

“Without the constant support and outreach from Novation by people like Cathy Denning, vice president, contract and program services, as well as those in supplier diversity, OP-marks would not be where it is today.”

– Kathy Lober  
OP-marks, Inc.

Novation®

# Supplier Success Story

**Supplier Profile:** OP-marks™, Inc.

**Headquarters:** Athens, Ga.

**Year Established:** 2002

**Program Participation:** A Novation-awarded supplier since 2007



## Meeting an Industry Need

OP-marks, like many other small start-up companies, came into being to fill an existing need. Dr. Steve Lober was chief of surgery at a Georgia hospital when a wrong-site surgery occurred. At the time, no good protocols or products existed for surgical-site marking. Not content to merely sit on the sidelines, Dr. Lober began designing a product for surgical-site marking that was both cost-effective and readily disposable to avoid cross-contamination. The result was the Mini Surgical Skin Marker, a streamlined skin marker designed to reduce waste and facility expenses while promoting proper single patient use protocol.

OP-marks also introduced the first TAT™ markers, Joint Commission-compliant markers for use in specialty applications such as ophthalmology and ENT procedures. Subsequent innovations include OP-marks' unique modular medication labeling systems, gen2™ prep-resistant ink and soffzone™ silicone safety products.

## Novation Leads the Way to 94% Average Annual Growth Rate

In 2004, Kathy Lober, Dr. Lober's wife, took over at OP-marks. Kathy Lober's extensive health care background, including previous positions at MD Anderson Hospital in Houston, Texas; Emory South Clinic in Atlanta, Ga.; and UT Southwestern in Dallas, Texas, gave her more than enough passion and drive to carry OP-marks into the future.

Business grew at a relatively consistent pace until 2007, when Lober received a phone call from Novation that changed the course of history for her organization. Though Novation had called to request more information on OP-marks and its products, the GPO provided some valuable information for the small business as well. "I spoke with a wonderful Novation representative who told us that we needed to get on contract with Novation, but even before that, we needed to become a woman-owned and operated business," Kathy Lober said.

OP-marks did become nationally certified by the Women's Business Enterprise National Council. And since becoming a Novation-contracted supplier in 2007, OP-marks' average yearly growth rate has been a stunning 94 percent. The supplier now proudly employs seven full-time employees.

Lober admits that before contracting with Novation, her organization still had a lot to learn. "Honestly, we were babes in the woods. We didn't know what a GPO or an IDN was," she said. "But Novation held our hand and walked us through the process of what we needed to do to become a successful business. They've been a constant partner, they've backed us when we needed it and they've been there to guide us."

Novation has also provided OP-marks access to member organizations and specifically large purchasing groups that the supplier might otherwise not have been able to reach. "Novation paved the way for us, and our contract has opened doors and given us connections and opportunities that we would never have had," Lober said. "Without the constant support and

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## Community and Environmental Contributions

In a commitment to its community, OP-marks provides summer work for high school and college graduates while also supporting local charities. In addition, the organization contributes to several national charities.

OP-marks continually strives to provide innovative products that meet the medical community’s demands for lowering costs and biowaste. One example is *soffzone*, its new line of silicone safety products, which provides operating room staff safety assurance and compliance while making a dramatic dent in biowaste and expense because *soffzone* products are completely reusable. OP-marks also specifically designed its *soffzone* neutral zone mats to reduce cost and waste. As a good steward of the environment, the supplier also implements sustainability practices throughout the production process and uses sustainable forestry products in 90 percent of all packaging.

## Viewpoint

Lober shared her thoughts and advice for other small business suppliers to help them succeed, while also making the most of their relationship with Novation:

- “Every small business starts with a leap of faith. You have to truly believe in what you’re doing, because you’re going to have to work harder than anyone else, lose more sleep than anyone else and put more on the line than anyone else. If you truly believe, then get into the game”
- “If you’re considering whether or not to become a Novation supplier, go for it. You won’t regret it.”
- “Maximize your relationship with Novation. Try to meet everyone you interact with at Novation whenever you can. It’s really important to get to know the folks you work with. The connections are invaluable.”