rigging of a kite. Below, the all-woman work force marches to lunch.



Naish International



Naish International



Nash International

The spotlessly clean factory in Chenzhen, China.



Nash International

Kites receive an eight hour inflation test.



Nash International

And nary a Honda in sight.