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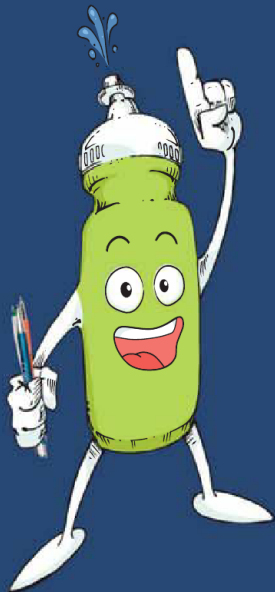
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JULY 2015

**THE
APPAREL
ISSUE**

The Next **Big** Thing

Will Wearable
Tech Items Become
Promo Superstars?



CASE STUDIES

**On The
Scene At
4 Live
Events**

DECORATION

**The Major
Shift In
Screen-
Printing Inks**

STRATEGIES

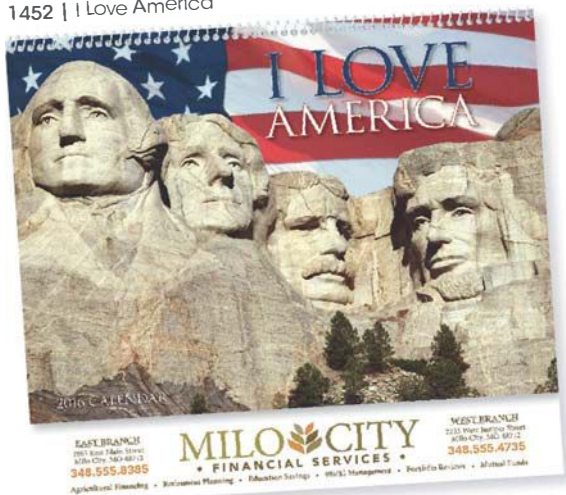
**5 Ways To
Ramp Up
Wearables
Profits**

EVENTS

***Shark Tank*
Star Barbara
Corcoran
Pumps Up
ASI NY**

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CALENDARS

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graphic

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62071
Valuables Zippered Pouch



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contributions
to this necessary
organization total
over \$100,000!*



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CorporateKey (asi/63053)

WebJaguar Offers A Solid Platform For Clients' Ever-Changing Needs

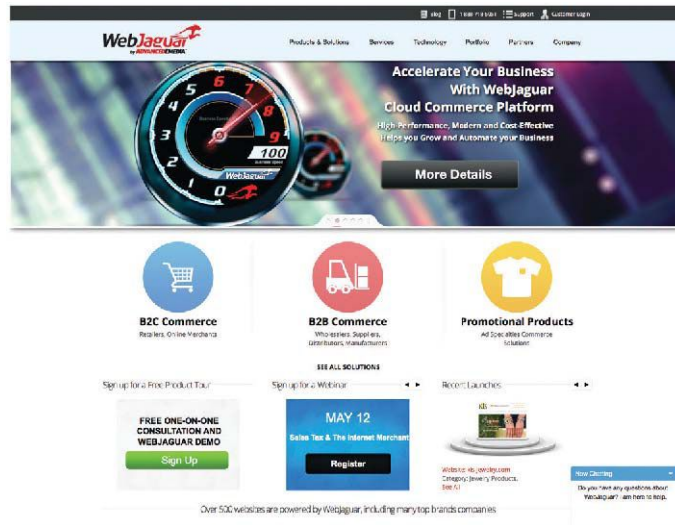
When CorporateKey needed a website as techno-friendly and innovative as its own products, AdvancedEMedia delivered.

CorporateKey has been in business since 1998, introducing many technology products to the promotional industry. Considered a "cool company" for being at the forefront of mobile data storage with its promotional USB drives, today it's heating up the market with innovative designs in mobile accessories and smart peripherals. With a portfolio of patented products in technology, CorporateKey needs an exceptional website as well — one that's attractive, easy to use and flexible enough to remain on top any product changes.

"We hired a local company to do our website three or four years ago," says Kyu Lee, president of CorporateKey. While the provider was close enough to assist easily, it did not have specific promotional product industry experience. The result was disappointing. Lee then spent a year looking for the right company to help.

"We didn't look for the cheapest solution," he says. "We looked for a company that would understand the needs of our business model and our customer... At the ASI Show in Chicago last year, we met AdvancedEMedia. They understood our business model." The choice for Lee was clear. WebJaguar was the right e-commerce platform. He explains: "We were careful who we picked. We needed tremendous resources to do a complete website, including the back-end solution."

AdvancedEMedia's e-commerce platform called WebJaguar provides small to mid-sized promotional products companies an ability to easily automate and manage business with a fully featured website, e-catalog/content management, shopping cart, CRM and lead-generation technologies. "We've provided a front-end and back-end solution to sell products online," says Bachir Kassir, president and founder of AdvancedEMedia. "We worked closely with ASI to develop data feed based on the ASI database. This gives users access to hundreds of thousands of products as a complete turnkey e-commerce solution."



"AdvancedEMedia makes sure we completely understand what to do. If we have an issue, they listen, go back and come up with a solution."

Kyu Lee, CorporateKey

The transition from CorporateKey's old website to the new WebJaguar platform has been smooth. "For the last few months, the WebJaguar team worked with CorporateKey as much as three times a week, an hour each time," Lee says. "In between were lots of emails." The result is a customized website that can meet ever-changing needs. "Distributors can use our website as a tool," Lee continues. "They can look up inventory and track their product through the supply chain. They can see their current order."

Lee cites WebJaguar's reflection of the ASI model and its customers' needs as key. "The culture of our channel has changed a lot over the last several years," he says. "Customers look to companies like Amazon, choose an order, then it ships quickly. A website should fill all the customers' needs. We wanted a product that was compatible across the platform. It had to be easy to navigate."

So far so good. "Already the experience has been wonderful," Lee says. "AdvancedEMedia makes sure we completely

understand what to do. If we have an issue, they listen, go back and come up with a solution." Looking ahead Lee expects benefits to be positive both in terms of the distributors' experience and for CorporateKey, freeing up staff to continue innovating and serving its customers even better. "It's quicker for distributors to get information online, such as what colors an item comes in, what's available, etc.," Lee says. Because the industry is constantly changing, we needed a resource that can adapt to what distributors' needs are. We are very excited to see it work."

All that's needed for other companies to get started on their own WebJaguar e-commerce solution is a Web browser. No special hardware is required, nor does any software have to be installed. WebJaguar is a cloud-based turnkey solution. For more information, visit www.webjaguar.com/asi or call (888) 718-5051 for a free consultation and demo.

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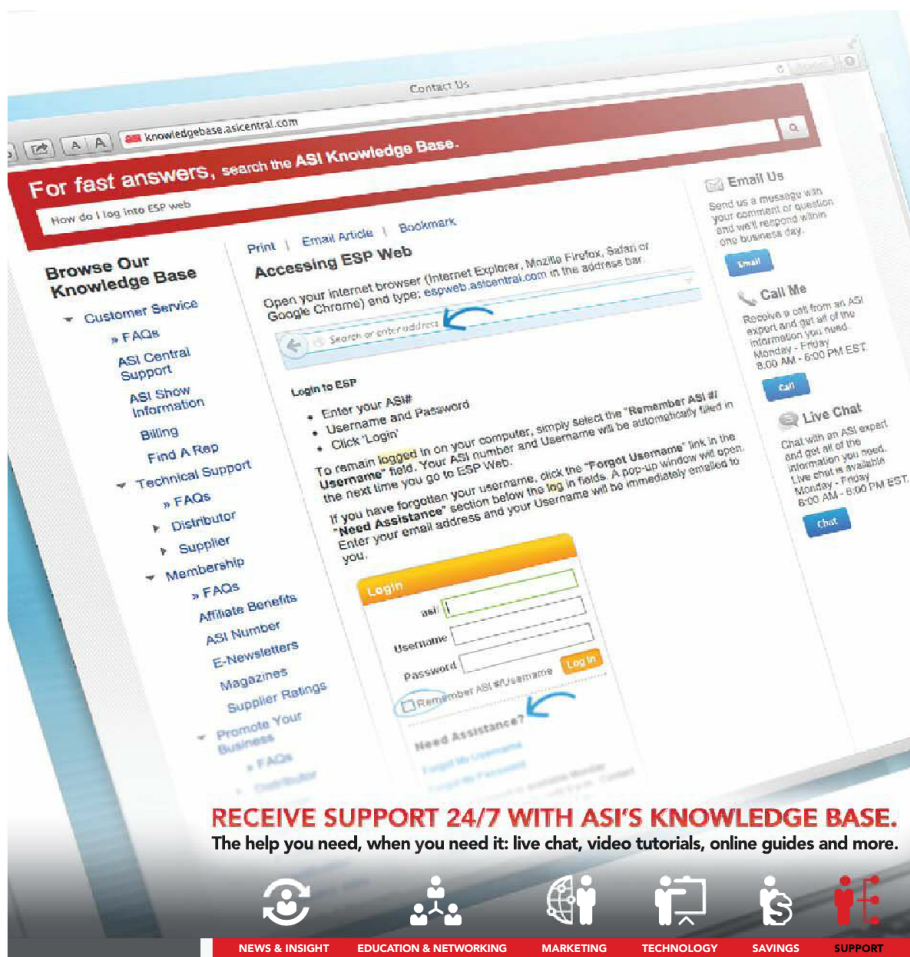
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Editor's Letter

What's on the Outside Matters

Distributors should use enhanced packaging ideas and options to increase sales and client loyalty.

By Andy Cohen

For so long, we've been told, "You can't judge a book by its cover." It's the meat, the inside, the substance of a product that matters so much to consumers and business buyers. But lately, there's some tilting of the pendulum toward the style of an item and how it's presented.

Indeed, packaging is in the limelight these days, and no more so than earlier this spring when consumer packaged goods giant Pepsico announced a new packaging initiative. The company's Frito-Lay division unveiled a new program that allows consumers to customize their own bags of Lay's potato chips. Yes, that iconic yellow bag of Lay's crunchers can be personalized with your own image or that of your dog, son, daughter, cousin – or, yes, employees.

"The packaging and [research and development] teams have invested a lot of effort to figure out how do we do these small customized packaging runs within the complexity of the millions of bags we produce," said Ram Krishnan, Frito-Lay North America's chief marketing officer.

Lay's is banking on the notion that these unique bags will get people talking about their product more than they would otherwise. Lay's will send a digital image to the consumer as soon as the bag is designed, hoping the user will share it throughout their social media outlets.

"I would say we are going to

reach millions and millions of people very easily," Krishnan said. "Consumers want this two-way conversation."

What buyers want today is different than before. They want products that are not only

ers. Sure, the product inside has to be well-received, but it's what's on the outside that will really make people talk and remember the promotion. That kind of conversation among promotional recipients is as powerful as the

Anybody right now can go online to buy a T-shirt or a baseball cap or a bandanna or a sweatshirt for their upcoming charity walk or outdoor fall festival. They'll most likely come across the exact same options



A T-shirt shouldn't just be handed out to a promotional recipient. It should come in a box with a note or it should be inside of a hollowed-out soda can.

useful and of high-quality, but they want the things they buy to really stand out. And, they want those items presented in unique and fun ways. That's where packaging and personalization comes in – and it's a trend distributors should capitalize on. A T-shirt shouldn't just be handed out to a promotional recipient. It should come in a box with a note, or it should be compressed into a unique shape, or it should be inside of a hollowed-out soda can. The key? Distributors can offer enhanced personalization today – distinct images on a 1,000 different T-shirts, for example – thanks to digital-printing advances.

The power of packaging and personalization is the conversation that it starts among consum-

product itself – today's marketing can be enhanced so much by word-of-mouth, and distributors can help that process by providing highly personalized promotional products inside of well-designed, unique and buzzworthy packaging. It's an opportunity today that shouldn't be missed.

Plus, it's a step in the right direction toward combatting what distributors currently say is their biggest challenge – dealing with price-cutters. You see, when somebody is buying a product inside of unique and creative packaging, they're purchasing an experience more than a commodity. That's what distributors should be striving for today – to provide clients with ideas that stand out and that make their promotions unique.

that you're offering, but those items will probably come at a lower price point than what you're willing to offer.

That's the conundrum for ad specialty distributors right now, so they need to separate themselves from the price conversation by offering unique ideas and, yes, packaging that buyers couldn't really find elsewhere. It's not only an up-sell, but it's a way for savvy distributors to connect better with clients and increase customer loyalty.

Packaging ideas like the one Lay's is testing right now will ultimately help to create a more memorable experience for clients and the promotional recipients they're trying to reach. And, really, isn't that what promotional campaigns are all about?

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News

WILL MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS BECOME MORE COMMON IN THE AD SPECIALTY INDUSTRY?



Steve Levschuk Talbot (asi/341500)
“Companies that don’t have the resources for infrastructure upgrades will find great advantages in aligning with companies that do.”



Justin Zavadil ASB (asi/120075)
“Acquisitions will always be a major part of larger distributors’ growth strategies. I don’t see that changing in the near future.”



Norm Hullinger alphabroder (asi/34063)
“Yes, increased margin pressure will cause both suppliers and distributors to seek ways to add service while holding the line on expenses.”



Bill Korowitz Magnet (asi/68507)
“Acquisitions take a tremendous amount of time and energy. Many companies don’t have the people to physically and mentally pull off the bigger deals.”

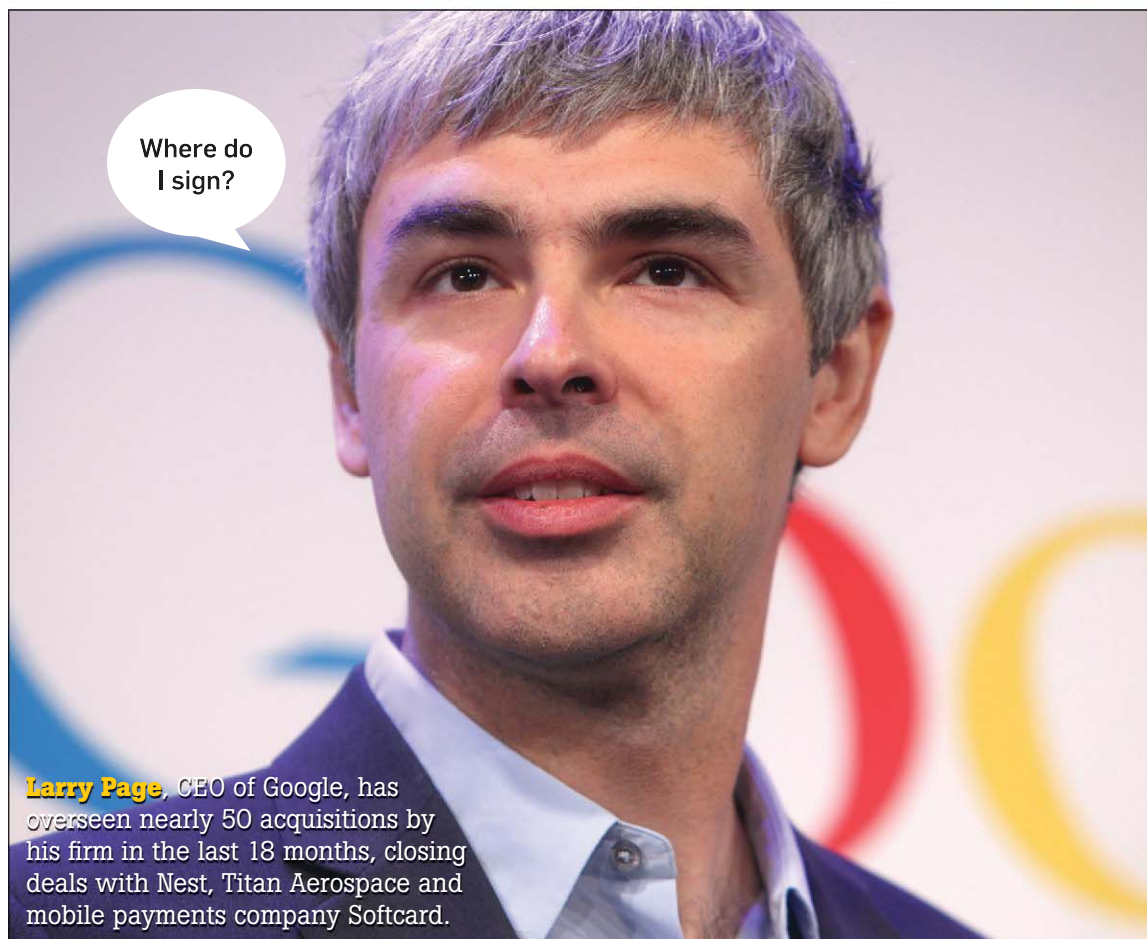


David Woods AIA (asi/109480)
“There has been a great deal of consolidation over the past 25 years and it will continue. The overwhelming trend will be towards larger and very well capitalized companies.”



Paul Lage Gill Studios (asi/56950)
“As barriers to success get higher because of regulations, product safety costs and a prolonged stagnant economy, it’s a natural business process to consolidate.”

M&A Activity Soars In 2015



Larry Page, CEO of Google, has overseen nearly 50 acquisitions by his firm in the last 18 months, closing deals with Nest, Titan Aerospace and mobile payments company Softcard.

► U.S. mergers and acquisitions have increased by 48% so far in 2015, with deals totaling \$902.2 billion in Q1 alone.

► The technology, finance and consumer services sectors have produced the most M&A activity this year.

► The most significant 2015 acquisition in the industry was when Staples Inc., agreed to purchase Accolade Promotion Group.

► Analysts expect 22,000 corporate transactions will be finalized in 2015, making it the most active year for M&A since 2007.

Chatter Now Trending



“Failing is proof that you’re meant to be a successful entrepreneur. It shows you’re willing to shake up the status quo & try new things.”

SHARK TANK JUDGE AND REAL ESTATE MOGUL **BARBARA CORCORAN**, VIA HER TWITTER FEED @BARBARACORCORAN. READ MORE OF CORCORAN’S INSIGHTS ON PAGE 77

“Entrepreneurs: Achievers move forward at all times. Achievement is not a plateau, it’s a beginning. Get out there & go for it! Set the bar high and resolve to be bigger than your problems. There’s nothing wrong with bringing your talents to the surface. Having an ego and acknowledging it is a healthy choice.”

DONALD TRUMP, WITH ADVICE FOR BUSINESS OWNERS, VIA HIS TWITTER FEED @REALDONALDTRUMP



“Tough times are inevitable in life and in business. But how you compose yourself during those times defines your spirit and will define your future.”

VIRGIN CEO **RICHARD BRANSON**, VIA HIS BLOG AT WWW.VIRGIN.COM

“If people leave meetings without next steps, the only next step will be more wasted meetings.”

ROSABETH MOSS KANTER, HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL PROFESSOR, VIA HER TWITTER FEED @ROSABETHKANTER



Facebook
Feedback

Do you think wearables tech items will quickly become popular as promotional products?

► **THINK Limitless Promotional Products** We are a long way away before this becomes a possibility. Once they do hit the mainstream, I’m unsure if there will be enough “real estate” on the devices to show off much branding. Soon wearables like these will become too helpful for people not to adopt them. Once this happens, the flood gates will break open.

How do you jumpstart sales during the summer?

► **Amanda Vories** Summer is the best time for bundling promotions, since so many involve outdoor events. A towel and beach bag, a water bottle with a sun care kit, etc; all are great opportunities to create added value to a promotion.

► **Erich Campbell** With so many events going on, this is also a great time to use sponsorship as your own self-promotion vehicle; sometimes for as little as a small discount you can add your own logo/slogan to event items and increase your visibility.

Selection of Tweets from the #promoproducts page

Twitter
Feed

@MarketngTidbits

Sure, fewer people smoke these days. But matches are still excellent #promoproducts.

@prgstore A great giveaway is always one of the steps to success at conferences & trade shows.

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@Grapevine_KC RISE TO NEW HEIGHTS. Celebrate your brand in a way that raises you above your competition! #PPWWeek #PromoProducts

@CrawfordInd Upselling - Using a high-gloss finish makes a statement on any restaurant table #promoproducts

@chrispiperor @RepSchrader the #promoproducts industry provides 3,202 industry jobs and generates \$103.7 million in revenue for #Oregon @NWPMA @PPAL_HQ

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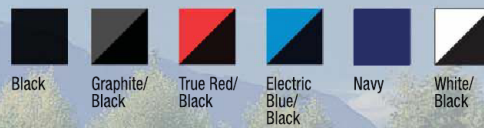
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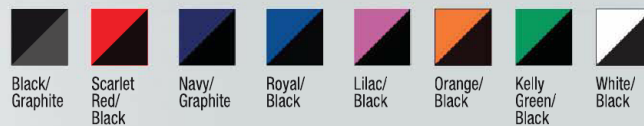
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“Business owners need to have conversations about retirement and prepare for the future.”

Jay DesMarteau, TD Bank (see page 32)

Help Really
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Q1 Distributor Sales Rise 3.5%

Exclusive data from ASI reveals that distributors grew revenues by 3.5% in the first quarter of 2015, the 21st straight quarterly rise. Meanwhile, the *Counselor* Confidence Index – a tool that measures distributor health and optimism – ticked upward from 114 to 115, hitting its highest ever point in the 14 years for which data exists.

Distributors say everything from a stronger domestic economy to internal initiatives at their companies are driving sales and positive sentiment. “Overall consumer confidence is higher than a year ago as key economic indicators reflect continued tailwind in the economy,” said Terry McGuire, senior vice president of marketing at HALO Branded

Solutions (asi/356000).

HALO – and other leading distributors – made sure to get the most out of the improving economy by focusing on strengthening their businesses. “Our growth has been achieved through recruiting – adding high-performing industry sales professionals – and organic growth,” said McGuire, noting HALO experienced a double-digit revenue rise in Q1 compared to the same quarter the previous year.

Similarly, Kotis Designs (asi/244898) engineered revenue growth in the first quarter of 2015. “We’re making every single part of our business better so the product we deliver to our customer improves every day,” said

Jeff Becker, the firm’s president.

While the industry-wide distributor sales growth is encouraging, the 3.5% increase in Q1 is the smallest quarterly rise in the last five years. The previous slowest rate of growth – 4.6% – occurred several times during that period, most recently in Q3 of 2014. There is no consensus on what caused the slight Q1 slow down. It could be everything from the harsh winter that parts of the country endured to a possible plateauing effect that’s happened as buyers, past the period of rapid spending swells that occurred post-recession, now purchase at more consistent dollar levels.

Regardless, the slower rate of sales growth has not dampened optimism about 2015. More than 60% of distributors expect sales will increase this year, while 31% anticipate that business will remain steady. Only 8% expect business to drop.

“We’ll definitely be up compared to 2014,” said Becker.

McGuire is confident that HALO’s sales will continue to surge, too. “HALO account executives are working harder – and smarter – than ever to grow their business,” he said. “We have had several new account executives join HALO since the beginning of the year. Once they settle in and start utilizing our sales and marketing tools, their business increases as well.” – CR

Survey: Companies Face Talent Shortage

A new survey from employment consultancy Manpower shows more than one-third of global employers are finding it difficult to fill open positions. Data shows 38% of worldwide managers and 22% of U.S. managers are struggling to find good talent to hire.

“Talent shortages are a real problem hurting organizations’ competitiveness,” said Manpower CEO Jonas Prising. “From the data we’ve gathered and the structural changes we can see coming in the labor markets, we know the problem is only going to get worse.”

Manpower found that sales reps and skilled trade workers like chefs, engineers, mechanics and electricians are the most challenging jobs to fill. Among the top reasons global respondents cited for their hiring woes are: lack of applicants (named by 35%), lack of technical competence (34%) and lack of experience (22%).

Employers in Japan struggle the most to fill vacancies, with 83% expressing hiring problems. Firms in Peru, Hong Kong and Brazil also reported dealing with significant talent shortages. Employers in the United Kingdom and Ireland, conversely, are having relatively little trouble finding good employees.

“Talent shortages are real and are not going away,” said Kip Wright, senior vice president of Manpower North America. “Despite impacts to productivity, our research shows fewer employers are trying to solve the problem through better talent strategies. Employers will be under pressure to position themselves as ‘talent destinations’ to attract the best workers that will drive their business forward.” – CR



Decorator Wins Court Decision

A Kentucky court ruled in May that Hands On Originals (asi/219413) had the right to refuse to print T-shirts for a 2012 gay pride festival, overturning a previous ruling by a regional human rights commission.

The Lexington, KY-based custom decorator, which specializes in Christian apparel

and promotional products, would not comment on the court decision, referring media instead to the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), the religious freedom nonprofit that argued its case.

Three years ago, the Gay and Lesbian Services Organization (GLSO) asked Hands

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On Originals (HOO) to print shirts for its pride festival. HOO turned the job down, and the GLSO filed a complaint with the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Human Rights Commission, which ruled in favor of the GLSO.

Judge James D. Ishmael of the Fayette Circuit Court reversed the decision, citing Kentucky's religious freedom statute and noting that HOO's case was not about "insuring citizens have equal access to services." Rather than refusing customers because of their sexual orientation, Ishmael wrote, HOO owner Blaine Adamson objected to the T-shirt because of its message.

"It is clear beyond dispute that HOO and its owners declined to print the T-shirts in question because of the message advocating sexual activity outside of marriage between one man and one woman," Ishmael wrote. "The well-established Constitutional rights of HOO and its owners on this issue are well settled."

He pointed out that HOO had turned down orders for strip clubs and shirts with violent messages in the past as well. Hands On Originals states on its website its right to refuse "any order that would endorse positions that conflict with the convictions of the ownership."

Representatives from the ADF said they were pleased with the court's ruling. "The government can't force citizens to surrender free-speech rights or religious freedom in order to run a small business, and this decision affirms that," said Jim Campbell, senior legal counsel for the ADF, in a press release.

The GLSO expressed disappointment with the court on its website. Officials close to the case believe an appeal is likely. — TH

Factory Fire Kills 72 Workers

A footwear factory fire in the Philippines killed 72 workers in May, many of whom were trapped on the second floor of the building, investigators said. The fire happened at a rubber slipper factory in Valenzuela City, near the capital of Manila. The factory is owned by the Kentex Manufacturing Corp., which sells flip-flops under the brand name Havana.

"The situation happened very fast," said Rhay R. Sousa, a city spokesperson. "Some people had to jump from the building to escape."

Investigators have not released an official cause of the fire, although initial reports indicate the blaze may have been set off from welding work on the factory's gate. It appears sparks ignited chemicals con-



tained in nearby containers. More than three dozen officers from the Philippine National Police's forensic examination team have joined the evidence

recovery process.

"Someone will definitely be charged because of the deaths," said police Deputy Director General Leonardo Espina. "It

doesn't matter if it's an accident, people died. Many of those retrieved were reduced to skulls and bones."

Since the fire, labor activists have staged protests in Manila, demanding an investigation of the factory owners. The protesters have specifically questioned whether the factory had been properly inspected and if the facility had enough fire exits and fire extinguishers. Reports suggest Kentex was compliant with safety requirements as of September of 2014, its latest inspection date.

The fire was one of the most deadly in Philippine history. In 1996, 162 people died in a disco club fire in a suburb of Manila. In 2001, a hotel fire in Quezon City killed 75 people. – DV

What is my promotional products company worth?

This is the most common question we hear from business owners. Even if they are not looking to sell in the near future, it is imperative that business owners understand the value of what is likely to be their most valuable asset. In this volatile world, no one knows what tomorrow's future will hold, but if we arm ourselves with knowledge, we can still be prepared for it. Certified Marketing Consultants is armed with over 100 years of industry knowledge to help you value, sell, grow or improve your promotional products company. Call us today for a confidential conversation.



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Small-Business Owners Concerned About Retirement

Many small-business owners are worried that they lack adequate funds for retirement. That's according to a new survey from TD Bank, which found that 26% of owners are not confident that they will have enough savings to retire comfortably.

The anxiety was greater among entrepreneurs from the Baby Boomer generation. Some 28% said they are not very or not at all confident that they will have the necessary capital to retire well. Only 21% of Millennials said the same. An important reason for this could be that, on average, Baby Boomers launched their current businesses at age 43; Millennials jumped into entre-

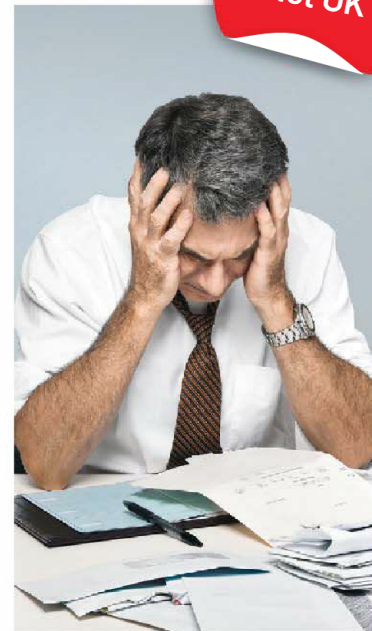
preneurship at an average age of 26, allowing them more time to earn and invest for retirement. Additionally, the anxiousness over retirement might be, in part, a result of the fact that only about half of owners have a retirement plan in place.

"Smart business operations need to consider the future, including the retirement of the owner," said Jay DesMarteau, head of small-business banking at TD Bank. "Just as those in the workforce should invest in themselves through retirement savings, business owners need to have conversations about retirement and prepare for the future to ease the transition."

According to the survey, one-quarter of respondents indicated they will close their business when they retire. Furthermore, 27% of owners who started the company from scratch said they plan to close their business when they retire, compared with only 8% of those who took over an existing business. Overall, 15% of business owners said they would transfer ownership of the business to family or co-workers.

TD Bank's survey includes input from 667 businesses across the United States. Each company has less than \$5 million in revenue and fewer than 100 employees. – CR

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Disney Bans Selfie Sticks On Rides

Visitors to Disney World and Disneyland can officially no longer use selfie sticks on rides, with a park spokesperson saying the items present a threat to safety. Signs announcing the ban have been posted outside Big Thunder Mountain Railroad and Space Mountain after recent rides had to be stopped because too many people were using the picture-taking device.

The signs are “just a continuation of our communication efforts at a few key attractions,” Disney wrote in an email to the *Orlando Sentinel*.

Disney has recently been urging its ride workers to remind visitors that any selfie sticks



should be stowed before beginning a ride. Complaints about selfie sticks on rides have grown in recent months, with people using social media to send out pictures of the item extending three feet away from a locked seat. Disney is now stressing it will allow selfie sticks in its

theme parks, but is asking visitors to simply put them away before they go on rides.

The selfie stick, which can be logoed, has been increasingly banned at popular events and places in 2015. The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Guggenheim Museum have

outlawed the device, as have music festivals Coachella and Lollapalooza. Major sporting events like Wimbledon and the Kentucky Derby have prohibited the selfie stick, as well.

Selfie sticks have been around for decades, but have become popular with advances in technology. The newest sticks have built-in Bluetooth shutters on their handles and sturdier frames to keep heavier devices like GoPros from falling. While selfie sticks have been banned at various venues, they remain top sellers in many tourist hotspots, especially on the streets of Europe. – DV

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Mergers & Acquisitions

Newton Files Chapter 11 & Sells Assets to HALO

Top 40 distributor Newton Manufacturing Company (asi/283300) has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in U.S. Federal Court in Des Moines, IA. The filing also includes a court motion to sell nearly all of Newton's assets to fellow Top 40 distributor HALO Branded Solutions (asi/356000). Both parties have signed the definitive agreement, although the court action could also include potential competitive bidding. The transaction between Newton and HALO, though, was expected to be an expedited sale that closed by the end of June.

"We have explored several options to resolve the difficult financial environment we have operated under for several months," said Mancil Laidig, Newton's president. "It became clear that our greatest assets – the Newton sales force and the loyal team that supports them – would be best served with a Chapter 11 filing."

Laidig further said that HALO bought out the position of Newton's senior, secured lender and has agreed to provide Debtor In Possession (DIP) financing. "This financing will assure all Newton orders that are shipped

and billed from today forward will be paid in the normal course of business," he said. "The confidence this will provide our suppliers in filling our orders will have an immediate and positive impact on our ability to serve the Newton sales force and their customers."

Laidig also sent a letter to suppliers that said the company was still trying to recover from a computer system conversion that began last year. "As a key supplier to Newton, you know that we have experienced financial difficulties for the past several months related in large

part to the system conversion we completed in 2014," said Laidig in the letter, which was obtained by *Counselor*. "We have struggled to sustain our financial commitments and have been searching for the best possible outcome for our sales force and for suppliers like you who have been supportive of our efforts over these past many decades."

The solution to these financial concerns, Laidig said, would partly be solved through its transaction with HALO. It's a deal for HALO that will provide access to an increased client base and new sales force. "We





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have reviewed Newton's financial performance with their team and their financial advisors for quite some time. We felt we could provide a meaningful value for their business that would allow them to apply much of the proceeds to pre-filing liabilities," said Marc Simon, CEO of HALO. "Our goal is to retain value in Newton's business during this transition in order to provide a great home for their loyal sales force, opportunities at HALO for many of their experienced support staff, and as much payment on pre-filing liabilities as possible to our valued suppliers."

► **Safeguard Acquires Fontis Solutions**

Top 40 distributor firm Safeguard Business Systems (asi/316203) has completed its

acquisition of Fontis Solutions (asi/230085). Financial terms of the transaction were not released. "When you look at the Fontis business, it's really clear to see why they've been so successful and why they are the largest business in our industry operating west of the Rocky Mountains," said Scott Sutton, director and vice president of Safeguard Acquisitions Inc. "Simply put, it's the people. Not only are they skilled and knowledgeable, but also dedicated and passionate about helping customers run and grow their businesses."

Fontis was founded in 1983 as Image Printing Solutions and adopted the Fontis Solutions name in 2011. The company, a member of *Counselor's* Best Places to Work list for the past two years, is a print services pro-

vider that also sells promotional merchandise, online communications and technology services.

► **McCabe Acquires PromoMedia Group**

Canada-based McCabe Promotional Advertising Inc. (asi/264901) has acquired Promomedia Group Inc. Financial terms of the deal, made public in mid-May, were not disclosed. "Promomedia is a market leader in eastern Canada with a great regional brand recognition and a motivated corporate culture that meshes intuitively with ours," said Jamie McCabe, president of McCabe Promotional. "By combining the companies' strengths and geographies, our customers will benefit from expanded sales and support capabilities."

Prior to the Promomedia

acquisition, McCabe had Canadian offices in London, Clinton and Toronto, as well as representation from Windsor to Timmins. This new agreement now extends McCabe's reach into the Ottawa National Capital Region and Quebec markets. Besides ad specialties, Promomedia is well known for offering graphic design, embroidery, warehousing and fulfillment. "Promomedia's bilingual service capabilities and extensive Quebec client base will further enhance McCabe's service delivery and operating base," McCabe said in a statement.

Promomedia's sales are up 40% year-over-year so far in 2015, McCabe told *Counselor*. Meanwhile, McCabe Promotional has increased its revenues by double-digits each of the last three years.

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Trends and insights from our website

► Tech Talk

Wearable technology products are all the rage these days – even showing up on fashion runways. From hats that monitor heart rate and burned calories (and then automatically send the data to a cellphone) to the Apple Watch, which does just about everything an iPhone can do, wearable tech items could be the next big thing when it comes to promotional apparel. “It’s a clever product and might work for promotional product distributors,” said Taraynn Lloyd, director of marketing for supplier firm Edwards Garment about the LifeBEAM Smart Hat (shown here). “I can definitely see adoption of this item by Millennials because they’re so geared for this type of activity and use smartphones constantly.” Go to www.CounselorMag.com now to see our full wearables tech showcase.



Commentary

Make Vacation a Priority

An excerpt from a recent **Counselor Commentary** on our website. Go to www.CounselorMag.com to view the complete archive.

What's your plan for the summer of 2015? Sure, you'd like to grow your sales. Maybe you want to be more active on social media. You could even be thinking about volunteering at a nonprofit. These are all good ideas. Hopefully, though, you'll also be spending some time away on vacation. You really should make it a priority.

A recent American Express OPEN survey showed 60% of small-business owners expect to take a week-long vacation this summer. This is a nice jump from a year ago when only about half of business owners planned a getaway. There are some legitimate reasons for not sailing away this summer. Thinking your company will not survive without you, though, is a very bad reason. There seems to be a fear inherent in entrepreneurs that if they take vacation, they'll lose business, their customers will stop liking them and whoever they put in charge will set the office on fire. Your company will be fine.

You can prevent a lot of while-you're-away issues by taking a few simple steps. First, let your customers – especially the good ones – know you're taking a vacation. Be clear and tell them who they should contact while you're gone. Second, pick a time to vacation when your company typically has a lull. Third, hire a temp to take your calls and forward you any messages that just can't wait. If you have to, set aside a time every day you're away to be available for a quick conversation.



Good Sports

“Sporting goods are great for education clients, as well as local community sports leagues. Don't forget about uniforms, too.”

– Dave Vagnoni, *Counselor* senior editor, in the latest episode of *Counselor Product Close-Up*, online now.

SOI Sneak Peek

14%

The percentage of distributor sales that came from the education sector in 2014, the number-one market for promotional products.

Facebook Comments We Loved

My first concert was...

*Lori Garofalo
Alabama! Even got a
kiss on the cheek from
Randy Owens!*

*Shawn Pollock
Oingo Boingo on
Halloween.*

*Rhiannon Rowland
New Kids on the Block,
in 1989!*

*Mike Johnson
Foreigner, with
Billy Squire as the
opening act.*

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Stock Report

Small gains and losses in May.

Distributor
-1.57%

Supplier
+0.75%

4/30/15-5/29/15								
Company	Stock Exchange	Symbol	52-week high	52-week low	Per-Share Price (5/29/15)	Market Capitalization (in millions)	Per-Share Change	Percent Change
DISTRIBUTORS								
► 4imprint Group	LSE	FOURL	£ 11.60	£ 6.11	£ 10.93	£ 304	0.01 ▲	0.09%
► Inner Workings Inc.	NASDAQ	INWK	9.44	4.94	6.36	334	0.03 ▲	0.47%
► Mobiquity Technologies Inc.*	OTC	MOBQ	0.65	0.18	0.295	20	(0.03) ▼	-7.81%
► Safeguard Business Systems <small>(Div. Deluxe Corp.)</small>	NYSE	DLX	69.77	51.46	63.83	3,190	(0.92) ▼	-1.42%
► Tic Toc <small>(Div. Omnicom Group Inc.)</small>	NYSE	OMC	80.98	64.03	74.53	18,210	(1.23) ▼	-1.62%
► Staples Promotional Products <small>(Div. Staples Inc.)</small>	NASDAQ	SPLS	19.40	10.70	16.465	10,548	0.15 ▲	0.89%
SUPPLIERS								
► 3M Promotional Markets Dept. <small>(Div. 3M Corp.)</small>	NYSE	MMM	170.50	130.60	159.08	100,910	2.69 ▲	1.72%
► American Apparel Inc.	AMEX	APP	1.30	0.50	0.58	102	(0.09) ▼	-13.43%
► BIC Corp.	PAR	BIC	€ 158.75	€ 93.84	€ 150.05	€ 7,252	1.20 ▲	0.81%
► Cutter & Buck <small>(Div. New Wave Group)</small>	STO	NEWAB	€ 46.20	€ 26.80	€ 43.20	€ 2,900	(0.70) ▼	-1.59%
► Delta Apparel Inc.	AMEX	DLA	16.62	8.21	13.85	109	1.58 ▲	12.88%
► Ennis Inc. <small>(Parent company of Admore and Alstyle Apparel)</small>	NYSE	EBF	17.21	12.51	16.82	434	1.44 ▲	9.36%
► Fossil Special Markets Division	NASDAQ	FOSL	115.20	68.55	71.01	3,470	(12.97) ▼	-15.44%
► Hanesbrands	NYSE	HBI	34.80	20.78	31.86	12,800	0.78 ▲	2.51%
► Hilton Apparel Group <small>(Div. Jarden Corp.)</small>	NYSE	JAH	54.27	36.27	53.06	10,220	1.88 ▲	3.67%
► Johnson Worldwide Assoc./JWA	NASDAQ	JOUT	35.29	22.15	23.97	239	(7.53) ▼	-23.90%
► Lancer Label <small>(Div. Mail Well Inc.)</small>	NYSE	CVO	3.85	1.39	2.50	170	0.52 ▲	26.26%
► Lee Printwear <small>(Div. VFCorp. Acquisition Co.)</small>	NYSE	VFC	77.83	59.82	70.43	29,930	(2.00) ▼	-2.76%
► Pfaelzer Brothers <small>(Div. ConAgra)</small>	NYSE	CAG	39.04	28.60	38.61	16,490	2.46 ▲	6.80%
► Sanford Business-To-Business <small>(Div. Newell Rubbermaid)</small>	NYSE	NWL	40.73	28.89	39.53	10,620	1.40 ▲	3.67%

*Formerly Ace Marketing & Promotions Inc.

All prices in U.S. dollars unless otherwise noted.



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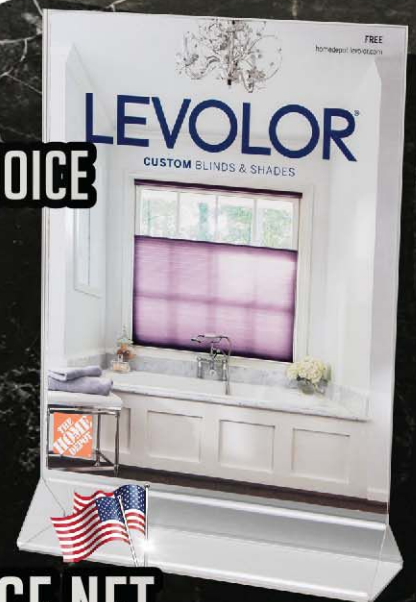
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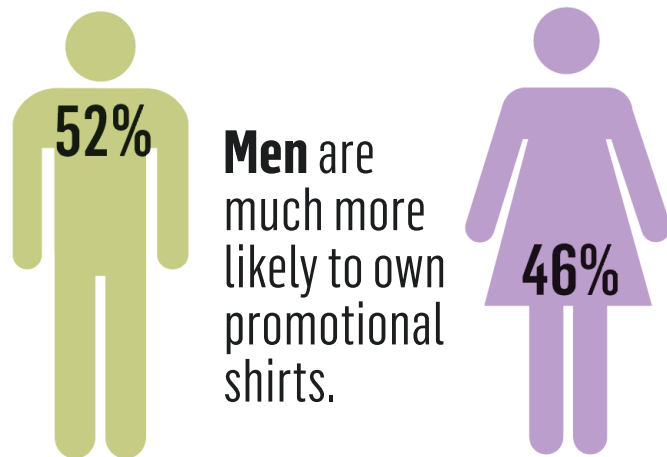
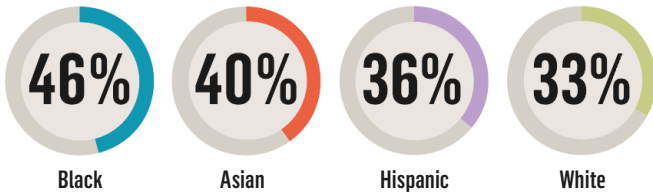
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By The Numbers: Shirts

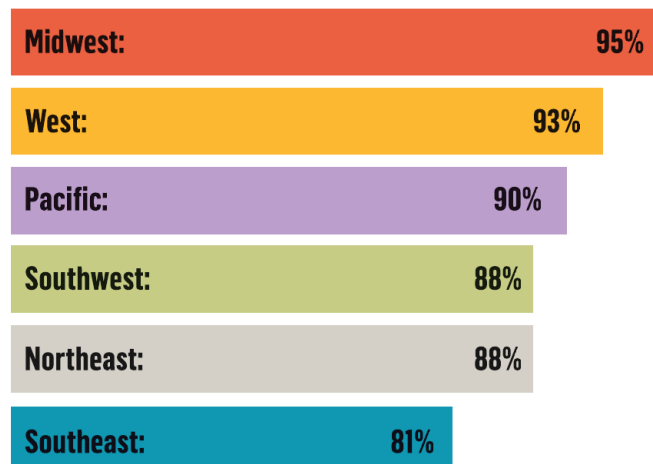
Data reveals nearly half of U.S. consumers own a promotional T-shirt.

African American consumers are much more likely to keep their shirts because they are attractive, compared with other groups.



Consumers know who gave them their promotional shirt, especially in the Midwest region.

% who recall advertiser on shirt



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Source: 2014 ASI Ad Specialties Impressions Study



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asi/84863

Product Picks

A collection of unique products

By Chuck Zak

1. HEAD GAMES

Semi-structured, classic six-panel cap (145) has contrast visor stitching and a hook-and-loop closure. **Target**

Markets: Great piece for adult baseball teams or even as part of a team-building program. Available from H T T Apparel & Headwear (asi/58842); www.httaparel.com

2. SCREEN TIME

Faux leather grain case with zippered cover (B829854) fits iPad Mini with a 360-degree rotatable plastic frame, easily adjusted for left or right hand use. **Target Markets:**

A nice gift for incentive programs or as a tech add-on. Available from SunGraphix (asi/90125); www.sungraphix.com

3. GET THE POINT

Keep your pencils sharp with this two-inch round pencil sharpener and eraser combo (80-08040) that features a steel blade and bottom that catches pencil shavings. **Target**

Markets: Great item for back-to-school promotions or construction companies. Available from Aakron (asi/30270); www.aakronline.com

4. WALL OF FAME

The Shart T-Shirt Frame (SPS) is a super-easy way to preserve and display a favorite shirt and is manufactured in the USA. **Target Markets:**

Great add-on gift for screen printers, coaches or music professionals and enthusiasts. Available from Shart.com (asi/86594); www.shart.com

5. FLAKING IT

Custom laminated cereal-type boxes (M-CEREAL-BOX) have a high-gloss finish and can be filled with your favorite cereal or other tasty fill.

Target Markets: Something new for clients in education, food service or morning radio. Available from Admints & Zagabor (asi/31516); www.admints.com

1



2



3



4



5



6. WELL ROUNDED

The two-inch custom LED Buz Balls are clear bouncing balls with colorful lights that can be coordinated to match a logo, team colors or event theme. **Target Markets:** Fun marketing tool for school sports, health care or any client who promises to help you bounce back. Available from Buzline (asi/42963); www.buzline.com

7. MARK MY WORDS

Create detailed marketing messages by placing any premium sages by placing any premium card (EZ67) then design your card with full-color graphics. **Target Markets:** Attention-getting mailer for local businesses like real estate agents, landscapers or credit unions. Available from DynaPac (asi/51184); www.dynapac.com

8. TAKING TEMPERATURES

The unique Vinnebago (SL2001B) helps users take their beverages along without losing their ideal temperature. Keeps 750 ml of liquid cold for 25 hours or hot for 12 hours. **Target Markets:** A top-shelf promo for wineries or for the new spirits dealer in the neighborhood. Available from SIMBA (asi/87296); www.simbacal.com

9. SPRING THING

Simply squeeze the unique spring mechanism on top to open this soft microfibre pouch (53013) and release to close. Great for glasses, phone, earphones, cables and more. **Target Markets:** A smart item to promote clients in eye care, travel or automotive. Available from HandStands (asi/59525); www.handstandsprimo.com

10. DRAWING ATTENTION

Solid metal construction with metallic finish highlights this 4-in-1 ballpoint pen (PE6012) with LED flashlight, laser pointer and stylus. **Target Markets:** The right idea for multitasking clients in finance or education. Available from Nu Promo Line (asi/74585); www.nupromoline.com



6



7



9



8



10

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Case Studies

Profile • Management

Profile

Create a Virtual Office

The benefits of working exclusively at home.

By Dave Vagnoni

Research suggests as many as 30% of American workers now telecommute – a monumental jump compared to just a decade ago. Studies show people who work from home are happier, more efficient and actually put in longer hours than employees who are strictly in the office.

Increasingly, companies are offering a work option that goes beyond occasional telecommuting. Firms from Github to Jet-Blue to industry supplier SanMar (asi/84863) have created systems to let employees work entirely from home. “For SanMar, our work-at-home program allows us to have the size of staff without needing the office space to support that staff,” says Kevin Shea, manager of the supplier’s inside sales team.

Read Shea’s advice for developing a work-at-home program.

Q: Why did SanMar start a work-at-home program?

A: We launched the at-home program in 2005. It allowed us to employ the number of staff we felt we needed to service our customers without expanding our physical office space. It allowed our employees more time to relax with their families instead of commuting, while also saving money on gas and keeping cars off the road. We viewed it as a win-win at launch

and are still quite pleased with the success of this program.

Q: How many employees now take part in the program?

A: Over 350 employees take part in our at-home program and almost all of them exclusively work from home.

Q: What types of jobs are included in the program?

A: Every role within our inside sales department has the opportunity to work from home at least a portion of the time. We also have credit team members working primarily from home. Other departments can opt to allow staff to work from home, as needed.

Q: What are the benefits?

A: We can bring on employees across the country with different backgrounds and unique perspectives. Also, in times of inclement weather, we are well prepared to meet our customers’ needs. Employees also find it is a tremendous benefit in getting time back with their family. This translates to them being even more invested in their career.

Q: What are the greatest program challenges?

A: Reliable high-speed Internet was an issue at first. We have worked with our Internet pro-



Kevin Shea is the inside sales team manager at SanMar.

vider to ensure that our speeds are now at the level necessary to run our business.

Q: How do managers know if at-home employees are working as they should?

A: We use tools and technologies like instant messenger, emails and videos to keep in touch with our at-home employees.

Q: What technology does SanMar use to help workers be more productive at home?

A: Webcams allow us to stay connected and not just be a voice on the other end but also visually connect with each other every day. Instant messenger allows our employees to get quick answers to things they need assistance with as well as stay connected to their teams. Dual monitors provide the ability to multitask more efficiently.

Q: Does the technology and software strengthen training, too?

A: By adding webcams and supporting technology to allow for Web conferencing, our training is much more interactive. Having the visual as well as the audio has gone a long way in our ability to better connect with each other while conducting training.

Q: Are there specific ways SanMar uses the program to recruit talent?

A: Our work-from-home program is open to anyone living in a state where SanMar operates and has a warehouse. This has allowed us to recruit from different markets that we wouldn’t otherwise be able to do.

Q: What policies are in place for at-home employees?

A: We have the same policies and expectations in place for those working at home that we have for employees here working on site.

Q: What advice do you have for companies considering virtual office programs?

A: Make sure employees have the equipment needed to do their jobs, the resources and training materials available to them on the Web, and the support structure to know where to turn for help when needed.

Management

Ensuring Safe Products

What distributors need to know.

By Shane Dale

With a recent increase in state and federal regulations – not to mention a heightened concern among end-buyers – promotional product safety is as important as it's ever been. What's more, distributors may bear greater responsibility for an unsafe product than they might think, according to Shamini Peter, director of compliance and imports for Top 40 firm Axis Promotions (asi/128263).

"If you're a distributor and you buy apparel from any company, and then move it to a decorator, who's the manufacturer in that process?" she asks. "Is it the supplier, the decorator, the client?"

The answer, according to Peter, is the distributor. "The distributor directed the decorator to put the decoration on it, and moved it to the client," she says. "So, in the eyes of the law, the distributor is the manufacturer."

Peter constantly reminds distributors, along with her company's own sales reps, that product safety isn't an option. "It's not just a nice thing to have – it's the law," she says. "If you don't ensure your products are safe for the consumer, it becomes a really expensive venture to recall, and it puts your client's brand in jeopardy."

With that sobering reality in mind, here are some steps for making sure every promotional item you distribute is safe and compliant.



Become Familiar With Regulations

U.S. federal safety regulations that pertain to promotional items are primarily geared toward children, according to Peter. The most notable is the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act, which was passed by Congress in 2008 and is enforced by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). The act introduced new standards for the acceptable level of certain substances in apparel, personal care products, toys, school supplies and a number of other items.

The CPSC also has Small Parts Regulations in place for products intended for children younger than three years of age. While Peter believes it's necessary to closely review these federal regulations, she thinks scrutinizing state rules is just as important. Each state has adopted its own set of safety guidelines, such as Proposition 65 (known as the Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986) in California, and the Lead Poisoning Prevention Act in Illinois.

"You need to know where the product is actually going to

be distributed to the final consumer," Peter says. "Is it in your state? California? Illinois? An international location? That's important because while there aren't many federal regulations in place, the states have taken it upon themselves to have regulations to protect their citizens."

Ask About Recipients

Peter says the most important question a sales rep should ask their clients before processing an order is "Who is the intended audience?"

"If the audience is children, then you know there are certain

protocols you need to follow in terms of testing, whether it's federal or state regulations," she says. "It should be tracked closely. If you're moving children's products to a decorator, you have to have a secondary tracking number to track just the imprinting of the product in case there are chemical contents above regulation."

Even if the promotional items aren't intended for kids, Peter says they may still wind up in children's hands at certain end-buyer events. That's why she stresses the need to learn as much about the event as possible – namely, whether children will be in attendance.

"Then, you would look at the products – whether any of them are what I consider elevated-risk products," she says. "That would include children's products, toys, drinkware as regulated by the FDA, anything that contains foods, anything that goes against the skin like jewelry or tattoos, anything that can go in the mouth, liquids like hand sanitizers, and lip balm."

If you're dealing with these kinds of items, it's crucial to partner with an experienced and reputable supplier – one who understands regulations and works with the correct testing agencies.

Michael Bowers, account manager for Bowers & Associates (asi/144035), agrees that it's essential to track any product that could end up in a child's hands. "With that comes labeling requirements and making sure that you have the country of origin and tracking information on the product, should there ever be a recall issue," he says. "I think that's a big thing that a lot of the industry is missing. On the child products, they blow right by that one."

Case Study

Tech Products Safety

Batteries used for high-tech items are quickly becoming one of the largest safety issues among distributors. "That's becoming the top concern for everybody, because you're hearing all these stories of third-party, lower-grade batteries being used in the chargers and things like that," says Michael Bowers, account manager for Bowers & Associates (asi/144035).

Some suppliers have begun independent testing on batteries for chargers and other devices that are imported to the United States – but that doesn't mean some substandard products don't slip through the cracks. "There's this whole aftermarket of batteries floating around overseas, and it's the reason someone gives you a ridiculously low price on a charger – they're using a bad battery," Bowers says.

To be on the safe side, work with suppliers to ensure those products are properly certified.

"The lithium ion power chargers don't typically have specific regulations, but you want to work with a supplier to ensure that the product is UL (Underwriters Laboratories)-certified or certified to the equivalent of UL, that the products have a UL marking or a CE marking," says Shamini Peter, director of compliance and imports for Top 40 firm Axis Promotions (asi/128263).

According to Peter, there are subtleties that distributors need to be aware of – or they can be fooled. "A lot of people try to tell you, 'Oh yeah, I have UL products,' but it's really just the ion battery that has it, not the product," she says. "It's important to understand that the certification should apply to the entire product."

Require Proper Documentation

It's the distributor's responsibility to ask suppliers – especially those who operate overseas – for the necessary safety documentation before placing an order, Bowers says.

"You're reading all these stories about Bangladesh and the factories over in India that are getting shut down. There are a lot of social compliance and environmental issues," he says. "The bottom line is you want to know who your suppliers are partnering with."

Larger distributors, Bowers concedes, probably have an overseas office that can closely monitor safety protocols. But 90% of industry distributors don't have that luxury. So what can be done? "The first step is to find a trusted supplier who has gone through QCA certification," Bowers says. "Then develop a questionnaire for them on how to source responsibly."

Bowers thinks there are clear benefits to doing business with large suppliers with overseas departments that engage in safety certification. "Go to sup-

pliers like Leed's (asi/66887) or Prime (asi/79530) that have their own division and say, 'I want some information on this factory. Send me an audit report,'" he says.

This pre-qualification, as Bowers calls it, involves a host of requirements. "If a factory can't produce an audit that shows it's been certified, it's treating its employees the right way, it's met cleanliness and safety standards, then we don't want to move forward with trying to source a product through them," he says.

Consider Independent Testing

Bowers says many of his clients, particularly the larger ones, aren't satisfied simply with pre-production product safety testing. "What can happen is the factory puts all its bells and whistles into the pre-production sample, and that slides through testing fine, but then you have to have some checks and balances on the back end," he says.

In fact, the big corporations – like Coke, McDonald's and Disney – want multiple tests done. "Not only do they want the test-

ing done on the pre-production sample," Bowers says, "they want a product pulled from the production run and they want that tested as well."

Bowers utilizes an independent laboratory for that kind of testing, and he recommends other distributors do the same. "Some of the big ones are SGS and Intertek – third-party, independent laboratories that will set standards for a product," he says. "That way, you have something outside your supplier and outside the distributor."

Why is it so important to conduct this kind of independent testing on the back end? Bowers offers up an example. "Let's say you're doing a duffel bag that needs to have a certain fire rating on the material," he says. "It's easy to go and get material to run the pre-production sample that checks out. But when they run 5,000 or 10,000 of them, how is there any accountability that the factory is using that same lot of material on the production run?"

In increasingly common cases like this, one level of testing, Bowers says, just won't cut it.



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Apparel

Trends • Accessories • Showcase

Trends

The Quarter-Zip Gets Its Day

This outerwear staple has increased in popularity and is primed for a promotional breakout.

By Sara Lavenduski

An end-buyer comes to you with a challenging apparel requirement: She wants to present a group of high-performing employees, comprised of men and women of varying ages, with a single logoed piece that's professional, comfortable and versatile, in order to garner the most impressions for the brand.

An ideal solution, and one that's gaining momentum in retail and in the promotional industry, is the quarter-zip pullover. Now with more variations than ever before, it offers extreme versatility for almost all demographics and markets.

"It's both athletic and casual and can be worn throughout the day and during evening activities," says Rachel Newman,

"Quarter-zips aren't relegated to a specific market or gender."

Steve Zimmerman, J. America

director of sales and marketing for Hanes Branded Printwear (asi/59528). "It's more polished than a traditional crewneck or hood, and offers the comfort of fleece with the style of a sweater. We're also seeing Millennials, particularly those in the college market, embrace its comfort and style."

Vantage Apparel (asi/93390) carries a variety of quarter-zips, including performance styles, sweaters and fleece, at a variety of price points, says Gina Barreca, director of marketing. "Performance pullovers are the hottest segment for us right now," she adds. "Their versatility for sport or casual wear plus the ease of layering with them are driving momentum. We've actually seen them replace traditional crewneck windshirts in the golf market."

J. America (asi/62977) has met current demand by adding the COSMIC Poly Fleece Quarter-Zip (8614) and the Shadow Mesh Quarter-Zip (8186) to its offerings. "Quarter-zips aren't relegated to a specific market or gender, and there are no age limitations," says Steve Zimmerman, national sales director.

"They'll continue to be a strong option, and we'll see more ladies' versions and lightweight performance fabrics."

When addressing an end-buyer's apparel needs, it's important to make them aware of the possibilities that quarter-zips offer. "Clients may instinctively defer to a crew or hood, without realizing how many options are available," Newman says. "The quarter-zip offers a style-driven silhouette, so it may lead to additional business instead of just replacing existing crew and hood orders. It's also a perfect alternative to sportshirts and gives buyers something new to consider."

Quarter-zips don't just provide a stylish look, says Barreca. They're also an ideal canvas for a variety of embellishment techniques, including etching, applique and patches, in unique locations. "Make sure to show logo options on a sample garment," she adds. "The quarter-zip trend will continue with upscale fabrications, contrast details, color-blocking, mixed-media construction and lighter weights with stretch properties."



The COSMIC fleece quarter-zip from J. America is made of 100% spun polyester fleece and includes a self-fabric collar, waistband, cuffs and pocket

Accessories

Fanny Pack Comeback

They're back! Here are ways to capitalize on a retro apparel accessories trend.

By Theresa Hegel

Despite a decidedly mixed reception since they became popular in the 1980s, fanny packs, also known as waist packs, are proving their staying power with a revival that continues to gain momentum. Among the celebrities recently sighted sporting them are Sarah Jessica Parker, Jared Leto and Fergie, and they've also been popular in retail and on the catwalks. Designers Alexander Wang, Lilly Sarti and Rudsak all featured waist packs in recent Spring/Summer 2015 fashion shows, and Extreme80s, a Web-based retail store dedicated to 1980s-inspired apparel and accessories, offers a variety of vintage styles.

"The fanny pack is making a huge comeback," says Alex Morin, executive vice president of sales and marketing at Debco (asi/48885). "They're no longer relegated to the '80s, particularly the sporty variety that are making huge waves

"They're perfect for yoga studios, gyms, swim clubs, schools and walks/runs."

Christine Santori, goband



The Thirst Breaker Two-Bottle Waist Pack from Debco is made of neoprene with mesh backing and includes two HDPE water bottles, a padded back panel, zippered main pocket and adjustable webbed belt.

these days." Currently, Debco is meeting client demand with the neoprene Thirst Breaker waist pack (N6453) that holds two water bottles, perfect for hiking, camping and fishing.

Two of the most popular styles from Nissin Cap & Bag (asi/30107) are the single-zipper fanny pack (1012) and the three-zipper fanny pack (1015), made of 600D polyester with a heavy vinyl backing. "We've had a number of inquiries for waterproof and water-repellent styles," says Vice President Julia Hong, "particularly from customers who might be using these near water, such as water park lifeguards."

Possible applications for fanny packs run the gamut, says Kevin Xiao, vice presi-

dent of Atteff International (asi/37455), who cites camps, lifeguard stations, YMCAs, banks, conferences and travel agencies as promising clients. "Some of our high-end fanny packs, such as the Mossy Oak camo outdoor pack with gun compartment (BF1729MO), are good options for outdoor/hunting events and activities," he explains.

For end-buyers who want a super streamlined look in addition to quick, hands-free access to essentials, check out goband (asi/61103), which offers a flattering, fitted hip-band organizer that's ideal for active lifestyles. "They're perfect for yoga studios, gyms, swim clubs, schools and walks/runs," says Christine San-

tori, sales representative. She notes that the editor-at-large of Oprah's *O* magazine, Gayle King, wore a fanny pack in a fall issue, calling it the "perfect accessory."

When looking to embellish fanny packs, consider screen printing and heat transfers. Goband even offers bling and rhinestones. Embroidery is a possibility, though often, Hong says, the pockets prove too small for the hoop.

"Many companies are now gravitating toward full-color decorating options," Morin says. "Lately, decorators have been incorporating cool wraparound artwork that showcases brilliant graphics and contemporary taglines. We've also seen some pretty awesome sublimation."



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GOING



LIVE



Our editors traveled to four live events to see how logoed apparel is energizing promotions and building brands.

By Andy Cohen, Melinda Ligos, Chris Ruvo & Dave Vagnoni

Downtown concerts, holiday parades and a trip to the ballpark – they all create some of the enduring moments of spring and summer. And while snapping a few pictures can capture memories, a promotional keepsake – like a logoed shirt – can make an event even more special. “Live events is a great market,” says Kevin Scharnek, president of Wisconsin-based 14 West (asi/197092). “The challenge for distributors is keeping up the pace with these high service level clients.”

Of course, sometimes organizers are just looking for a simple item to give away as part of a promotion. Other marketers, though, want higher-end apparel that resonates with an event’s image. “Most of the time people are at an event because they are supporters,” says Jill Albers, executive director of global sales at Shumsky (asi/326300). “So, smart distributors pick items that are going to give great and lasting brand awareness.”

What kinds of promotions and apparel did *Counselor*’s editors find on the live events scene this year? Turn the page to find out.

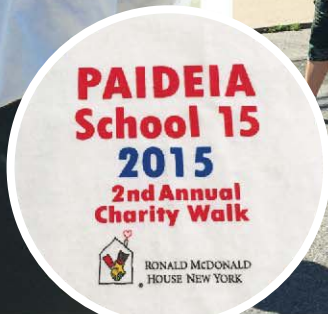
T-Shirts Highlight Fundraiser

It was a sea of white in late May for the Yonkers, NY-based Paideia School 15 annual charity event – a 1.5-mile walk followed by a spring carnival. With more than 500 elementary school students – and quite a few parents – decked out in crisp white T-shirts, the day-long event was designed to raise money to benefit the Ronald McDonald House. And that it did, in spades.

From sales of T-shirts, food and tickets to carnival games spread across the school's playground following the walk – as well as donations and sponsorships of students for the walk – the school raised more than \$16,000 for its chosen charity of the year. “It was a great day that brought out the best in our school,” says Michael Shapiro, principal of Paideia. “The purpose of the shirts was to demonstrate unity for the entire learning community.”

In fact, for some of the students the T-shirts even became a yearbook of sorts, as they had their friends sign the fronts, backs, and sleeves. It was all-over imprinting at its most basic. The T-shirts also served a purpose to raise money, as the school sold about 100 additional shirts at \$12-\$15 apiece (advance sales got a discount) for a total of more than \$1,000. Plus, the school gave its teachers and staff red shirts with the same imprints to help them stand out during the event.

“The fundraising aspect of the event went great, and the T-shirts helped to give a celebratory feel,” Shapiro says. “Our impression was very positive. It was a continuation of creating a culture based on the importance of civics and responsibilities.” – AC





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Swag That Rocks

When you're a hard-rocking punk band, you need swag that blares as brashly as your distorted bar chords. That's just what the four-piece group, KNIF, had to offer their audience of pogoing punkers at an early summer show at the Brighton Bar in Long Branch, NJ. T-shirts with brass knuckle graphics, vinyl stickers bedecked with skulls, buttons with song titles like "Get Dorked" – corporate swag this was not.

And yet, KNIF's reasons for investing in branded merchandise was essentially the same as the most button-downed organization: to project its unique image to audiences with which they want to connect – to get broader, positive exposure that helps win new fans.

"It's cool to have real things you can put in people's hands and say, 'Here, this is what we're about,'" says Chloe Stewart, KNIF's drummer. "The hope is that somebody is out wearing your T-shirt or your button and then someone asks them about it. Word starts to spread."

At the Brighton Bar gig, KNIF had shirts, stickers, buttons and CDs arranged at a merchandise table. While items were for sale, it's common for the band to give products away, too. "It's good to just get stuff out there," says Stewart, whose bandmates are Steve Sherk (vocals), Deane Clapper (guitar) and Tom Sullivan (bass).

For KNIF, black T-shirts with the band's name spelled inside the finger loops of a brass knuckle design are particularly popular with listeners. Fans also especially appreciate the retro appeal of buttons that feature band members' faces in black-and-white. "It's an old-school style that people like," says Stewart.

And, as KNIF brings its chunky riffs and driving drums to bars, clubs and beyond, you can bet that their swag will go with them. "We have our merch," says Stewart, "at every show." – *CR*



Apparel Wins Best In Show

Along Philadelphia's famed Main Line, the Devon Horse Show (DHS) is one of the summer's most celebrated events. The old fairgrounds – which are more than a century old – are quaint. Within a few yards of the entryway, visitors can turn right to watch graceful horses navigate jumps in the main ring, or go left to wander through an alley of vendors, exhibits and carnival games. Staying straight, though, leads to another colorful sight – the souvenir stand. “Everyone’s always happy to get something that reminds them of Devon,” says Susie Farrell, an event volunteer.

While the stand sells pins, posters and commemorative bags, it's apparel that seems to get the most play. From jersey-style T-shirts to custom horse-pattern bowties to designer saddle pads, the booth is packed with stylish wearables. “Our volunteers spend the summer and fall meeting regularly and visit gift shows, equestrian trade shows and college bookstores to see what the trends are,” says Mimi Killian, a DHS board member. “The ROI is 100% net and all of those funds go to our beneficiary, Bryn Mawr Hospital.”

With proceeds going to such a worthy cause, showgoers don't seem to mind the sometimes three-figure prices for classic promo items. In fact, one of the most popular apparel collections is the Vineyard Vines line, which Killian says “flies out the door.” Jeff Sirek, a patron from Massachusetts, happily purchased a DHS Vineyard Vines pullover that was made just for the 10-day event. “I'm a half-zipper kind of guy,” he says. “Plus, I really like the patch on it.” – DV



Logos Take Over Lions' Country

Most college campuses are relatively quiet on Memorial Day weekend. Not so at Penn State's University Park campus this year, which was packed with thousands of spectators and athletes for the annual Happy Volley volleyball championship. The tournament brings in more than 400 girls' volleyball teams from throughout the East Coast (and other areas, too: One team hailed from Las Vegas) for three days of high-intensity matches, spread throughout several gyms on the Penn State campus.

Yes, the games were spirited. But promotional items of every kind also whipped up fans and players into a frenzy. Obviously, all of the girls and fans who participated arrived already fully deck out in logoed club gear from their teams – uniforms, T-shirts, sweatshirts, hats, backpacks, and even socks. But that didn't quell the hunger for apparel sporting the Happy Volley and Penn State Volleyball logos.

Those who strolled down the campus' Main Street saw dozens of stores displaying racks of logoed Penn State volleyball gear on the sidewalks, with salespeople outside handing discount coupons to all of the players walking by. And throughout the campus, mobile screen-printing and embroidery vans were set up, selling everything from tie-dyed Happy Volley logoed onesies to jerseys that could be embroidered with a player's number.


Like the sidelines of the matches, these stores and pop-up shops were mobbed with fans, eager to get their hands on some cool gear to take home. After all, the collectibles will serve as a reminder for the girls that they'd played on the same volleyball courts as this year's collegiate women's volleyball national champs.

"Getting a T-shirt from this type of event is a pretty special thing for the players," says Joel Kern, team parent for a member of the Princeton Volleyball Club. "A year or two from now, most of these girls won't remember the scores of most of their games. But you can bet that they'll still be wearing their T-shirts." – ML





UNDERPRESS

The background is a vibrant collage of geometric shapes in shades of olive green, mustard yellow, and deep red. A stylized bird with a yellow body and red wings is positioned on the left side. A large, dark teal arrow points from the top right towards the center. The word 'SURVIVE' is written in large, white, cracked letters across the bottom.

With margins squeezed and online options expanding, how can distributors stay profitable selling apparel? By focusing on something other than just sales.

By Betsy Cummings

SURVIVE

For Robin King, sometimes the battle just doesn't seem worth it. In Batesville, AR, a town of only 11,000 people, there are a disproportionate number of T-shirt vendors. And though the three shops in addition to King's certainly aren't bitter rivals, she says, the minimal profits on wearables makes the challenge to win certain clients "not worth fighting over."

Between one competitor – a personal friend – and another nonprofit vendor that practically gives away T-shirts thanks to a volunteer workforce, King has decided to mostly put her energy elsewhere. "We sell some golf shirts for special promotions, but in small quantities," says King, owner of Schwegman Office Products/Independent Stationers (asi/522442).

apparel sales by having customers design items right on the company's website. CustomInk also floods TV airwaves with ads. In what almost feels like a campaign pitch against traditional distributors, CustomInk CEO Mark Katz insists that his products are not only reasonably priced and easy to order, but "have this incredible power to bring people together."

In a marketplace of increased competition and tougher margins, retailers like CustomInk and Vistaprint would seem to be muscling in on precious business. (Both firms declined to be interviewed for this article.) Many distributors explain that they're not competing against those businesses that have a strong presence online. But what many are really saying – without realizing it – is that they've already ceded one-offs and small orders to online compa-

firms like CustomInk are doing them a service. Their mainstream ads are helping apparel sellers by shining a spotlight on promotional T-shirts. Plus, these Internet firms wind up targeting a very specific niche of the marketplace. That leaves distributors a clear idea where they can better focus their sales and marketing efforts in the corporate arena.

"I think CustomInk is the greatest thing that ever happened to the business," says Rich Rosenthal, president and COO of Super TShirts (asi/570684), a distributor based in Ft. Myers, FL. "They bring awareness to the industry."

A customer recently walked into Rosenthal's shop with a design printed out from CustomInk's website. He wanted to know if it could be done in a larger quantity and what the cost would be, in part because the



King might take comfort knowing she's not alone. Distributors nationwide complain with greater frequency that margins on apparel orders are tighter and tighter every year, making some wonder if the staple of the promotional product marketplace – the ubiquitous T-shirt – is worth its value in business.

Web Threats

Part of the issue, distributors say, is an increasing apparel onslaught from Web-based retailers who are offering quality name-brand tees for reasonable prices. The Internet firms sell direct and, by doing so, potentially force distributors to cut prices to remain competitive.

Take one example: CustomInk. The DIY T-shirt provider is trying to simplify

nies. And that may be the first step to widespread encroachment.

Local Leverage

Yet, oddly enough, many distributors say

"I think CustomInk is the greatest thing that ever happened to the business."

Rich Rosenthal, Super TShirts.

online vendor's prices were substantial. Apart from cost, Rosenthal says some customers would "rather do it local" and "see it up close and personal," rather than view their product online without the chance to feel fabric before placing an order.

That's particularly true for large corporate clients, experts say. Moreover, "CustomInk isn't cheap," Rosenthal says. With the belief that CustomInk and others like them target the "stay-at-home mom or girl scout leader that wants to do eight T-shirts for a retreat," many distributors say they're not worried – yet – about infringement from Web-based apparel vendors.

"I don't think they'll be a threat anytime soon because online companies are curtailed to that type of market, and it doesn't affect the rest of us very much," says Jes-

sica Johnson, promotional consultant with Production Creek Specialty Advertising (asi/299743), based in Lincoln, NE.

That said, Johnson admits, “If I was a business that really needed those smaller orders just to keep me going, then, yes, I could see where that probably is going to be a problem. It depends on who your market is.”

The Right Clients

Because of online merchants’ common claim to one-off orders, many distributors are using a different tact to boost margins – carefully choosing clients that provide bigger returns. Instead of competing on declining T-shirt or wearables prices, they’re focused on two types of opportunities: larger or corporate-type orders and smaller orders filled with higher end,

healthy, the vice president of Forever Young Sportswear (asi/322524), based in Marathon, FL, targets firms and industries that tend to produce more loyal clients, like government-based groups and large corporate customers. “It’s a different niche than the average person who wants 10 shirts and wants them for \$3,” says Buxton, who dreads that type of client and the minimal margins they bring in.

Keying in on large clients with deep pockets and a willingness to reorder is certainly one way to boost margins. But so is knowing your client and leveraging insider information for bigger profits, says Marty McDonald, president and CEO of McDonald Imaging Solutions Inc. (asi/522770), a distributorship based in West Des Moines, IA. Recently, McDonald walked into a local bank and noticed a slew of college grads

bank execs to explain.

“Here’s the thing about college kids,” he said to bank reps. “They might wear a T-shirt out, then throw it in the corner of their room when they get home, then wear it to work again... It looks like they slept in it.” And, no one would argue, that’s a poor employee image for a bank to project.

As an alternative, Buxton came armed with a performance fabric shirt that could be wadded up and still look pressed. “I rolled it in a ball and pulled it out and it looks perfectly fine,” Buxton says. The bank ultimately opted for it, giving him an \$8 profit per shirt.

Service & Smarts

Distributors should keep in mind that inflated prices and profits come from working with clients (whether large corporate



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In fact, distributors tout customer and order size selection as one of the most effective ways to maintain healthy margins on apparel orders. “I don’t hesitate to do small orders, because the margins are so good,” says Belinda Gist, president of Red Truck Promos (asi/529185), based in Arlington, TX. “A typical order for us is between 12 and 48 embroidered performance polo shirts, very frequently a mid- or higher-range shirt,” she says. That “sweet spot” comes from targeting small businesses where Gist and her team “can deal directly with the owner or decision maker in the office,” who is often also willing to refer Red Truck to colleagues.

In 40 years, Ed Buxton isn’t sure he’s ever had to lower prices. To keep margins

serving as bank tellers, all dressed in cotton shirts. Though the shirts were a low-cost buy for the bank (bought online, McDonald thinks), they wouldn’t prove profitable over time, McDonald figured, and he approached

ones or small mom-and-pops) who are willing to pay more for a trusted relationship and service offering. Not surprisingly, those types of clients are also keen to have more attention paid to their orders – something online vendors are less prone to do.

“The people we work with usually appreciate having their hands held a bit during the process, and you give that up when you do things online,” Johnson says. Johnson and others believe that online firms also don’t offer the breadth of embellishments or design sophistication that distributors can broker for clients. Specialty inks, “glitter, vinyl, placements” and other decorating offerings from industry designers are a benefit not seen in the retail online world of apparel sales, distributors say. And that gives ad specialty firms an advantage, as

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in the person-to-
person touch and
good customer
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CustomInk

Founded 15 years ago by college roommates, CustomInk now produces annual sales of more than \$200 million. It sells 20 million custom T-shirts a year through its website and in 2013 raised \$40 million in funding.

www.customink.com



Vistaprint

Now based in the Netherlands, Vistaprint was founded in 1995 in Paris. Using mass printing technologies, the company focuses on consumers and small businesses. The firm's parent, Cimpress, recently reported its quarterly global revenues increased 19% to \$340 million. www.vistaprint.com



CafePress

Besides T-shirts, CafePress sells several other categories of promotional products online, including bags, mugs and calendars. The firm went public in 2012, with its stock debuting at \$19 per share on the NASDAQ exchange. Its Q1 2015 revenues were \$27.4 million, an 11% year-over-year decline. www.cafepress.com

well as another opportunity to boost margins, since those add-ons can drive up the final price as well.

In addition, partnering with one or two decorators helps too, experts say. By funneling a majority of orders to a couple of vendors, distributors can often negotiate volume discounts in decorating, cutting costs and boosting their margins in the process. In fact, brokering better margins often occurs behind the scenes.

When a supplier offers a special on shirts, for example, distributors don't always pass the savings along to a client. For his part, Buxton says, if a supplier offers a \$24 shirt for \$18, he may pass along part of the savings to clients to entice them to buy. But it's not necessary to share the entire cost reduction, he says.

"You can pass on a few dollars in savings and increase your margin at the same time," he says. The same holds true for shipping charges, he adds. "A lot of suppliers have free shipping," Buxton says. "We don't have to pass that on." Ultimately, distributors say, savvy sellers can keep apparel prices high enough to be profitable by offering a better level of service and detail. Stressing to clients that they're "selling projects, not products" is often the key to sustaining healthy margins.

"If you break it down, there's got to be 150 steps involved in the sequences and the way things have to happen in order for blank goods to be printed goods to get to their shipping destination," says Cary Weinstein, president of LogoPro, based in Coupeville, WA. "We as distributors don't produce anything," says Weinstein, whose apparel margins average 37%. "But what we do provide is the service, and we charge for the ser-

vice of getting it right and where it's supposed to be when it's supposed to be."

The Personal Touch

In fact, being service rather than product purveyors is the single greatest competitive advantage most distributors think they have over online competitors – something that allows them to hold pricing and profits steady.

"There's still value in the person-to-person touch and good customer service," says Gist. And despite the seeming ease of ordering online, most corporate clients don't have the time to spend on even the most user-friendly websites, Gist and others say. "Most of us have very short attention spans," Gist says, and clients "don't have the art right or aren't sure of the colors."

"Many of our clients come in and have an idea," she says, but not a lot of interest in developing or executing it detail by detail. Instead, they want to delegate the work to an expert so that "they don't have to think about it anymore."

Distributors who thrive on creativity and execution insist they have loyal clients and a booming business with consistently high margins. "The last order I wrote today I can't produce" for another month, says Rosenthal. Companies are rarely enticed by online price games and are willing to pay much more if the service is good, Rosenthal says. "They're staying with you come hell or high water." Plus, that makes raising prices and earning profits in the future easier, Rosenthal says. "I've got a sufficient backlog, so I'm not discounting."

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We looked at some of the most popular wearable technology on the market today and asked top suppliers: Could these products really work as promotional items?

On April 10, 2015, when Apple made its long-awaited watch available for pre-order, the tech manufacturer received almost a million orders in 24 hours. The excitement and anticipation over the new Apple Watch was just one of many indicators – certainly the

most publicized – that wearable technology is here to stay.

From the Apple Watch to smart T-shirts to fitness-tracking earphones, functional wearable technology is changing the way consumers once did everyday tasks, enhancing their experiences and providing more detail and insight in the process.

Which then begs these questions: Can the ad specialty industry get in on the action? Could these items one day become end-buyers' next marketing campaign items and incentive program gifts? We asked top promotional suppliers to give us their take on six wearable tech items and how they'd fit – or wouldn't fit – into this market.

Apple Watch

The new Apple Watch features time-keeping, fitness tracking, communication and mobile app syncing functions. Consumers can choose from three separate collections: Watch, Watch Sport and Watch Edition.

SIZE: Screens measure 38mm or 42mm

FEATURES: Bands made of fluoro-elastomer, leather or stainless steel; cases made of aluminum, stainless steel, 18-karat rose gold and 18-karat yellow gold; scratch-resistant sapphire crystal face; retina display

COST: \$349 to \$17,000

WEB: www.apple.com/watch



SUPPLIERS SAY:

“I think the Apple Watch is a good product and concept. This would be a great add-on for an executive corporate gifting program – as long as the budget allows for it. However, beyond pricing, the challenge with it comes down to the platform restriction. Although many people use the iPhone, it's not the only platform available. So in our industry, you'd have to ensure the receivers of this product regularly use the iOS operating system.”

– Elson Yeung, director of private label design & merchandising, alphabroder (asi/34063)

“I believe the Apple Watch could eventually inspire industry products, especially since fitness tracking is all the rage right now. I'm not sure that these exact Apple products could be sold into our industry because of the price point, but there is certainly room for similar wearable tech.”

– Ty Cannon, national business development manager, Cutter & Buck (asi/47965)

OMsignal Biometric Smartwear

OMsignal Biometric Smartwear, a collection of compression-style performance tops, syncs with a mobile app for real-time monitoring of heart rate and breathing, calorie and step counting, and recording of activity levels.



SIZE: S to XL, in long-sleeve, short-sleeve and sleeveless styles

FEATURES: Made of rain-, splash- and sweat-resistant materials; includes a module that wirelessly streams data to a smartphone via the mobile app

COST: \$249

WEB: www.omsignal.com

SUPPLIERS SAY:

“When looking at OMsignal, there are many other outerwear options, such as highly technical jackets, available within this price point. Convincing distributors that their clients will need the extra features could make for a challenging sale.”

– Elson Yeung, director of private label design & merchandising, alphabroder (asi/34063)

“I believe anything can translate into the ad specialty industry, as long as it has meaningful function, which this one does. Tech products are not a novelty; they can create value and long-term brand recall. The price tag, though, is beyond reach for most budgets. It may work in smaller quantity purchases, but it’s definitely not for everyday giveaways.”

– George Shih, president, Idol Memory (asi/62222)

LifeBEAM Smart hat



The LifeBeam Smart hat measures heart rate, number of steps taken and calories burned, and sends the data wirelessly to a smartphone or fitness tracker.

FEATURES: Ball cap style available in black or white; compatible with iPhone 4 and later, all Android devices with Bluetooth 4.0 and later, and select fitness trackers; visor and bike helmet styles also available

COST: \$99

WEB: www.life-beam.com

SUPPLIERS SAY:

“As a population, we are incredibly stagnant. We spend hours driving each day and then sit at our computers all day long. These daily habits can lead to very serious health problems. I’m a former strength coach, so I’d certainly welcome a product that makes us more aware of our daily activity levels.”

– Ty Cannon, national business development manager, Cutter & Buck (asi/47965)

“It’s a clever product and might work for promotional product distributors. However, price may be a hurdle. I can definitely see adoption of this item by Millennials because they’re so geared for this type of activity and use smartphones constantly.”

– Taraynn Lloyd, director of marketing, Edwards Garment (asi/51752)

Fitbit ChargeHR

The Fitbit chargeHR fitness tracker wristband monitors heartrate, tracks steps and distance, measures calories burned and provides Caller ID notifications.



FEATURES: Water-resistant; LED progress display; syncs wirelessly and automatically to iOS, Android and Windows smartphones with Bluetooth 4.0 technology

COST: \$149.95

WEB: www.fitbit.com

SUPPLIERS SAY:

“This could certainly translate into a product for the promotional industry. Most people would love a fitness tracker wristband. The only issue with the Fitbit most likely would be the price. It may be a challenge when trying to sell a few hundred for a special event, for example.”

– Taraynn Lloyd, director of marketing, Edwards Garment (asi/51752)

“It has a nice design, useful app and reasonable functionality. It’s a lifestyle piece, in that it becomes a part of your daily routine, like a car charger or a smartphone wallet. So any branding imprinted on it is in constant exposure, and that makes it truly exciting as a promotional piece. However, it’s not truly waterproof, which is a drawback, and it doesn’t provide a huge amount of smartwatch functionality.”

– Daniel Baker, marketing manager, Debco (asi/48885)

FreeWavz Smart Fitness Earphones



The FreeWavz Smart Fitness Earphones provide wireless heart rate monitoring and fitness tracking.

FEATURES: Communicates with smartphone app via Bluetooth; monitors heart rate and tracks fitness levels with audio alerts and real-time feedback; connects to smartphones and MP3 players to play music; compatible with iOS and Android

COST: \$249

WEB: www.freewavz.com

SUPPLIERS SAY:

“The creativity and functionality are incredible. They offer real-time information for people who pay attention to their health. They’re wearable, easy to carry and comfortable to wear. However, it provides real-time information and historical data on the smartphone app, which could be a challenge for non-tech savvy users. Actually, this is a common problem for most tech products.”

– George Shih, president, Idol Memory (asi/62222)

“Having worked as an operating room technician in a previous life, I’m familiar with the pulse oximeter technology involved with these earphones. I like the concept, but I fear the technology won’t work without very expensive components. Also, after having purchased wireless earphones just like these – minus the pulse oximeter, obviously – for my wife, I can tell you they tend not to be comfortable to wear while working out.”

– Daniel Baker, marketing manager, Debco (asi/48885)

Visijax Commuter Jacket

The Visijax Commuter Jacket provides added visibility for work and recreation in low light.

SIZE: XS to XXL in black or fluorescent yellow

FEATURES: 23 white and red LED lights, for safety in low light; motion-activated, self-cancelling turn indicators; rainproof and breathable; teflon coating

COST: Approximately \$170

WEB: www.visijax.com

SUPPLIERS SAY:

“The Visijax Commuter Jacket is very innovative. It’s perfect for cyclists, but it could also fit right in as a uniform piece for hotel valets, parking service associates or restaurant valets. Any work environment where visibility is enhanced would certainly benefit.”

– Taraynn Lloyd, director of marketing, Edwards Garment (asi/51752)



“The technology here is motion-sensing lighting. Cycling continues to be a hot trend, and growing more so every day. Part of its allure is the gadgetry involved. Cyclists are gear heads and love spending money on their hobby. The price point on this item is already within an acceptable range for select wearables, so I can see it being successful. The question will be, how well does the system work?”

– Daniel Baker, marketing manager, Debco (asi/48885)

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- Sue Saw, Color World of Printing,
asi/530136

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NK Promotions, asi/394942

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- Scott M. Smith,
FolderPros Plus, Inc., asi/212846



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For years, plastisol inks containing PVC have been the screen-printing standard. But now, environmental worries may be changing everything.

By C.J. Mittica

It was four years ago that Latitudes and plastisol parted ways. The Portland, OR-based screen printer didn't have a choice. Its top client – none other than Nike – had declared that all of its apparel decoration must be free of polyvinyl chloride, or PVC. And because plastisol contains PVC, a synthetic polymer, Latitudes had to rethink almost its entire approach to printing.

The decorator spent months researching and held multiple “PVC-Free Summits” to test its options. The owners of the shop even traveled to Europe to search for a solution. But when it came time to switch in November of 2011, Latitudes didn't have the luxury to slowly phase out plastisol.

“Instead of a gradual ramp-up, we pretty much hit a wall and had to go straight into it,” says Jamie McCrae, Latitudes' production manager. The screen printer immediately went from printing 50,000 impressions a day to 6,000. Adds McCrae: “It took us maybe three weeks to get back up to 70%.”

While the breadth of ink and equipment alternatives has improved since then, the task of replacing plastisol remains a giant headache. The equipment requirements are different (and costly to replace), the processes are more labor-intensive, and changing over is no mere flip of the switch. “A lot of people have an unrealistic timeline to make the change,” says Rob Coleman, segment marketing manager of textile screen inks for Nazdar SourceOne. “They think they can do it in a month or two. By and large, depending on the size of your shop and how much you're investing, it will take probably 8-12 months.”

With so much difficulty involved, why are some of the largest screen printers in the country abandoning plastisol, the gold standard of user-friendly inks and the dominant ink chemistry in the United States? It's because they don't have another option – and, perhaps at some point in the future, neither will you.

Turning Green

During the summer of 2011, Greenpeace launched a new campaign labeled “Detox.” At the center was an investigative report from the environmental organization that highlighted water pollution caused by the textile industry. Greenpeace singled out several global apparel brands, starting with Nike and Adidas, and called on them to

clean up their practices. Six weeks after the campaign was launched, Nike announced it was “committed to the goal of zero discharge of hazardous chemicals by 2020.”

The prevailing perception is that Greenpeace's campaign spurred Nike to eliminate PVC in all forms – including plastisol ink, which contains a PVC resin. But Greenpeace's “Dirty Laundry” report at the time only mentions PVC fleetingly and nowhere regarding apparel manufacturing or decoration.

The confusion underscores the complicated – and even controversial – environmental profile of PVC. Greenpeace and multitudes of other groups have urged manufacturers to phase the compound out of everything from electronics and toys to athletic shoes. PVC can contain phthalates and lead, and it releases toxic dioxins into the air if incinerated improperly.

“A lot of people have an unrealistic timeline to make the change from PVC.”

Rob Coleman, Nazdar SourceOne

And yet PVC is found in hundreds of everyday items – piping, insulation, flooring, blood bags and much more. In the case of plastisol, the PVC resin is encapsulated, and then fused to the garment. Because of that, when a garment is disposed, there is no runoff or migration, says Marci Kinter, vice president of government and business information for SGIA.

While the saber rattling against phthalates the last few years reached a crescendo, by contrast, the scrutiny of PVC has been a mere whisper. The Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act makes no mention of PVC. California's Prop 65 regulates the presence of lead and phthalates in PVC, rather than limiting the amount of PVC in a product. “What we're finding with the issues with PVC is that it's very market-place driven,” Kinter says. “It is not driven by any regulatory agency. Really, we see more issues with phthalates than the PVC.”

That was the case for Nike when it decided to replace plastisol. In 2010, Nike

had introduced guidelines to “highlight ‘positive’ chemistries,” including PVC- and phthalate-free screen-printing inks. In its initial response to Greenpeace's directive the following summer, Nike highlights its use of PVC-free ink as an example of its sustainability engagement, terming it “a major accomplishment for the apparel industry.”

And Nike isn't the only one. According to Nazdar SourceOne, seven of the top 10 global apparel brands (including Zara, Adidas and Ralph Lauren) have partial or full PVC restrictions. That may affect a mere slice of decorators worldwide who work with those companies, but it also represents a significant volume of decorated garments. In short, the PVC initiative is surprisingly broad – and growing.

Because of that, “I can assure you on the ink side, that your big companies like Wilflex and Rutland are spending a significant portion of R&D on non-PVC technologies,” says Coleman. Plastisol alternatives may have been slim a few years ago, but the range of choices continues to improve. Rutland Plastic Technologies, for example, offers its EKO PVC-free plastisol (which uses an acrylic base), silicone ink and a variety of waterbase inks, including traditional and high-solid acrylic (also known as rubber ink).

The original EKO line was first developed in 2007, “but this last year has been the big year where it's come forward and people have started really using it,” says Brian Lessard, print applications manager for Rutland.

Equipment manufacturers, too, have been forced to modify their offerings to

Defining PVC

Q: What is it?

A: Polyvinyl chloride, abbreviated as PVC, is one of the most widely produced synthetic plastic polymers in the world. It's most commonly used in piping and flooring.

Q: Is it dangerous?

A: Opinions are mixed. PVC can contain phthalates and lead, and it releases toxic dioxins into the air – but only if it's incinerated improperly.

Q: What's the link between plastisol and PVC?

A: Traditional plastisol ink contains a PVC resin.

accommodate these new inks. It was last fall at the SGIA show that M&R CEO Rich Hoffman flatly said: “We’re not even addressing plastisol anymore.” The company has developed a number of solutions to address two of the major issues with plastisol alternatives: the significant increase in necessary curing time and the need to flash between each color. Among other products at the show, M&R unveiled the Sprint 3000T, a tri-level version of its dryer that offers 30 feet of belt travel within a footprint of a 12-foot-long chamber.

“We have hundreds of customers that are large production shops, and they have their floors laid out around their equipment,” says David C. Zimmer, textile products manager for M&R. “You can’t simply tell the customer, ‘Sorry, but the new inks are going to require that you buy four times as much space for all your driers.’ And they’re not going to re-layout their entire shops either if they can avoid it. We’re trying to offer them a solution that fits within the footprint they already have built in.”

Rethinking Ink

Last year, Nazdar SourceOne surveyed the major screen-printing ink manufacturers to predict ink sales over the next few years. According to the results, in 2014, 70% of the ink sold was to be comprised of PVC inks. In 2018, the survey predicted a decline to 45%.

Those numbers underscore two major conclusions regarding PVC ink. One is this: Plastisol will still be the primary ink used in North America. The vast majority of screen printers – those who cater to the promotional products industry, small businesses and the average everyday user – will still trade in plastisol. There will be no external pressure on them from their customers to make a switch for safety reasons. “I think there’s always going to be a place for plastisol ink,” says Coleman.

The other conclusion: Traditional plastisol will still experience a dramatic decrease in usage. That change won’t occur without ramifications. When major brands champion an initiative, others tend to follow suit. Wal-Mart, for example, announced in 2007 that it was reducing or phasing out PVC in all of its products and packaging, yet the company still sells screen-printed garments with plastisol ink. “If a major retailer decides to buy into this whole thing,” says McCrae, “things will start moving pretty fast – much like the phthalate-free issue.”

The race to remove phthalates a few years

PVC-Free Alternatives

1. Traditional Waterbase/Discharge

These inks feature water as the main solvent along with other co-solvents. It’s a retail favorite, particularly with discharge, where the dye of the fabric is essentially removed and often “re-dyed” with waterbase pigments.

2. High-Solids Acrylic/Rubber Ink

Even though it’s a waterbase ink, High Solids Acrylic (HSA) prints more like a plastisol. It offers some of the best of both worlds – a softer hand than plastisol with greater opacity than traditional waterbase. Note that some formulations use polyurethane instead of acrylic.

3. Silicone Ink

With its superior stretchiness, silicone is quickly becoming an activewear favorite, even for customers who don’t have restrictions on PVC. Be forewarned though – that performance comes at a pretty penny.

4. PVC-Free Plastisol/Acrysol

For those who prefer plastisol, this is most natural ink to transition to. Acrysol is a plastisol that uses an acrylic resin instead of a PVC resin. Results have been inconsistent in the past, but the technology is improving.



ago highlights the wide-ranging aftershocks of regulation. Phthalates in children’s clothing and apparel decoration weren’t banned by product safety legislation several years ago, yet the scrutiny was so great that ink manufacturers were compelled to eliminate them from their formulations. Similar fallout can occur with PVC, either directly or indirectly as the result of regulation.

Zimmer likens it to the switch from leaded to unleaded gasoline – a mandate from the government where many had not seen an environmental concern. “I have a feeling,” says Zimmer, “it may not be up to the printers in the long run to make that decision.”

And the truth is, there are reasons beyond

sustainable initiatives that are causing plastisol to dip. Traditional waterbase and discharge has become a leading method of decoration in retail, and it has driven customers to places like Forward Printing in Oakland, CA, which specializes in all things waterbase. Owner Dan Corcoran says none of his customers have mentioned PVC – they just want the soft-hand feel they see in retail. “Waterbase is going to be pushed forward by a lot of fashion brands,” he says.

Whatever the reason, replacing inks that contain PVC will certainly be more difficult, but it can be done. “It’s not as bad as they think,” says McCrae. He lists a number of reasons: It’s easier for small, agile shops to make the switch compared to large shops with dozens of employees and presses; the durability requirements for prints of companies like Nike far exceed what the average buyer will want; and the level of knowledge and products out now surpasses what was available a few years ago.

Despite all the hair-pulling, McCrae acknowledges that going PVC-free has made Latitudes a better shop. “It turns out we weren’t really as good a printer as we thought we were,” he says. “This whole exercise has made us much better.” – Email: cmittica@asicentral.com

“If a major retailer decides to buy into this whole thing, things will start moving pretty fast.”

Jamie McCrae, Latitudes



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LIVE FROM

NEW YORK

Barbara Corcoran, star of business-reality TV show *Shark Tank*, headlined the ASI Show New York in May with her special brand of Big Apple inspiration. Plus, take a look at nine unique and useful products that *Counselor* editors found during the show.

*By Andy Cohen,
Joe Haley &
Dawn Shurmaitis*

The list of titles that describe Barbara Corcoran is long and varied: Real estate mogul. Reality TV star. Author. Celebrity broker. Morning show commentator. Wife. Mother. And, according to ASI CEO Tim Andrews, “Firecracker.”

Corcoran added the title of ASI Show keynote speaker to that list when she took to the stage at ASI New York in early May to dish out advice to a rapt audience of nearly 300 entrepreneurs and small-business owners.

“Never be ashamed of who you are” and “A true American success story” flashed on the screen as Corcoran began her presentation to the tune of the theme song from *Jaws*, a humorous nod to her starring role as a judge on ABC’s *Shark Tank*, in which entrepreneurs vie for investors’ money.

“It’s a fabulous act of the universe to actually be in business for yourself, having nobody tell you what to do,” she said by way of greeting. “Congratulations for having the guts to run your own business.”

Corcoran kicked off with a no-holds-barred rundown of highlights from her life, including the story of the boyfriend-turned-business partner who provided the \$1,000 seed money for a real estate business in Manhattan that Corcoran turned into multibillion-dollar business – by the way, without the help of said boyfriend, following a split the couple had early in the company’s lifetime.

Then, the New Jersey native with nine siblings who has laid down roots in New York after her real estate business took off there, offered five tips to success:

Perception creates reality. “New York City is a competitive town,” she said. “From day one, I dreamed a picture of who I would be. I had an image. I discovered the keys to the magic kingdom.” By billing herself as a real estate agent to the stars, she seized the city’s imagination, along with sizeable publicity, cementing her reputation.

Corcoran is also a big believer in using public relations and the media to build a perception of your company that makes it seem even bigger than it is. “Create storylines through information and data that your local business journals will be interested in,” she advised. “Give them lists of interesting information and make sure they know you’re the source.”

This approach, Corcoran said, will create the perception that you’re the top marketing and promotional products expert in the local area – and it will provide you with clips and online links that prove your value.

“From day one, I dreamed a picture of who I would be. I had an image.”

Barbara Corcoran

There are two kinds of people: Expanders and Containers. Hire people who balance out your team. If you’re unorganized, hire someone who can manage the business smartly. “You can’t just bring on like-minded yes-people,” Corcoran said. “Find out what you’re weakest in and then make your best hires the types of people that are best at those things.”

Shoot the dogs early. After you’ve hired people, if you find they’re not working out, then you have to get rid of them quickly. Corcoran used to rank all of her salespeople, and the bottom 25% were immediately put on a three-month plan to improve or they would be fired. It’s vital, she said, to quickly rid your business of underperforming salespeople or employees.

“Our system was clear and fair,” Corcoran

said. “Everybody knew the rankings and would know if they would be in line to lose their jobs. Everybody knew what the rules were when they were hired so there were no surprises.”

Fun is good for business. On the other hand, Corcoran said, you need to create a fun and unique corporate environment if your company is going to find big success. “I created outrageous fun,” she said, “instead of just boring Christmas parties.” Her costume parties and picnics helped everyone in her office bond, creating a stronger team, while helping lure top people from her competitors.

“Fun is good for your business,” Corcoran said. “Be creative with it and it will help build camaraderie and togetherness among your staff. Why would you want to work for a boring competitor when you can have more fun here?”

Be great at failure. With new hires, Corcoran watches for how soon they recover from failure and whether they indulge in pity parties. “Failing well” is a sign of strength, she said. “It’s the key to success for entrepreneurs and salespeople. You have to enjoy getting knocked down and then getting back up again. The singular difference between people is when they take a hit, how long they take to stop feeling sorry for themselves.”

Online Extra

Shark Tank judge Barbara Corcoran spoke to *Counselor* Editor Andy Cohen on camera just before taking the stage at the ASI Show New York. Her topic: How to succeed as an entrepreneur today. Using her decidedly New York humor and her vast experience at building her own business into a billion-dollar company from nothing, Corcoran provided tips in this video that are sure to help every ad specialty pro find success right now. Go to www.CounselorMag.com now to watch the video.



Finds From NYC

9 products that shined at ASI New York.

1



1. CALL TO ARMS

Dye-sublimated sleeve helps with muscle fatigue, so it's perfect for promotions targeting athletes. Think about local gyms, youth sports groups, and PTAs. Available from Pro Feet (asi/79707); www.profeet.com

2. WRITE ON

Custom tin includes a chalkboard that allows the user to jot down to-do lists, daily specials or inspirational messages. Available from Dixie Stamp & Seal Co. Inc. (asi/50120); www.dixiline.com

3. TATTOO YOU

Sheet includes six tattoos and a tear-off coupon. Great for a school fundraiser sponsored by a local business. Available from California Tattoo (asi/43530); www.caltattoo.com

4. ZIP IT

This quarter-zip pullover is easy to care for and is moisture-wicking. The stretch material affords a comfortable fit and makes this item perfect for any campaign targeted to active lifestyles. Available from alphabroder (asi/34063); www.alphabroder.com

5. IT'S A WRAP

Promotional condoms are available in a number of different packaging options, plus an imprint can be done directly on the foil. Great for

college campus promos. Available from Say It With A Condom (asi/84989); www.sayitwithacondom.com

6. DON'T FORGET ...

ChargerLeash charges mobile devices and sounds an alarm when the device is disconnected, assuring that the charging cable will never be left behind. A unique and effective promo targeted to travelers. Available from ChargerLeash (asi/44538); www.chargerleash.com

7. DULY NOTED

Note cube is imprinted on all four sides with an additional brand on each sheet. A must-have office accessory. Available from Bebcos (asi/39395); www.bebco.com

8. BOUNCE BACK

Bungie affixes to all styles of cell-phone. Clip to a belt loop and when dropped the phone won't hit the ground. Also keeps the user from losing it. Unique item for the tech market. Available from BCG Creations (asi/37693); www.bcgcreations.com

9. SHINE ON

Pocket shoe shiner makes shoes look like new without the need for shoe polish. Traveling salespeople would relish such a grab-and-go item. Available from Allen Adv. Products Inc. (asi/34326); www.fingertipline.com

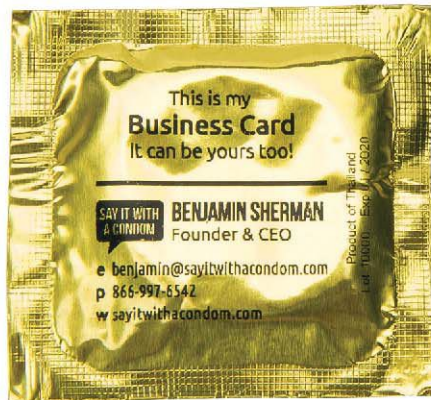
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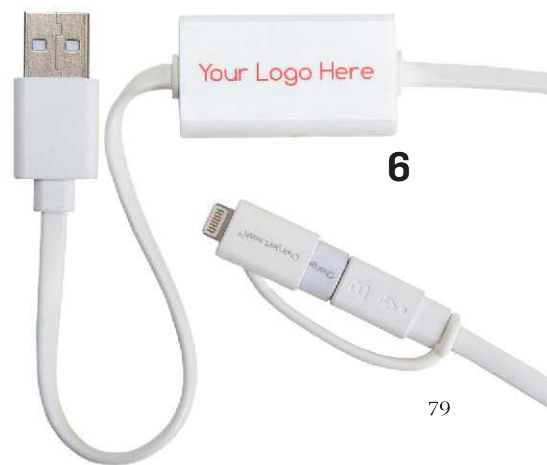
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People Time Marches On

Larry Abels marks 50 years as an ASI supplier of fine timepieces.

By Sara Lavenduski

It's hard to believe, but there was a time when Larry Abels, who celebrates 50 years as an ASI member in 2015, wasn't even aware of the advertising specialty industry. Today, he's the chairman of Selco (asi/86230), and his son Mark Abels is the president and CEO. But when Larry Abels first started in business in the early 1960s, he sold fine jewelry and watches directly to oil executives, since Tulsa, OK, where the company is based, was at that time teeming with black gold and the companies who flocked there were looking to get in on the action.

"Back then, Tulsa was called the oil capital of the world," says Abels. "Our offices were very close to the oil area, and executives bought jewelry from us. We were eventually selling \$50,000 emeralds and \$100,000 diamonds. We were heavily into retail, and had a chain of jewelry stores in the region. We had no idea about recognition or the promotional market."

But that all changed when an executive asked Abels if they could supply him with 200 Omega watches as a service

award. "We had no idea what he was talking about!" says Abels. "But we filled that order and then started doing engraving for incentives and awards."

Eventually, Abels teamed up with a distributor who sold to the petroleum industry and supplied the client with different watch styles for multiple divisions, all the while realizing that his product line could fit comfortably into the promotional marketplace.

When Selco eventually joined ASI in 1965, the company still offered items mostly in a retail capacity, but gradually devoted more time and energy to supplying distributor clients with timepieces. "We basically introduced watches to the industry," says Abels. "And we've never left." As a new member of ASI, Selco's business continued to center on oil executives' gifting and incentive programs in the Oklahoma and Texas area. Today, while Texas is still the company's largest market, the client base has expanded dramatically. "It's now all over the country," says Abels, "We're right in the center of all the UPS zones, which is convenient, and we've also sold to Mexico and Central America."



Larry Abels, chairman of Selco, with his grandchildren. Abels has been an ASI supplier since 1965.

By the early 1970s, Selco was completely dedicated to serving its distributor clients. They made their name as a supplier of watches and clocks before changes in the market forced them to give up production on the latter. "We had a lot of clock business early on, with movements from Europe," says Abels. "But then they became too expensive. We did some of our own production here in Tulsa, but when Asia started we just couldn't keep up. Now we just focus on watches, and we're still the only dial manufacturer in the United States."

Selco continues to offer high-end brands, as well as its own line. "It's a higher price point for distributors, and sometimes

they stay away, but others want to show their client everything that's available," says Abels. "We have to make sure our quality is high because if thousands of watches in the same order have a problem, we're out of business. We're proud to say that less than 1% come back for service or repair."

Watches continue to be a sought-after promotional item and incentive gift for a variety of industries, even half a century after Selco first started offering them to distributors, Abels says. "They're the most-watched wearable," says Abels. "People look at them about 40 times a day. And if we personalize it, the recipient will never lose it because it's valuable to them. It's a piece of jewelry with intrinsic value."

Today, while Abels is still significantly involved with the company, he spends "as much time as possible" in Naples, FL, and still travels to Asia and Las Vegas each year. "With my IP phone, it's like I'm sitting in the office in Tulsa," he says. "I can be anywhere in the world and stay in touch. I can see all the details, monitor cash flow. Our company is much better run than ever before."

Appointments & Promotions

This month's people on the move in the ad specialty industry.

Compiled by Sara Lavenduski

► **Ads On Magnets** (asi/31061) hired Stacy Piszczek to the position of inside sales/office manager.

► **Alistair Mylchreest**, the CEO of UK-based Sourcing City, has left the firm, effective July 1, to pursue a new venture in the United States. David Long, the chairman and founder of Sourcing City, will be resuming the role of CEO.

► **Clayton Kendall** (asi/162965) announced the following new hires: Traci Tarquinio, vice president of operations for Rush Imprint; Nicole Robertson, director of sales for Rush Imprint; Nicole Ruccio, merchandising manager for Clayton Kendall; Suzanne Spears, regional sales manager for Clayton Kendall; Matt Vrabel, account manager for Rush Imprint; Mary Beach, vice president of sales for Clayton Kendall.

► **ETS Express** (asi/51197) hired Adam Stone, Jennifer Windemuth, Mike Contreras and Kelsey Earl as regional sales managers for the Southwest, North Central, East North Central and South Central territories, respectively.

► **Gildan Activewear** (asi/56842) welcomed Rhodri Harries as its new CFO and chief administrative officer.

► **High Caliber Line** (asi/43442) has hired Les Dorfman as vice president of



Les Dorfman
High Caliber



Ross Silverstein
iPROMOTEu



Larry Nichter
MediaTree



Christine Von de Veld
Selco



Lavina Da Silva
Spector



Jim Hagan
Sweda

sales & marketing.

► **Hirsch Gift** (asi/61005) hired David Degreeff as regional sales manager for the Southwest territory, covering TX, AR, KS, LA, MO and OK.

► **Howw Manufacturing Co.** (asi/61952) appointed Bob Fleisher as vice president of sales.

► **iPROMOTEu** (asi/232119) announced that founder, president and CEO Ross Silverstein is a finalist for the EY Entrepreneur of the Year 2015 Award in the New England Region. The awards program recognizes entrepreneurs who demonstrate excellence in the areas of innovation, financial performance and personal commitment to their businesses and communities. Award winners will be announced in November.

► **Marco Promotional Products** (asi/260870) hired David Giroux as president.

► **MediaTree** (asi/70303) announced that it appointed Larry Nichter as chief revenue officer.

► **Nationwide Promotions LLC** (asi/73464) welcomes Michele Kennedy as director of creative services.

► **OMNi Apparel Inc.** (asi/99550) announced that it hired Larry White as sales manager.

► **Pilot Corporation of America** (asi/78110) welcomed Rhonda Reilly as sales manager for the company's Promotional Products Division.

► **PWS** (asi/75731) hired Craig Ross as inside sales specialist covering the East Coast Territory.

► **Selco** (asi/86230) announced that it hired Christine Von de Veld as an account manager and Ryan Pope as account service specialist.

► **SIMBA** (asi/87296) appointed the following multi-line agencies: Bridge Marketing for ND, SD, NE, KS, MN, IA, MO, WI, IL, MI, IN, OH; In Stepp Marketing for CO, NM, OK, TX, AR, LA, MS, KY, TN, AL, WV, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL; and Jules Scheck Associates for ME, NH, VT, MA, RI, CT, NY, PA, NJ, DE, MD.

► **Spector & Co.** (asi/88660) welcomed Lavina Da Silva as social compliance and sustainability manager.

► **Summit Group** (asi/339116) announced the following new hires: Josh Bleicher, account coordinator; Lottie Witowski, accounts receivable coordinator; Maria Finch, accounts payable coordinator; Berenice Proa, customer care representative; Debbie Blake, manager of program accounts.

► **Sweda** (asi/90305) announced that Jim Hagan has moved to chairman of the company, and Kenneth (KB) Marshall will take over all responsibilities as president and CEO.

► **Visions/AwardCraft** (asi/93986) hired Mike McMillan as vice president of sales.

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"I believe the Apple Watch could eventually inspire industry products, especially since fitness tracking is all the rage right now."

Ty Cannon, Cutter & Buck
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Best Places to Work

eCompanyStore

This southern distributor firm uses sabbaticals to motivate and energize employees.



Time off is the true key to attracting and retaining great employees, believes Craig Callaway, CEO of **eCompanyStore**, a 130-person firm based in Alpharetta, GA. "There's only so much money you can pay people," says Callaway. "What you can really give them that makes the difference is free time to spend with their families."

So, eCompanyStore gives every employee, with the exception of highly-commissioned salespeople who are eligible for incentive trips, a 21-day mandatory sabbatical every five years. That's in addition to any regular time off they're entitled to. "I want people to take the kind of trip they'd never take in a regular week's vacation," Callaway says. "We want people to do life-changing stuff and come back revitalized."

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