

# The Handwork Landscape: New York City Garment District

Nest's Makers United Project  
2021 Update





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# Approach and Methodology: 2021 Addendum

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Nest included two primary data sources in this study:

- ▶ Nest's Makers United Landscape (Original and 2021 Addendum) surveys
- ▶ Qualitative interviews conducted alongside the surveys

For this 2021 update to the Garment District—Makers United Landscape Report, Nest's approach included quantitative data collected through the landscape survey, as well as qualitative insights gained while conducting these surveys. These tools provide a valuable glimpse into how the small businesses have fared since last year, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent shifts to the industry and supply chains.

Based on earlier conversations with the Garment District Alliance, the target population for this update addendum includes a portion of last year's 105 businesses focusing on a total of 30, which manufacture, produce, and sell within the apparel or accessories industry. To ensure a representative sample of the 105 businesses, we selected 15 businesses that were deemed "more engaged" in Year 1 (i.e. attended our workshops and/or participated in the Artisan Showcase event) and 15 who only took the survey in Year 1. There was also an opportunity to further expand the data collection, with the original survey being given to five new businesses, adding to the range of wholesale vs. retail captured.

The survey, developed to understand the changes to, and business needs of, the Garment District businesses was administered digitally using Qualtrics survey software and largely through on-site interviews. The data collected was aggregated to analyze trends and Covid-19 strategies among the makers. This report offers an updated representation of New York City's Garment District businesses after a year of financial struggles, pivoting, closures, and in some cases, positive growth.





## 1

## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

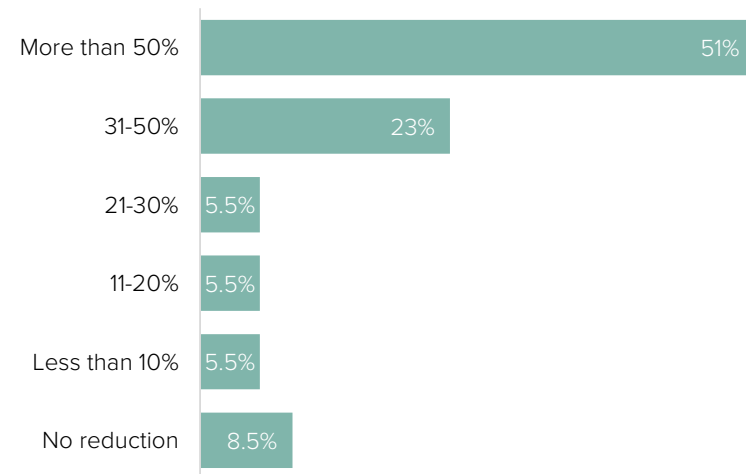
While most businesses in the Garment District were negatively impacted by Covid-19, some leveraged the opportunities created from the industry's massive shifts. Sixty-six percent reported that business has not returned to pre-COVID status and 50% of business owners cited a decrease in staff hours since last year. Due to a decrease in sales and inability to pay rent, some business owners have plans to close, retire, or downsize, but others are hopeful as they witness signs of revival. The status of these businesses varies widely, depending on their ability to withstand and bounce back from the global pandemic, often relying on longstanding relationships and luck.



With the loss of income and sales, in a way Covid-19 was a strengthening and awakening for fashion businesses to pivot and put forth new energy.

—5th generation textile craftsman, and co-owner of pleating business

### % Sales Reduction Due to Covid-19



The fashion industry as a whole has changed, for better or worse. Some have chosen to bring business back to NY, some shut down, some are more budget conscious than ever before. People are more realistic and understanding now, a little more flexible with timelines.—Owner of an embroidery and embellishment studio



## WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM COVID-19

Covid-19 has reemphasized the resourcefulness and resiliency of the Garment District community, further demonstrated by their ability to support one another. We've often seen these joined efforts in practice and while some of these solutions have proven successful in the short term level, they have difficulty scaling and making a larger, lasting impact.

To ensure more consistent and impactful change, more resources are needed to scale some of the grassroots strategies that the Garment District businesses have already been doing. Based on the mapping, Nest noted several examples of community-problem solving such as:

- ▶ Establishing micro-networks within the same building for a safe walk buddy system during the height of AAPI hate-acts emerging in the District
- ▶ Providing alarm keychains to employees to ensure additional safety
- ▶ Offering rented storage space for other businesses during times of Covid-related transitions, etc.

With additional support and structure these strategies can be further developed to provide greater and broader support to businesses. Some ideas include:

- ▶ Establishing a more formal “buddy system” by building or block by developing a shared calendar between businesses and/or creating a contact list for those who would want to join
- ▶ Create a listserv or a posting section on the GDA website of businesses that have storage space available with their applicable details (location, size of space, negotiable or non-negotiable rental prices, duration of space availability) and share widely.
- ▶ Increase funding for safety measures like personal safety alarms, increased camera surveillance in the District and providing ride share services during later work hours



## 2

## THE BENEFITS OF THE GARMENT DISTRICT

Despite the challenges of **obtaining sales, paying rent, and finding skilled workers**, the data shows the Garment District is still considered a great place to start a business. **Over 60% of business owners cite the Garment District's advantage is its proximity**—the unparalleled access to designers, suppliers, and manufacturers.



I have been in this industry for 35 years so I have seen it all. I'm originally from Peru and I started my business in 2008. In that time I have made all kinds of garments, from wedding dresses to bathing suits. All types of people have walked through this studio. But I have always wanted to be a designer, and during Covid-19 I got that opportunity. An emerging designer let me collaborate on ideas. We created a fashion show together. It gave me life. I came here every day during the pandemic, because no one else could work from here but me, and I just focused on my work, my passion.

It gives me joy to pass on my knowledge. When young students or designers come through this building asking for production or suppliers or resources, I point them in the right direction. Because I know everyone here. I never would have made it to this point without the Garment District community. I want to see this industry thrive like it once did.—*Owner of an apparel cut-and-sew studio*



Designers want to see and feel the product...it's a symbiotic ecosystem.

—*Owner of an embroidery studio*



Designers want their to product turn around in 24 hours. If we move, we would lose clients and workers.

—*Owner of a production company*



The amazing talent we have met in our 50 years in business [is what keeps us here]. We have a responsibility to give people an opportunity for work.

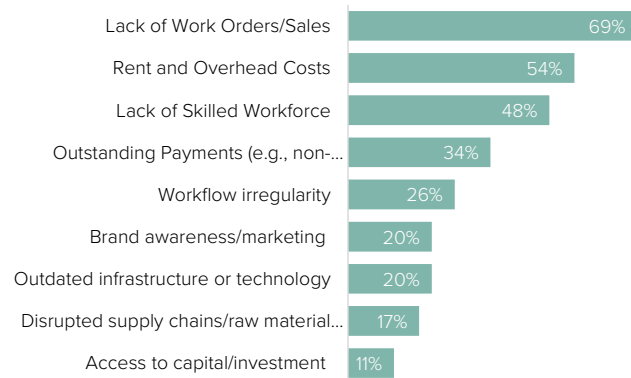
—*Owner of a pattern-making studio*

# 3

## SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES: SKILL AREAS

Business owners spoke of requiring external or outsourced help for social media, finances, and other administrative needs. They feel this assistance would ultimately lead to more organized and strategic business planning, increased sales and rent support.

### Top 3 Business Challenges



### Top 3 Business Topics to Develop in the Next 3 Months

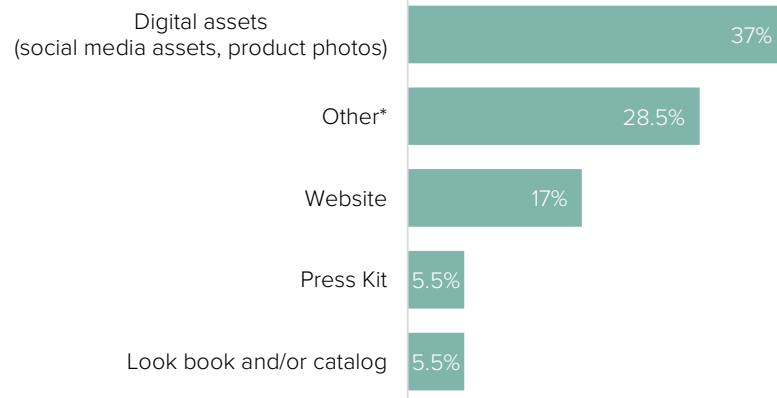
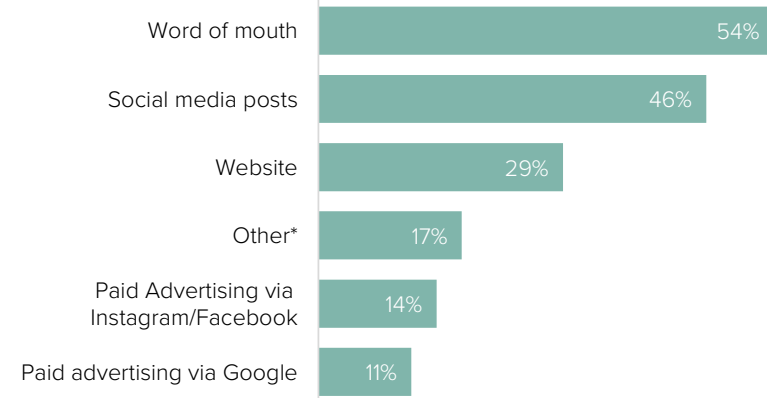




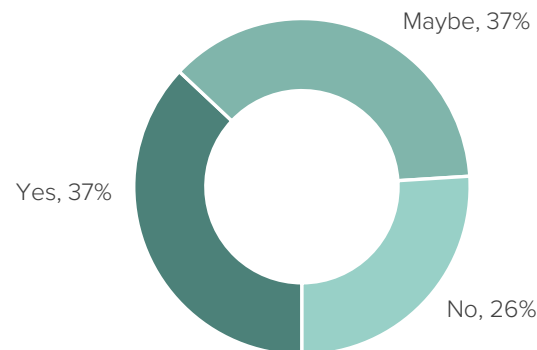
## 4

## SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES: BRANDING AND MARKETING

Due to time constraints, branding and marketing often gets neglected. Many expressed there is too much business already, they just need workers. One said that designers want anonymity so producers cannot post on social media, another said they need someone to conduct these tasks.

**Sales/Marketing Materials Needed****Desired Marketing Expansion**

\*Other responses indicate businesses that do not need additional marketing materials or sales expansion, either because they have too much business already, designers do not want them posting production shots on social media or they would require extra assistance to fulfill these tasks and cannot afford it at this time.

**Interest in Hiring Paid Interns for Business-Related Needs**

## 5

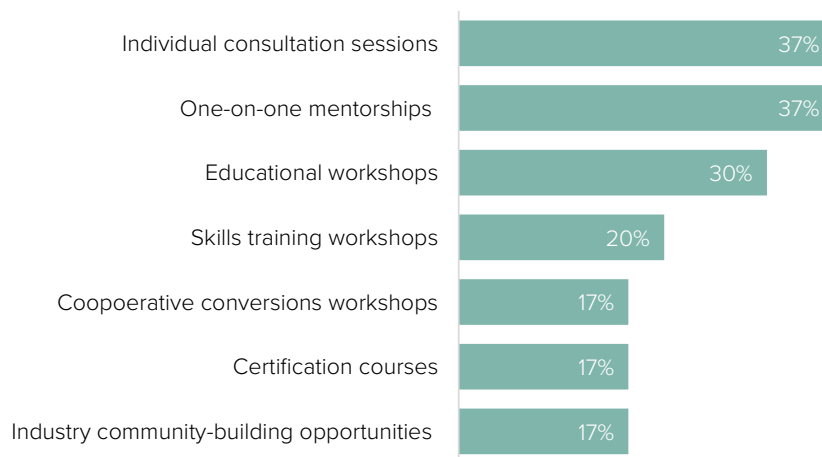
## DESIRED SUPPORT

In receiving feedback on last year's GDA virtual events, **30% of business owners did not participate because of time constraints**, while **37% thought the content/topics did not seem applicable**. 33% of businesses did attend but found their problems to be greater, or different, than could be solved with such events.

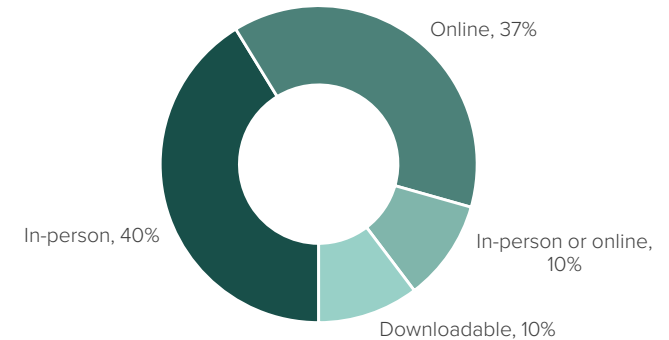
Because of nuanced issues in the face of an uncertain future, the businesses most desired **tailored assistance through individual consultations and mentorship**.

40% of business owners prefer in-person support while 37% said in-person or online would work for them. Additionally, 73% prefer to have workshops, consultations, mentoring sessions and other supportive services held on weekdays.

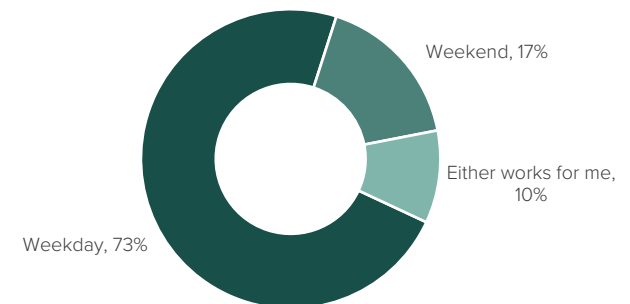
### Types of GDA Support Desired



### Preference: In-person or online?



### Preference: Weekday or weekend?



# Where We Go From Here

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## **MARKETING MATERIALS FOR SOURCING LOCAL**

Nest will develop a business case and marketing materials for sourcing local to be shared with District businesses who can use it with prospective brands and designers to help make the case for manufacturing locally. Working collaboratively with the Business Development Collaborative partners, Nest will create a marketing “resource kit” that will include digital assets (social media tiles, images of the Garment District and Garment District businesses, etc.), the business case, an updated sourcing guide and other materials and resources that will promote the District.

## **CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT**

In response to what we have heard from Garment District businesses, Nest will design and lead a series of three capacity building workshops focused on needs identified in the landscape survey. As we have done in other Makers United cities, Nest will prioritize a collaborative and constituent-first approach to workshop design and lean on its partnership with Business Development Collaborative for input and support.

## **ETHICAL HANDCRAFT PROGRAM**

Nest will implement its Ethical Handcraft Program with five District-only businesses, which offers a pathway to compliance for workspaces beyond a traditional factory and are targeted for production settings similar to those in the Garment District. Nest adopts a training-first approach to provide businesses with the guidance and resources needed to meet the Standards. Following a customized remediation phase, businesses will receive an assessment to evaluate eligibility for certification and access to the Nest Seal of Ethical Handcraft.

# Acknowledgments

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MAKERS UNITED NYC GARMENT DISTRICT WAS GENEROUSLY FUNDED BY:







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To learn more about Nest's Makers United Program,  
please visit [buildanest.org](http://buildanest.org)