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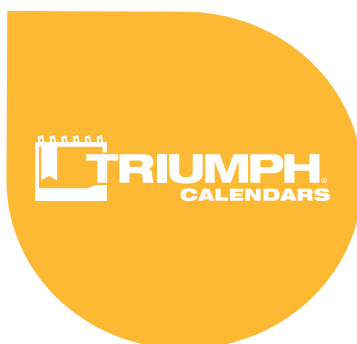
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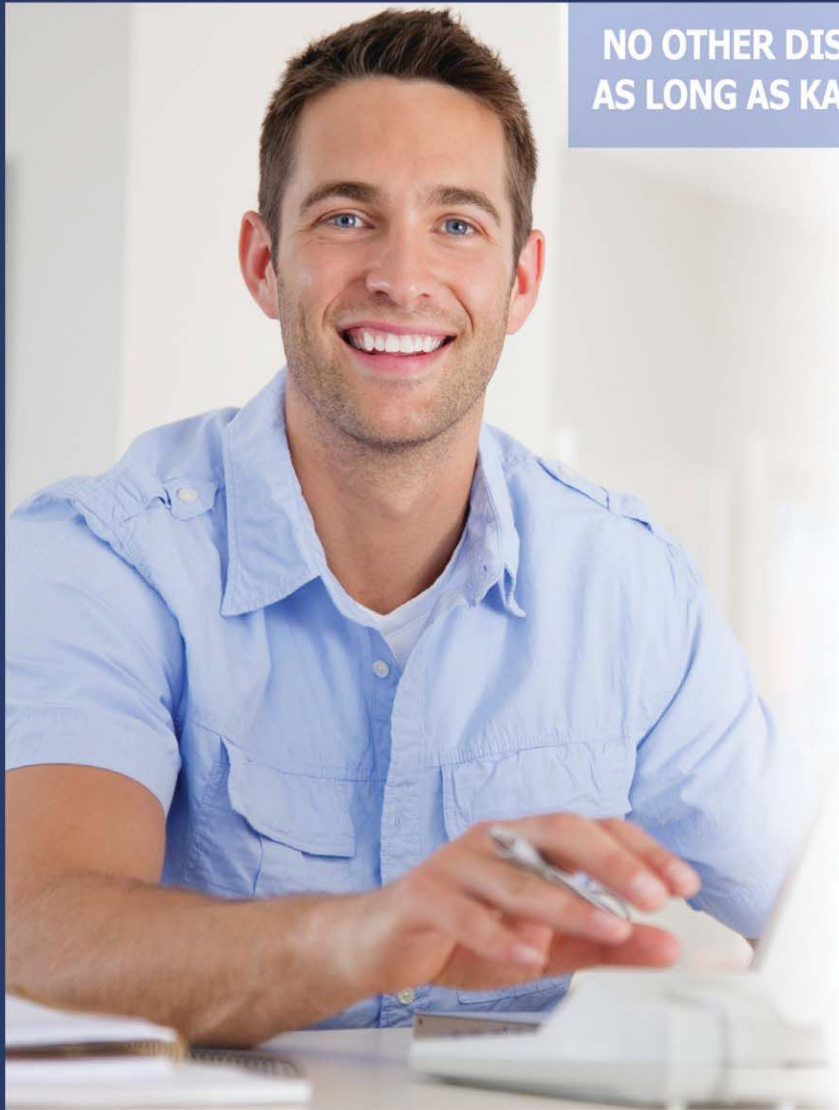


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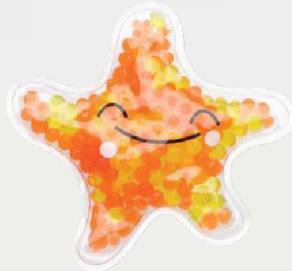
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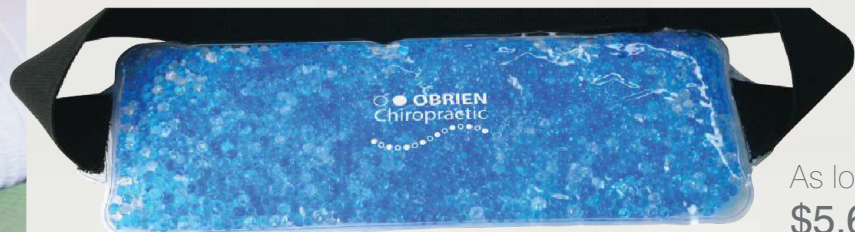
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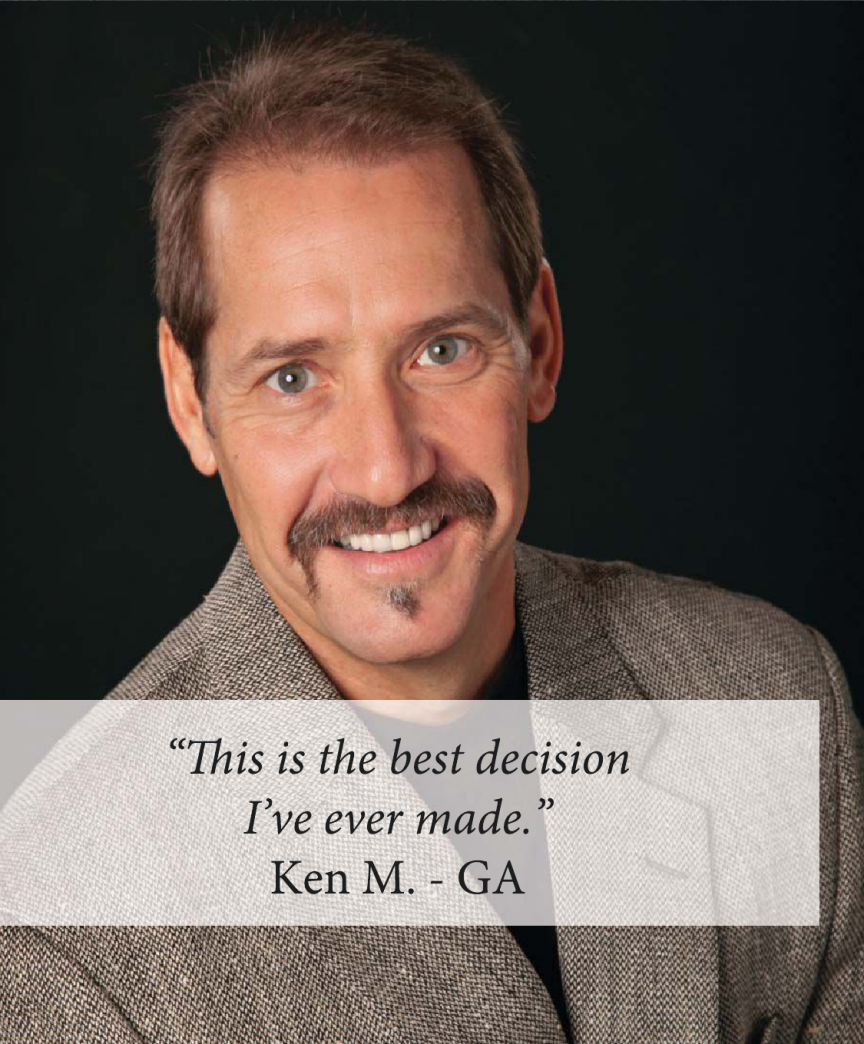




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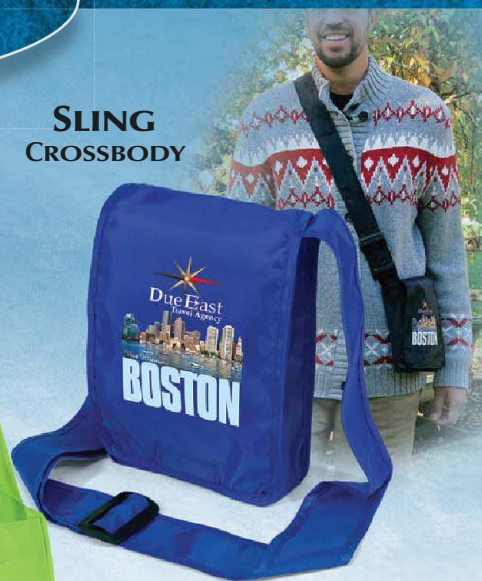
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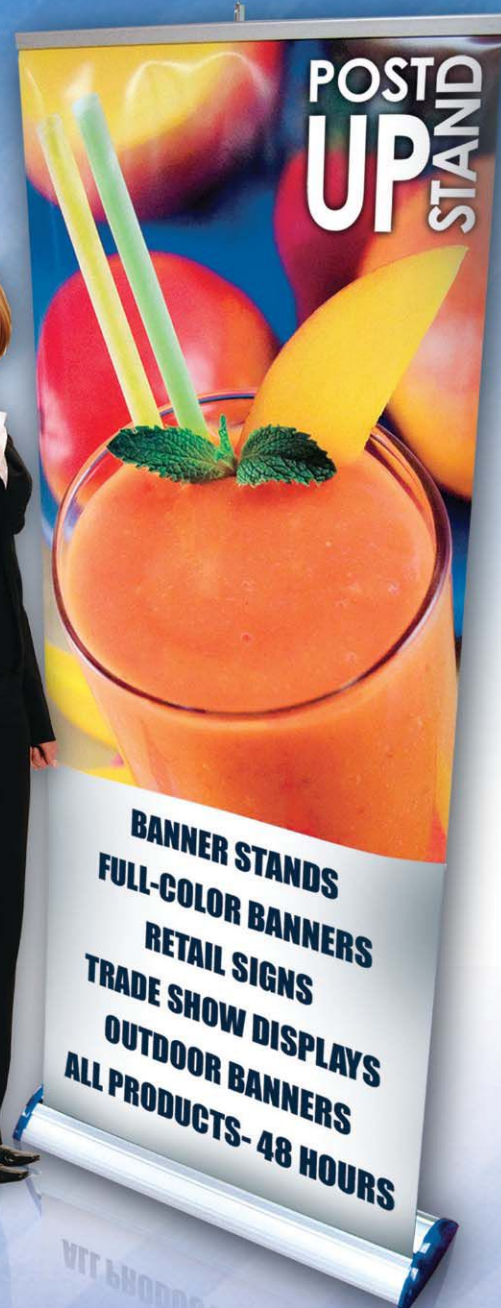
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Richard Fairfield, MASI, rfairfield@asicentral.com,
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**EDITOR IN CHIEF,
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT**

Melinda Ligos, MASI, mligos@asicentral.com
@ASI_Melinda

EDITOR

Andy Cohen, BASI, acohen@asicentral.com
@ASI_AndyCohen

MANAGING EDITORS

Joan Chaykin, BASI, jchaykin@asicentral.com
@asi_joanchaykin
Joe Haley, MASI, jhaley@asicentral.com
@asi_joehaley

SENIOR EDITORS

Michele Bell, BASI, mbell@asicentral.com
@ASI_MBell
Dave Vagnoni, BASI, dvagnoni@asicentral.com
@vagnoniASI

SENIOR WRITERS

Betsy Cummings, bcummings2368@nyc.rr.com
C. J. Mittica, BASI, cmittica@asicentral.com
Chris Ruvo, BASI, cruvo@asicentral.com

DIRECTOR OF AWARDS

Karen Akers, BASI, kakers@asicentral.com
@ASI_Awards

COPY EDITOR

Lindsey Strawser, lstrawser@asicentral.com

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Carole Seymour, BASI, cseymour@asicentral.com

ART DIRECTOR

Hillary Haught, BASI, @HaughtArt

SENIOR DESIGNER

Glen Karpowich, BASI, @KarpoDesigner

DESIGNER

Melissa Lascala, BASI, mlascala@asicentral.com

PHOTOGRAPHER

Mark Prickslett, MASI, @marcOphoto

ART INTERN

Jessica Williams, jwilliams@asicentral.com

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PRODUCTION & ADVERTISING OPERATIONS

Haitham Barakat, MASI

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ADVERTISING

PUBLISHER, CHIEF REVENUE OFFICER

Richard Fairfield, MASI, rfairfield@asicentral.com

VICE PRESIDENT/ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER

Edwin Koehler, BASI (800) 546-1261

ekoehler@asicentral.com

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT/SALES

Christine Lovell, MASI (800) 546-1478

clovell@asicentral.com

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT/SUPPLIER SALES

Ron Ball, MASI (800) 546-1430

rball@asicentral.com

VICE PRESIDENT/SALES

Mary Sells, MASI

msells@asicentral.com

ADVERTISING SALES

Vincent Deissroth, BASI

vdeissroth@asicentral.com

Mary Fox

mfox@asicentral.com

Cindi Mann, BASI

cmann@asicentral.com

Charlene McCaw

cmccaw@asicentral.com

Barry Melito, BASI

bmelito@asicentral.com

Phyllis Mutnick, BASI

pmutnick@asicentral.com

James Padilla, BASI

jpadilla@asicentral.com

Suzanne Rozick, BASI

srozick@asicentral.com

CANADIAN OFFICE

Fred Oesen

foesen@asicentral.com

Ryan David

rdavid@asicentral.com

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Editor's Letter

The Fallacy of Employee Ratings

Are you helping or hurting your corporate culture by how employees are rated?

By Andy Cohen

Two technology industry giants made news in November. It wasn't for introducing the latest gaming system or mobile phone or online search function. Rather, both Microsoft and Yahoo created headlines with internal announcements.

First, Microsoft informed employees that it would be doing away with its oft-criticized "stack ranking" system, which forced managers to essentially rate their employees on a curve. In other words, every department had to have a certain amount of people receive great scores, another specific percentage receive average ratings, and a third group that got bad scores. Ultimately, bonuses were doled out to the top scorers, and yes, many of the employees with the lowest scores were weeded out periodically. Now, concerned about the hyper-competitive and unfair environment that this system created, Microsoft has pulled a 180.

It will now have a review process that is more flexible and which encourages employees to work together, instead of against each other. "Our new approach will make it easier for managers and leaders to allocate rewards in a manner that reflects the unique contributions of their employees and teams," Lisa Brummel, executive vice president of human resources

at Microsoft, said in a letter distributed to employees.

Well done, Microsoft. Why would you want an employee review system that essentially pits people against each other? Annual reviews are designed to increase communication



Why would you want an employee review system that essentially pits people against each other?

at companies by providing feedback to employees on where they're performing well and where they could pick it up. In a vacuum, that should work.

But companies aren't implementing reviews in a vacuum, because many are applying ratings to employees at the end of the process on a curve system that forces managers to have certain amounts of their people in the different levels provided. All that succeeds at doing is creating a toxic environment where employees inevitably wonder who got the top scores and who got the bottom scores. And many companies have begun to realize this.

The Institute of Corporate Productivity says that only 5% of high-performing companies used a forced ranking system in 2011, down from almost 20% two years earlier.

So, what did Yahoo do? The company adopted the employee

a high-performance culture, is it? Greg Harris, president of Quantum Workplace, the research company that conducts employee surveys for *Counselor's* Best Places to Work program, believes companies will increasingly

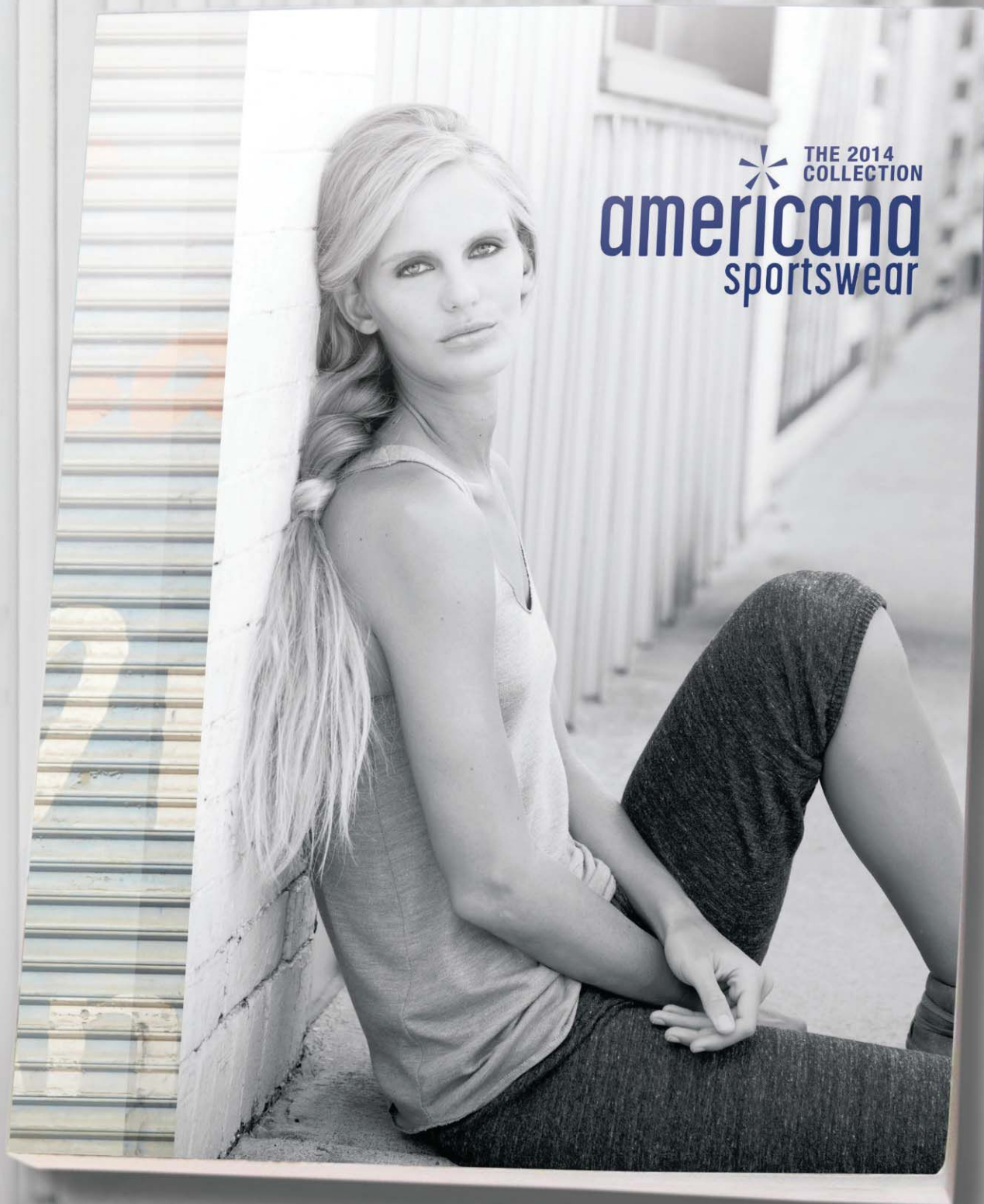
rating system that Microsoft – and many others – just shunned. Website AllThingsD.com reported that Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer has instituted the ranking system so the company can more easily identify the employees it should fire. However, now the company has a morale issue on its hands.

Said one manager: "I feel so uncomfortable because in order to meet the bell curve, I have to tell an employee that they missed when I truly don't believe it to be the case. I understand we want to weed out people not meeting their goals, but this practice is concerning. I don't want to lose the person mentally."

Not a good way to create

realize this and move away from stack rating systems. "It's antiquated," Harris said at the inaugural *Counselor* Best Places to Work Conference, held in November. "Companies should be rating each employee on their own merits and not measuring people against each other. That creates an environment rife with trust issues. Employee ratings should be meant to improve performance and productivity and not kill it. Stack rating systems tend to have a negative effect."

How are employee ratings handled at your company? Drop me a line at acohen@asicentral.com or on Twitter @ [ASLAndyCohen](https://twitter.com/ASLAndyCohen).



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CTO's Letter

Tech Sea Change

ASI's chief technology officer unveils new tech offerings.

By Armughan Rafat

From the start, my number-one priority as ASI's chief technology officer has been to serve our customers. Although it's important to pay close attention to the ever-changing technology market, I derive most of my inspiration from the industry-specific needs of the distributors, suppliers, decorators and screen printers who rely on ASI technology to help move their business forward.

A customer-driven focus spurs proactivity and innovation and drives rapid improvements in customer experience, even in areas where we already lead the industry. When we're at our best, we don't wait for external pressures. We're internally driven to improve our services, adding benefits and features and continuously introducing new features that make it easier to sell more promotional products.

With that in mind, in the last year alone, ASI launched over 100 new features in the ESP platform and introduced several new products like Traffic Builder, which helps drive customers and prospects to distributor websites by advertising distributor presence on two of the top used search engines and social media sites in the world today.

As I write this, my team is

putting the final touches on implementing "Visual Search" in ESP, which will let you snap a photo of a product with your smartphone and quickly search for similar products and get full results in ESP.

The single most dramatic

sharing and communication available across the entire industry, the end-to-end workflow – from product inputting to price quoting to order processing – will be straightforward and uncomplicated.

At the end of the day, I want to make the latest technologies work for all of us. I'm incredibly lucky to lead a large team of outstanding colleagues who love nothing more than finding more ways to help you work smarter.



Soon, the days of trying to complete orders using old or unreliable data will be a thing of the past.

change taking place, however, is through the creation of a product management system that will transform the way distributors search, find and quote products to their customers.

Soon, the days of trying to complete orders using old or unreliable data will be a thing of the past. Suppliers will be able to update their latest product information, high-resolution images and pricing in minutes, which means distributors will always have the most complete data available on every product imaginable. We're already working with dozens of top suppliers to link their databases directly to ESP.

By making quick, vital data

We're launching nothing less than the most flexible, complete, modern database in the history of the advertising specialty industry.

That's not all we're working on. In 2014, ASI's technology team will fine-tune its focus on order accuracy through a new project whose ultimate goal is to cut the percentage of inaccurate orders down to zero, saving everyone involved time and frustration.

Ours is an ever-evolving industry that thrives on creativity and challenge. My job is to devise and develop innovative new tools, products and services that will rise to whatever challenges our customers face.

As proud as I am of our progress, I know our passion for pioneering will lead to a few mistakes and blind alleys along the way. But with a lot of effort and a bit of good fortune, we'll continue to deliver on our promise of success to our customers.

Your feedback continues to be invaluable. Please let me know how we're doing, what products work best and what we need to improve upon. Your input helps us make continual improvements, so please keep your thoughts, suggestions and ideas coming. You can contact me at Armughan.Rafat@asicentral.com. I look forward to a fun, interesting and challenging 2014.



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News

CAN PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS COMPANIES CAPITALIZE ON THE OLYMPIC MARKETING OPPORTUNITY?



Kim Newell
World Wide (asi/98290)
“Most distributors and suppliers are used to working through the logistics of licensing, so I don’t feel this limits the possibility of new business.”



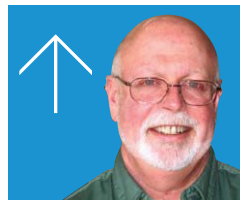
Jason Black
Boundless (asi/143717)
“This is not ideal for the promotional industry because the ‘ante’ (license requirement) to get into the game is very high.”



Pat Cavanaugh
Cavanaugh Marketing (asi/159262)
“Creative groups can activate programs with winter/sports themed programs and contests for customers.”



Paula Shulman
Prime Line (asi/79530)
“It makes it more difficult for suppliers to print products if the distributor does not have a signed licensing agreement to print that logo.”



Mike Little
Team Mates (asi/90674)
“There are a lot of imaginative ways that people can take advantage of the Olympics without actually pushing the logo and licensing aspects.”



Memo Kahan
Promo Shop (asi/300446)
“Because of licensing agreements, it’s not something we’ll benefit from. It’s also tough because it’s half-way around the globe.”

Big Brands Energized by Olympic Marketing



Lindsey Vonn, U.S. champion skier, will be competing in next month’s Olympics, and bringing plenty of logoed gear with her.

► NBC Universal says it has sold more than **\$800 million** in advertising for the Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

► Bloomberg News estimates that Coca-Cola will spend more than **\$500 million** on marketing efforts surrounding the Olympics.

► Red Bull and Under Armour are spending a combined **\$200 million** to market their tie-ins to Lindsey Vonn.

► Nielsen estimates that more than **190 million** Americans will watch some part of the **17-day** Winter Olympics.

Chatter

Readers React



"I believe industry revenues will grow but slowly. I think the economy will remain fragile; consumers and businesses remain cautious. However, I'm optimistic 2014 will be better than 2013."

LORI KATES, VITRONIC PROMOTIONAL GROUP (ASI/93990), IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION: WHAT'S YOUR OUTLOOK FOR THE INDUSTRY IN 2014?

"Companies seem to have opened their purse strings and have money to spend again. Anything to do with technology seems to be the strongest category right now"

PAULA SHULMAN, PRIME LINE (ASI/79530)



"From an international perspective, I think North America will see slow growth but lower risk of decline than we've seen in the more recent past. Europe will continue to be very challenging with a lot of disruption for the foreseeable future."

MICHAEL BERNSTEIN, POLYCONCEPT

"I'm very positive for the North American market. I anticipate continued strong growth for 2014."

JO-AN LANTZ, GEIGER (ASI/202900)



"I expect results to be widely varied by region with an overall result of flat or slight increase in sales. Achieving flat sales organically will require a considerable amount of effort and focus in 2014."

MARC ROY, BRANDALLIANCE (ASI/145177)

Facebook Feedback

How do you generate creativity in the workplace?

► **Laurie O'Shea Motivators** We run a "buck" program. We have fake money printed out, and when a co-worker does something that another co-worker appreciates, they give the person a buck. At the end of the year we have prizes and raffles that we put our bucks toward and people win prizes. Everyone loves it and it really promotes a happy work place.

► **PiperSpeaksPromo** Establish an Employee Happy Hour - a special event that recognizes employee(s) of the month. Doing this builds camaraderie and results in higher retention with that employee.

► **David Garthwaite** How about just ask? Encourage employee suggestions. Compliment on good ideas. Don't downplay ideas that aren't so great. Money and prizes are great, but most employees thrive on management acknowledgment.

► **Melanie Avigliano-Schultz** We run special contests and incentives for employees to try and make them think out of the box.

Twitter Feed

@dontheideaguy How many people think @Amazon #drone delivery is realistic? How many think Bezos released the info to simply drive @Walmart bonkers?

@jolshan Drones are the new iPhones: Parents are using them to film their kids' soccer games.

@4AllPromos We are the fastest in the industry for #promotional products when you are in need of #rush delivery. #Trade shows, #parties and more.

@BRANDERScom In the spirit of the season, we're celebrating #GivingTuesday by announcing a new #GiveAWay-Campaign.

@AliSpecialties What is your favorite way to communicate in business? Do you prefer e-mails, texting or placing a phone call?

@AshCity #Didyouknow that breathable fabric allows moisture to be transferred to the outside of the garment?

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“The future of package delivery is a seven-day-a-week schedule.”

Patrick Donahoe, USPS (see page 50)

Distributor Sales Jump 4.6% in Q3

Ad specialty industry distributors increased their revenues by 4.6% in the third quarter of 2013, a total year-over-year gain of \$232 million, according to a report released in November by ASI. This is the 15th consecutive quarter of sales growth for distributors of promotional products. Further, the latest *Counselor* Confidence Index (CCI) – a measure of industry health – rose during Q3 to a score of 111, a 1.4 point improvement compared to the second quarter.

“Overall, I’d probably say this is the healthiest recent year,” said Jeff Becker, president of Kotis Design (asi/244898). “The

last year or so has been much better. Some of our clients are definitely spending more, but there are also those clients spending less. The market is stronger, but not amazing.”

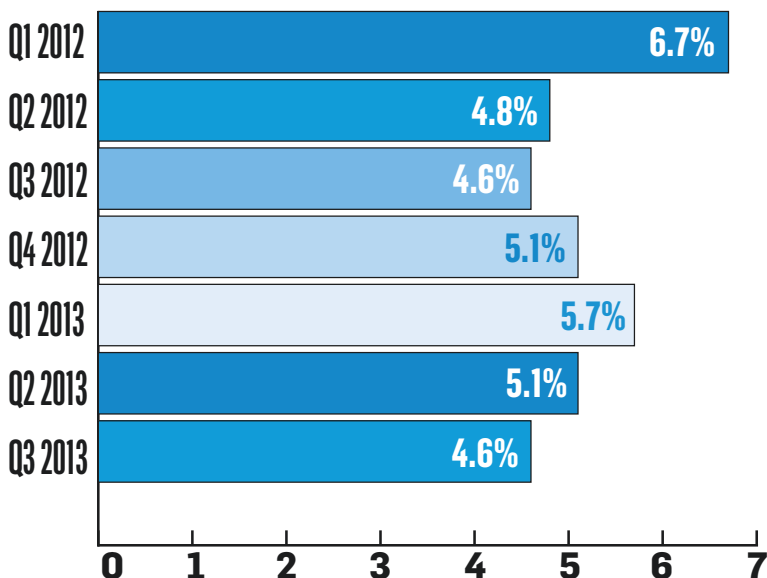
Large firms (annual sales of more than \$5 million) reported an average sales increase of 6.1% in the third quarter, the highest of any group. Distributors with yearly revenues under \$250,000 reported a 2.3% average increase in Q3 revenues, up from 1.1% in the second quarter. Nearly half (49%) of distributors reported their third-quarter sales were better this year than in Q3 of 2012.

“The popular answer, I suppose, is that the economy is improving and that is prompting customers to spend more,” said Ross Silverstein, president of Top 40 distributor iPROMOTEu (asi/232119), which has grown its sales by 20% in 2013. “Maybe that is partially true. However, another factor may be that distributors, instead of just waiting for the economy to improve, are actually working harder to secure new customers and increase their sales.”

Large distributors are the most optimistic about sales, as two-thirds expect their revenues to be higher this year than they were in 2012. Still, optimism among these large firms has faded a bit – in Q2 about 83% anticipated higher 2013 sales. Among all distributors surveyed, 55.2% now believe their 2013 sales will be stronger than their 2012 sales, a modest drop in optimism when compared to earlier this year.

“The spend is in reasonable shape but the margins continue to be challenging,” said Dan Craig, general manager of Top 40 distributor Accolade Promotion Group (asi/102905). “Luckily, we are strong in a couple of sectors that are in good shape and are spending. Our numbers are ahead of last year and we feel confident about the close of 2013.” – DV

Quarterly Sales Increases (2012-2013)



It's About Time

Olympic Uniforms Now Made In USA

After controversy erupted during the 2012 Summer Olympics, the U.S. team uniforms made by Ralph Lauren for next month's 2014 Winter Olympics are now all made in the USA.

Both the iconic fashion company and USA Olympic governing bodies drew criticism from Congress and others last year for the fact that the manufacturing of the uniforms was done outside the U.S.

“We have worked incredibly hard to go across America to find the best partners to help us produce the Olympic uniforms at the highest quality for the best athletes in the world,” David Lauren, an executive vice president of Ralph Lauren, told the Associated Press.

Ralph Lauren used more than 40 vendors from across the U.S. to create the uniforms. The uniforms will be worn in the opening and closing ceremony by the American athletes in Sochi, Russia. There is no Made in America guarantee for the gear worn by the athletes during competition. However, The North Face, the maker of the uniforms for the U.S. Freestyle Skiing team, also switched to USA-manufactured products.

The controversy last year dovetailed with a much-discussed resurgence in American manufacturing despite their higher price tag. “During the recession, corporate buyers saw their spend decrease, so country of origin went out the window,” says Tim Vadney, president of RaceReady (asi/74894), which produces running and sports apparel that's made in the USA. “Now that the economy is recovering, there's a lot more interest in buying a higher quality U.S.-made garment. And we've seen our sales increase as a result.” – CR

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Hiring Forecast to Increase

With the U.S. economy expected to expand at a faster rate in 2014, the pace of job growth could accelerate in the months ahead. Such were the findings of the Philadelphia Federal Reserve's quarterly survey of 42 leading economic analysts.

Overall, the economy will register a growth rate of 1.7% in 2013, a pace that will power up to 2.6% in 2014, the survey found. As for jobs, the pace of hiring will increase enough to reduce the unemployment rate from 7.3% to 7% by the end of the second quarter this year. Monthly job growth will average, the survey says, 187,000 over the next two quarters before ratcheting up

to 202,100 by the final quarter of 2014.

Within the ad specialty industry specifically, nearly



two-thirds of *Counselor's* Power 50 members say their companies will hire additional

staff next year. Further, ASI's recently released Third Quarter Sales Survey shows that distributors have a positive outlook about the market for 2014. The latest *Counselor* Confidence Index (CCI) – a measure of industry health – rose during Q3 to a score of 111, a 1.4 point improvement compared to the second quarter.

At contract apparel decorator Stitch Designers (asi/741145), soaring sales have already helped drive a hiring surge. "Our year-to-date sales are up again – 12%-15% growth is what we project for the year," says Joe Thompson, national accounts manager/marketing director. "This

has caused us to staff up our expected permanent employees. We have added customer service (doubled in the last two years) and production because of this."

Economists surveyed predicted that the economy expanded at an annual rate of 1.8% in the fourth quarter of 2013. While that's down from previously forecasted growth of 2.3%, analysts anticipate that economic activity will pick up in the first-quarter, with the growth rate rising to 2.5%. Despite the predicted increase, the tally comes in below an earlier estimate of 2.7% growth for 2014's first quarter. – CR

Three Largest Ocean Carriers Propose Alliance

In a move that will affect shipping throughout North America, Europe and Asia, the world's three largest ocean carriers have announced plans to form an alliance. Under the terms of the agreement – dubbed the P3 alliance – Maersk Line, CMA CGM Group and Mediterranean Shipping will share ships and port facilities in hubs like Rotterdam, Shanghai and Los Angeles – where many promotional products routinely arrive.

"The three things the P3 gives us are coverage, frequency and stability," said a Maersk spokesperson. "That's the value it provides not just us, but our customers as well."

Supporters of the alliance claim that by sharing resources shippers will be able to keep costs low. Those who question the alliance wonder if the potential for fewer ships and routes will instead drive costs to ship goods higher. "One of my concerns relates to media reports that a combined East-West fleet of 346 vessels will be reduced to 255 vessels once the proposed alliance is consummated," said Federal Maritime Commissioner William Doyle, in a statement.

In the past, shipping alliances have generally been formed by carriers to improve delivery times along limited, specific

routes. The P3 alliance, though, would impact a full 43% of the Europe-Asia shipping traffic, at least 40% of the trans-Atlantic market and 24% of trans-Pacific deliveries, according to data from the Federal Maritime Commission (FMC), which is based in the U.S.

Adding to the confusion, the world's biggest carriers have recently ordered more fuel-efficient, but larger ships, giving analysts pause about how the market will absorb the P3 deal. That's because, in comparison to stronger economic times, global shipping remains depressed, as supply currently outweighs demand



Shipping Price Changes?

for services.

Several regulatory agencies, including the FMC, are reviewing the proposed P3 alliance and could decide to try to block the deal. If the alliance gains regulatory approval, however, it is likely to go into effect by next spring. – DV

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Navy
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Black
White



See us at the ASI Show/Dallas, booth 1104

Bangladesh Hikes Wages for Garment Workers

Garment workers in Bangladesh will receive a minimum wage increase amid worker protests that shut down more than 250 factories in mid-November. Bangladesh factory owners agreed to the 77% increase that was previously recommended by a government board. Minimum-wage garment workers will now make \$68 a month, up from the previous total of \$38. The wage increase took effect December 1. Factory owners initially opposed the wage hike but since relented.

"In the greater interest of our garment sector, we agreed to

it," Mohammad Atiqul Islam, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers' and Exporters' Association, told Reuters. "But many small factories cannot afford the rise."

Working conditions and wages for Bangladesh's garment workers have been under intense international scrutiny since the collapse of the Rana Plaza complex of factory buildings in April that killed more than 1,100 people. Dozens of major companies who source from Bangladesh agreed to safety audits in the wake of the disaster.

Those audits, though, are



turning up some concerning revelations. Walmart reported that 10 of 75 apparel factories that have been audited failed their safety inspections. The retail giant said that the factories that failed their audits have since made improvements. The company plans to audit all of about 200 factories it uses in Bangladesh and will release the results as they are finished. After the April industrial accident, most retailers signed one of two safety accords. Walmart, like many American retailers, signed the agreement that does not include a legally-binding clause. — DV

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U.S. Agents Seize Chinese Toys

Ten different shipments of toy dolls made in China were seized by officials in November at several U.S. ports because the items allegedly contain high levels of phthalates – a group of chemicals considered dangerous to children.

The operation to stop the shipments, which contained a total of 200,000 dolls, began in April through the U.S. Commercial Targeting and Analysis Center (CTAC).

“Using advanced technology to track certain shipments before they reach our shores is helping CPSC better protect America’s consumers,” said Inez Tenenbaum, chair of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), in a

statement. “Expanding our port surveillance program is key to preventing injuries and achieving our long-term vision.”

The shipments – valued at \$500,000 – were seized from the ports of Los Angeles,

Chicago, Dallas, Norfolk, Memphis, Newark, Savannah and Portland, OR. Officials did not name the manufacturer of the dolls. Port authorities flagged the shipments as high risk after

CTAC identified potentially harmful commonalities in the items. Officials believe the items were shipped from China and intended to be sold as holiday toys.

“The Toy Industry Association (TIA) commends CBP and CPSC for their diligence and hard work at the ports to ensure that products violating strict federal safety laws never reach consumers,” said Ed Desmond, TIA’s executive vice president of external affairs. “We work year-round to ensure that toys are designed and produced with safety in mind. We support the efforts of these federal agencies to identify and seize products that could put a child at risk.”

– DV



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USPS Reveals New Fees, Reaches Sunday Delivery Deal

The United States Postal Service (USPS) has announced that it intends to raise prices on its products by an average of 2.4% in 2014. The new price structure, would take effect on January 26. In addition to revealing the price increase, the postal service said it also is adding a package delivery option to allow customers to send Priority Mail Express to most locations in the United States by 10:30 a.m. for an additional \$5.

“The Postal Service remains the best in value in the shipping business,” said Nagisa Manabe, USPS’ chief marketing and sales officer. “We continue to offer excellent domestic flat-rate shipping with a price that doesn’t vary by destination.”

In a separate announcement, the USPS said it had reached

an agreement with Amazon.com to deliver packages for the e-commerce giant on Sundays, beginning immediately in the Los Angeles and New York markets. Amazon and the USPS said they expect to expand the service in 2014 to Dallas, Houston, New Orleans, and Phoenix. The deal is expected to bring a new revenue stream to the cash-strapped USPS, as it tries to appeal even further to online retailers.

“It will certainly help (our finances),” said Patrick Donahoe, postmaster general of the USPS, which expects to lose about \$6 billion in fiscal 2013. “The fastest growing segment is the package business. The future of package delivery is a seven-day-a-week schedule. We’ve got the capacity to do it.” – AC



CPSC Recalls Hooded Jackets

The Consumer Product Safety Commission, in cooperation with retailer Vans, said in November that it is recalling a line of boys’ hooded jackets because the product has drawstrings through the hood. In a ramped-up effort this year, the CPSC has cracked down on companies that are selling any upper outerwear children’s products that contain drawstrings anywhere near the neck area. The CPSC says these types of children’s apparel items cause strangulation hazards, and has warned that

selling or distributing these products violates current federal regulations.

The products in question in the most current recall were sold in Vans retail stores and online at www.vans.com between September 2012 and September 2013. While no injuries were reported in connection with these products, the CPSC says that about 2,400 of them were sold over the year time-period in question. It asks consumers to immediately stop using the jackets and to return them to Vans for a complete refund. The

products were manufactured in India and imported by non-industry company Vans Inc. of Cypress, CA.

In its statement announcing the recall, the CPSC again



warned apparel manufacturers and sellers about the dangers of children’s clothing with drawstrings near the neck or waist areas.

“In July 2011, CPSC issued a federal regulation regarding drawstrings in children’s upper outerwear,” the federal consumer product watchdog said. “CPSC’s actions demonstrate a commitment to help prevent children from strangling or getting entangled on neck and waist drawstrings in upper outerwear, such as jackets and sweatshirts.” – AC



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Los Angeles Launches Reusable Tote Giveaway

Ahead of a single-use plastic bag ban that begins on January 1, the city of Los Angeles is handing out free reusable totes to residents. While some of the tote bags will be produced overseas, many will be manufactured by nonprofit groups in southern California. Officials plan to give away up to one million bags through the initiative. “Angelenos will be carrying these around for decades,” said Los Angeles City Councilman Paul Koretz.

According to officials, it will cost about \$5 to manufacture each of the locally-made bags, which are being constructed from recycled or repurposed



materials. A group called Green Vets L.A. is manufacturing the USA-made totes out of donated material, while Homeboy Industries will screen-print logos. So far about \$25,000 has been donated to help fund the giveaway program.

“We will be creating good green jobs for some of the most worthy charities in the city,” said Koretz. “I know the Bureau of Sanitation and the California Grocers Association will be giving out hundreds of thousands of bags, but we want everyone to benefit.”

This past summer, Los Angeles became the largest city in

the U.S. to ban single-use plastic bags. The legislation will prohibit plastic bags in supermarkets and large drug stores starting in January, while smaller shops must comply with the law beginning on July 1, 2014. Stores will be allowed to sell paper bags for 10 cents apiece, although the long-term goal of the ordinance is to encourage people to shop with reusable totes.

“This has been a cultural shift in our city,” said Los Angeles City Councilman Paul Krekorian. “This will be a better city when we are without plastic bags.” – DV

Obama Administration Delays Small Biz Health Care Site



On the eve of Thanksgiving, the Obama administration announced that small businesses in the 36 states served by www.HealthCare.gov will not be allowed to buy medical insurance coverage for their employees through the government-operated website

until November 2014. Until then, owners in the affected states who desire to buy the Small Business Health Option Program (SHOP) for workers will have to make the purchase directly through an insurer, agent, or broker.

HealthCare.gov has been beset by crippling technical problems since launching in October. Julie Bataille, a spokeswoman for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, said officials felt it was more “important” to get the malfunctioning site’s application and enrollment features for individuals up

and running before turning to enabling the site for small-business owner buying.

The delay in allowing online purchasing has prompted criticism from small-business owners and the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB). “Small businesses continue to be low on the priority list during the Obamacare implementation process,” Kevin Kuhlman, NFIB’s manager of legislative affairs, said in a statement. “It probably matters little to people in Washington that the failure to get the small business exchanges online adds yet

another onerous paperwork requirement for job creators. The continued delays add to uncertainty and contribute to the decision of many owners to take early renewals of their small-group plans.”

The postponement of Web-based purchasing of SHOP for businesses with less than 50 employees applies only to companies in the states where health insurance is sold through HealthCare.gov. Small firms in the other 14 states and the District of Columbia can buy insurance online through state government-run health exchanges. – CR

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"Only Proforma has the \$4 million in proven sales tools and marketing resources to be able to offer such a risk-free program," says Greg Muzzillo, Founder of Proforma. "Most distributor networks say, 'Join us. Pay us fees. And THEN you will get results.' But with the Proforma 'Results First' program we say, 'We will get you sales and bottom line results first. Then join us. Then continue to grow.' You can't lose. No other distributor net-

work can offer such a bold promise because no one else has the breadth and depth of proven resources of a \$450 million leader."

In addition, Proforma provides you with a 150 member support services team and a \$10 million technology platform that has been recognized for two consecutive years on the InformationWeek 500 list of the nation's most innovative users of information technology. You'll also benefit from Proforma's purchasing clout and proven supplier network, opening the door to preferred pricing and special vendor programs.

Proforma has over 100 million dollar owners including over 40 multi-million dollar owners with annual sales ranging from \$2 million to more than \$25 million. All members are given the freedom to

join Proforma without changing their business name and are free to leave the system after 60 days' notice and continue to own all the customer accounts they brought with them.

Need proof it works? Check out these success stories.

RESULTS FIRST FACT

Proforma's Recruiting Department will groom a pipeline of top-notch sales reps in your region to help expand your business, as well as delivering clients who already book thousands in sales.

ABC Printing, / SALES GROW OVER \$1 MILLION RJ Strauss IN FIRST MONTH



When Chicago distributor RJ Strauss of ABC Printing Company was presented with an opportunity to realize his business goals, risk-free, he gave

it a try. After all, there was nothing to lose and much to gain. Very quickly, his decision paid off.

"In just one month Proforma has given us more than \$1 million in new business," Strauss says. At the outset, Proforma's Recruiting Team added a sales rep with more than \$750,000 in annual sales to Strauss's team and

developed a pipeline of nine additional sales reps with more than \$12 million in total sales within a one-hour radius of ABC Printing powered by Proforma. Additionally, Proforma's Business Development Team landed

"Proforma has helped put us on track to reach our initial goal of \$10 million in sales and to double our business to \$15 million over the next few years."

RJ Strauss

a new account worth \$2 million and assigned the account to Strauss. To-date this new account has ordered more than \$250,000.

"I'm confident that with Proforma we can add more than \$3 million in sales by 2014," Strauss says. "Proforma has helped put us on track to reach our initial goal of \$10 million in sales and to double our business to \$15 million over the next few years. Proforma's purchasing power alone easily put more than \$200,000 directly back into our bottom line. Now I have access to tools and resources to grow my business that I never could have developed on my own."

Proforma One Solution, / DOUBLE SALES, AIMS FOR Matt Muratore MULTI-MILLION MARK



Meet Matt Muratore of Proforma One Solution. After years as a sales rep, he was ready for a change. He wanted more control than working for

a distributor allowed. "I wanted the processes, support and structure to allow me to run my business in my clients' best interest," he recalls. "I did not want to recreate the wheel. Proforma provided a brand as well as the best tools in the industry to allow me to reach and exceed my goals."

Today Muratore makes more than twice what he made as a sales rep. He is his own boss. "The freedom to take care of the client in their best interest without initiatives being forced from corporate was a breath of fresh air,"

he says. To reach that point, Proforma provided an important bridge to Muratore. "They were very generous to me both financially and legally in aiding me to separate from my previous employer with a smooth transition of my clients' needs," he explains.

"The most important benefit to my decision of joining Proforma is the enhanced quality of life of owning my own business, while having the best tools, name and support in the industry. It's a fantastic equation."

Matt Muratore

Proforma's resources enabled Muratore to build true wealth as a business owner for himself and his family. "My quality of life has never been as good as it is today in business," he continues. "The Proforma structure allows me to sell less and make more than any previous company where I was employed. My business is taking off and I am tapping into the great advanced features Proforma has to offer to help grow my business. Appointment setting and mergers and acquisitions have shown signs that they will really pay off in the near future."

With a taste of success, Muratore looks ahead: "My goals are to be in Multi-Million Dollar Club in the next few years. I started Proforma with over \$1 million dollars in sales and have a plan to get to \$3 million in the next few years from both organic growth and acquisitions."

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CounselorMag.com

Trends and insights from our website

Commentary



◀ 2014 Apparel Trends On Display

Did you know? Blue (cobalt or cerulean) is the hot color on the fashion runways for spring and summer 2014 outfits. Further, plaid (of just about any color) is the runaway hot pattern of the recent fashion shows. These and many other apparel trends are now on display (in pictures) on our website at www.CounselorMag.com. We explore everything from smart watches and soccer apparel (the World Cup is in June) to graphic colorblocking and clear bags. Check it out now at www.CounselorMag.com.

Green Revival?

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

No doubt, eco-friendly promotional products aren't as popular as they used to be. The latest *Counselor State of the Industry* report shows 90% of distributors sold the same amount of green items or fewer of them in 2012 compared to 2011. This is not a one-year blip – it's a multi-year trend. So it would be reasonable to think, then, that the eco-friendly movement – at least when it comes to promotional products – has moved on, right?

Not entirely. We recently spoke to Fairware Promotional Products (asi/191452), one of the fastest-growing distributors in the industry. Between 2010 and 2012, the Canada-based firm increased its sales by 65%, working with clients like Johnson & Johnson, Aveda and Patagonia. How did Fairware do it? By strictly selling eco-friendly products. "We identified a gap in the market," said Denise Taschereau, CEO. "Eight years ago, there were some distributors focusing on the green products arena, but very few that were also identifying social compliance as an issue."

Translation: Fairware goes after companies that are eco-conscious – demonstrated through their branding, policies or mission statements. So, that's one part of the potential eco-revival.



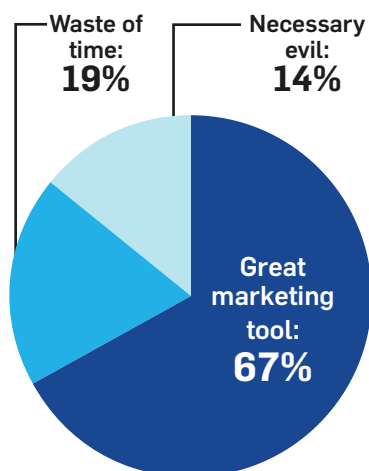
Keep Warm

"Think of youth markets for outerwear. Hoodies, sweatshirts, light jackets. They're all good for the high school and college audiences."

– Dave Vagnoni, in a new online video series, *Counselor's Product Close-Up*, this month focused on outerwear.

By The Numbers

Social media is a ...



Facebook Comments We Loved

What's your favorite holiday pie?

Erich Campbell
Pumpkin, hands down.

Rebecca Devereaux
Apple! with ice cream of course!

Cindy Stefanovsky
Mince meat.

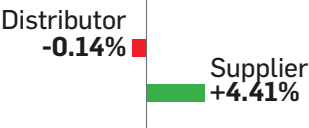
Patricia Cangelosi
Is "mashed potatoes" an acceptable answer?

Stock Report

Suppliers Back On Top

Stock market ups and downs

► **Index Watch**
November 1-December 2



11/1/13-12/2/13								
Company	Stock Exchange	Symbol	52-week high	52-week low	Per-Share Price (12/2/13)	Market Capitalization (in millions)	Per-Share Change	Percent Change
DISTRIBUTORS								
► 4imprint Group	LSE	4IMPRINT	€ 650.00	€ 340.00	€ 650.00	€ 164	22.50 ▲	3.59%
► Ace Marketing & Promotions Inc.	OTC	AMKT	0.60	0.20	0.42	20	(0.01) ▼	-2.33%
► Inner Workings Inc.	NASDAQ	INWK	15.80	5.54	6.48	331	(3.04) ▼	-31.93%
► New England Business Services Inc. <i>(Div. Deluxe Corp.)</i>	NYSE	DLX	50.39	29.17	48.83	2,456	1.96 ▲	4.18%
► Tic Toc <i>(Div. Omnicom Group Inc.)</i>	NYSE	OMC	72.49	48.84	71.98	18,234	3.00 ▲	4.35%
► Staples Promotional Products <i>(Div. Staples Inc.)</i>	NASDAQ	SPLS	17.30	11.04	15.48	10,020	(0.70) ▼	-4.33%
SUPPLIERS								
► 3M Promotional Markets Dept. <i>(Div. 3M Corp.)</i>	NYSE	MMM	134.16	89.6	127.68	85,476	1.78 ▲	1.41%
► A.T. Cross Co.	AMEX	ATX	22.62	9.41	21.70	287	1.58 ▲	7.85%
► American Apparel Inc.	AMEX	APP	2.40	0.9	1.15	129	(0.15) ▼	-11.54%
► BIC Corp.	PAR	BIC	101.50	75.01	89.83	4,254	(1.88) ▼	-2.05%
► Cutter & Buck <i>(Div. New Wave Group)</i>	STO	NEWAB	39.30	21.30	33.70	2,300	(3.10) ▼	-8.42%
► Delta Apparel Inc.	AMEX	DLA	19.23	12.80	17.24	136	(1.07) ▼	-5.84%
► Ennis Inc. <i>(Parent company of Admore and Alstyle Apparel)</i>	NYSE	EBF	19.59	13.92	17.78	465	(0.12) ▼	-0.67%
► Fossil Special Markets Division	NASDAQ	FOSL	134.99	83.71	125.14	6,890	(3.52) ▼	-2.74%
► Hanesbrands	NYSE	HBI	70.8	34.74	70.20	6,997	2.59 ▲	3.83%
► Hilton Apparel Group <i>(Div. Jarden Corp.)</i>	NYSE	JAH	57.19	32.93	56.03	7,190	1.10 ▲	2.00%
► J.M. Smucker Co.	NYSE	SJM	114.72	84.57	104.45	11,020	(6.56) ▼	-5.91%
► Johnson Worldwide Assoc./JWA	NASDAQ	JOUT	28.65	19.28	28.07	266	0.54 ▲	1.96%
► Lancer Label <i>(Div. Mail Well Inc.)</i>	NYSE	CVO	3.54	1.85	3.40	224	0.27 ▲	8.63%
► Lee Printwear <i>(Div. VFCorp. Acquisition Co.)</i>	NYSE	VFC	238.25	142.79	235.74	25,910	20.24 ▲	9.39%
► Pfaelzer Brothers <i>(Div. ConAgra)</i>	NYSE	CAG	37.28	28.78	32.89	13,810	1.09 ▲	3.43%
► Sanford Business-To-Business <i>(Div. Newell Rubbermaid)</i>	NYSE	NWL	30.54	21.49	29.91	8,540	0.27 ▲	0.91%

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Number Crunch

Shirts in High Demand

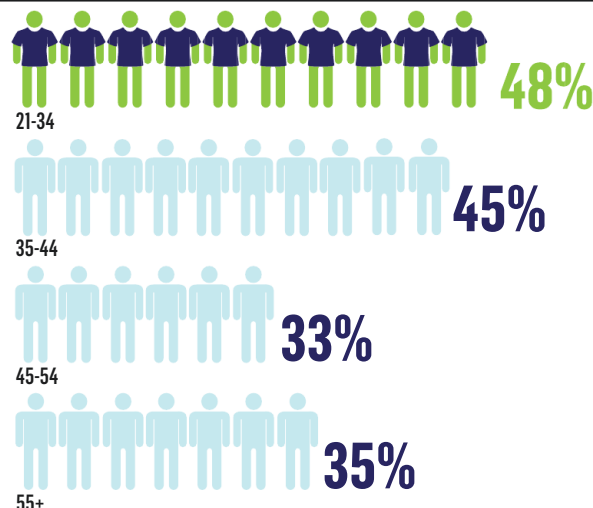
Who should clients target with the most popular product in the industry? Young male consumers.

44%

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46%

say they own a promotional shirt, vs. 44% in the U.S.

Of the 12 U.S. metro cities where people were polled, consumers in Atlanta lead the way.



40%

Independent

46%



41%

The Vote Is In

46% of independent voters report owning a promotional shirt. 40% of Democrats and 41% of Republicans make the same claim.

Men Own More Promo Shirts Than Women



45%



40%



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Product Picks

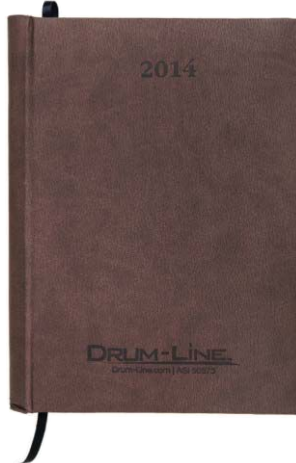
A collection of unique products

By Chuck Zak

1



2



1. CASH & CARRY

Money band clip (BKOE-1) makes a lightweight front pocket wallet and has a die-cast custom logo golf ball marker. Something different for a golf-related campaign. Available from Bandit Elastic Money Clip (asi/37688); www.banditclip.com

2. BOOK OF DAYS

Stay on top of your schedule with this deluxe time manager (TMD7) that has monthly and weekly views. Practical promo for the legal or financial profession. Available from Drum-Line (asi/50873); www.drum-line.com

3. SCARY SPICE

Seriously-hot tabasco peppers make this red pepper sauce an all-natural and gluten-free treat for fans of real heat. Fun for promoting a "hot" new event. Available from Panola Pepper (asi/75787); www.panolapepper.com

4. WATER BEARER

Colored bands and cap highlight this translucent water bottle (S-731) made with Tritan plastic with a built-in straw. Try it for clients in food service industry. Available from High Caliber Line (asi/43442); www.highcaliberline.com

5. INCHY FEELING

The 6" Mood Wood ruler (91306) changes color with hand heat. Made in the USA. Fun promo for schools or afterschool programs. Available from AAKron (asi/30270); www.aakronline.com

6. DRINK IT IN

Pressure-tight, photo realistic imprinted stainless-steel can cap (CL-Bev 01) is a great giveaway for beverage companies or concerts. Available from Orcas Customized Products USA (asi/75083); www.orcas-usa.com

7. HEAD HONCHO

Military-style poly/cotton boonie hat (5826) has screened side vents, branch loops and chin strap. Made to government specs. Great for sportsmen or fishing gear manufacturers. Available from Rothco (asi/83708); www.rothco.com

8. A LITTLE WINE

Personalized bottle of Chilean merlot (VDLA187merlot) is an ideal client gift for the wine-lover or for promoting B&Bs. Available from Personal Wine (asi/77747); www.personalwine.com

9. ADORE A VACCUUM

Tumbler (SV95BM) has dual-wall construction with stainless-steel vacuum insulation and a colored silicone band. Promote to clients in transportation. Available from Starline (asi/89320); www.starline.com

9



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4



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8

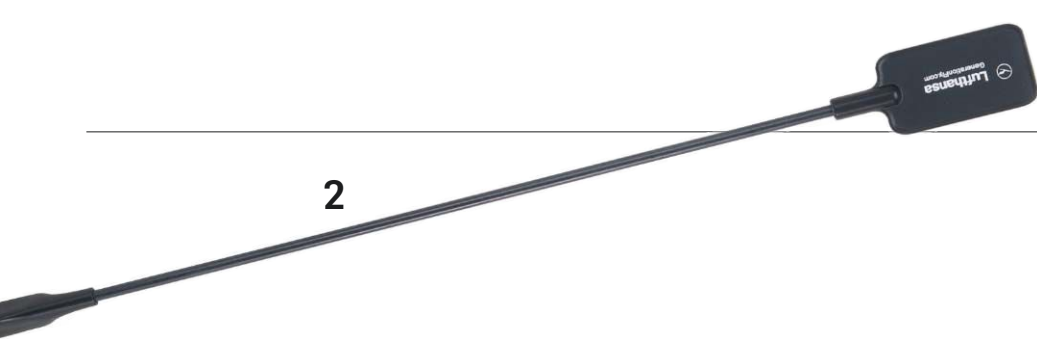


7



5





2



1

1. GET AWAY

Spacious vintage-inspired sport duffel bag (SM-7283) is made with 600D poly-canvas and has an adjustable shoulder strap. Nice giveaway for schools or gyms. Available from Bullet Line (asi/42424); www.bulletline.com

2. KEEP DIGGING

Retrieve whatever gets stuck between the seat and console with the Gap Stick (GS14). Great product for auto detailers or parking garages. Available from AmeriCraft Promotional Products (asi/86364); www.americraftproducts.com

3. ON REFLECTION

This 360-degree reflective cap (5484) illuminates when light shines on it to keep runners safe on dark roads and trails. Use it for clients trying to reach active users in health care or technology. Available from Philadelphia Rapid Transit (asi/77945); www.phillyrapid.com

4. HIGH SPIRITS

Prevent spills with the tapered spout on this streamlined chrome-finish liquor pourer (LP-O) featuring a rubber base. Promote city taverns or luxury hotels. Available from EMT (asi/52263); www.emteasy.com

5. FINE SWINE

Ultra-soft plush spotted pig (1826) is made with top-quality materials. Give as a gift or design something unique for your client's brand. Available from Douglas (asi/50708); www.douglaspromoplush.com

6. RELAX & UNWIND

Eliminate frustration by automatically winding cords and cables with this spring-loaded cord winder (RC02B-LWB). Perfect for commuters or students. Available from Recoil Winders (asi/81067); www.recoilwinders.com

7. LUNCH ARMSTRONG

Two-tone lunch cooler (2150-73) has a heat-sealed water-resistant lining and a grommet detail. Great part of wellness programs to encourage home-prepared meals. Available from Leed's (asi/ 66887); www.leedsworld.com

8. FAST FOOD

This collapsible container (KP8624) is BPA-free, FDA-compliant and folds down for easy travel and storage. Great for school lunches or for hikers. Available from Debco (asi/48885); www.debco-solutions.com

9. SHINING EXAMPLE

Travel flashlight (L115) is great for camper or car in case of emergency. Clients in utilities or transportation are a good choice for this useful item. Available from The Magnet Group (asi/68507); www.themagnetgroup.com



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8



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5

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Case Studies

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Profile

How We Launched a Mobile App

Simplicity was the ultimate design goal.

By Dave Vagnoni

When Motivators Inc. (asi/277780) introduced its mobile app in April 2010, the company saw its benefits almost immediately. For example, by October of that year, the distributor's Web traffic had increased by 87%. "Because we're an online business, it's important to stay at the forefront of technology," says Bill O'Shea, eCommerce manager at Motivators. "Creating a mobile app helped us to do so."

Of course, launching an app takes planning and a willingness to adapt. It took Motivators six months to research, design and test its app before its release. A few more months passed before Motivators offered an update to the app – a major upgrade that allows people to buy promotional products right from their mobile devices. The latest version of the app connects customers to Motivators' mobile site, which features an online cart. "Our app makes the shopping process even easier for our customers," O'Shea says.

Q: Why did Motivators develop a mobile app?

A: We realized that many of our customers browse Motivators.com from their smartphones



Bill O'Shea is the eCommerce manager at Motivators.

and other mobile devices. While we do have a mobile site, people tend to look for an app first. Our app also helps to promote the Motivators brand and the promotional products industry as a whole.

Q: What steps did Motivators take to create its mobile app?

A: When it came time to develop the Motivators app, we took a look at the mobile apps we admire and use frequently. We knew we wanted a clean and simple interface that would be easy to navigate. Motivators' IT department worked with a design team to complete the coding. The team was helpful in making sure the app would perform to our standards and the standards of our customers.

It was tested internally until we were satisfied with the outcome.

Q: What was the hardest part of the development?

A: The greatest challenge for us was making sure we displayed all the necessary information regarding the customization of each product. Selling promotional products via a mobile app is very different than selling on the Web.

Q: What are some of the app's features?

A: First, there's an alphabetical listing of all product categories, as well as a sampling of our best-selling items. The product information includes an ID, description and available price for each item. Plus, there's a push-to-e-mail feature that gives customers the ability to e-mail a product to someone who can then view it on Motivators.com. Finally, the app allows easy access to important company contact information, like phone numbers, fax numbers, e-mail addresses and Twitter feeds.

Q: How has Motivators marketed the app?

A: We've promoted the app via social media, specifically on YouTube. Our Motivators app

commercial, which has been viewed more than 2,000 times, demonstrates exactly how to use the app and where to download it. We've also created a "brand in a box" – a self-promotion kit that was sent to 1,000 customers. The box, which included our catalog, a pocket-sized notebook and sticky notes, was imprinted with an ad for our app. The message on the package was: "Yep, there's an app for that." The app has been featured in our e-mail newsletter and catalogs, too.

Q: How is Motivators measuring the success of the app?

A: We've measured its success by tracking downloads. We also keep an eye on how many orders come from the app.

Q: How can an industry company decide if creating a mobile app is worth it?

A: It's important to know your audience. Talk to your customers. If they do most of their shopping via telephone, an app might not be for you. On the other hand, if they're using their smartphones or tablets to visit your website, creating an app might make sense for your business. Research where your sales are coming from, and go from there.

Market Watch

Government

How to win local, state and federal contracts.

By Betsy Cummings

Matt Davidson knows a good government deal when he sees it. Over the last 15 years, he's built up 13 Army contacts at New Jersey's Fort Lee, winning orders from several departments. But Davidson has also learned that not every bid is worth making. Some, in fact, "are a waste of my time," says Davidson, owner of LOGO Dynamics Inc. (asi/255454), based in Richmond, VA.

The truth is the bureaucracy of government orders can be burdensome and the margins can be tight. Even when a bid seems strong, another firm might go lower. Davidson once offered a government prospect 4,000 woven bags for \$7,200 – just \$700 above his \$6,500 cost. He was stunned to find that a competitor had quoted the same bags for \$5,400, while another set his bid as low as \$4,800. "How can somebody do that?" Davidson asks.

Examples like this might scare some companies away from targeting government agencies, but not as many as you might think. An American Express OPEN survey found that, in 2012, small-business owners invested an average of \$128,638 in both time and resources to win government deals. That was a 49% increase when compared to 2010. Clearly, despite the hurdles to landing a government contract, plenty of firms are willing to



play the bidding game.

► Why It's Worth It

Every year, government deals put "\$90 billion to \$100 billion worth of business" in the hands of small firms, according to John Shoraka, an administrator with the Small Business Administration. And while

government entities' yearly spend might be flat, decreasing activity hasn't had any negative impact on small firm contracting success rates, says Dona Storey, the American Express OPEN advisor on procurement. Current contracting success rates stand at 55%, up from 41% three years ago, according to

OPEN's survey. "Business contractors appear to be bidding smarter," Storey says.

Among the successful bidders is Shelby Goldblatt, president of Indianapolis-based Goldleaf Promotional Products (asi/209675). Why does he target government agencies? "The government sector is good

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS GASH

business, it's solid business, and you know you're going to get paid on it," he says. Indeed, the government tends to pay within 60 days, unlike private contracts where payment windows can span upwards of three months.

► The Way In

While government agencies can be a lucrative source of steady business, getting in can be tricky. OPEN's statistics show an average 24-month waiting period and as many as 4.7 rejections before a company's first successful bid. But experts insist persistence pays off, and there are some strategies that work better than others.

One of the easiest routes to winning these types of contracts might be to piggyback your way in, says Steven Ostrowski, director of corporate communications for CompTIA, a technology trade association, and an expert on doing business with the government. Subcontracting with a prime government vendor or forming a consortium among current vendors is often an effective approach when making a first pass at federal agencies, Ostrowski says.

Quoting rock-bottom pricing, as much as distributors loathe the paper-thin margins, is also a key to getting government business for the first time, says Brandon Kennedy, owner of Proforma Progressive Marketing (asi/300094). "It's always going to come down to the lowest price," says Kennedy, who admits many times his company has bid on a government job with only a 25% margin and still been almost twice as high as the next bidder.

Goldblatt understands government agencies are looking for low prices, but he says they

also want good quality. Not long ago, Goldblatt received a call from the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, a state program involved in the creation, enforcement and protection of environmental laws. The department wanted 500 hats with an embroidered logo – and it wanted them cheap as well.

For Goldblatt, whose government business accounts for about 2% of his company's overall sales, it was a welcome bidding opportunity, and he landed the deal. Agreeing to lower margins may be the cost of doing government business, Goldblatt says, but it's a great way to supplement private sector revenue.

Experts say looking for the right types of bids can also help you win contracts. For Barb Burcham, owner and president of Norman, OK-based Ad Specialties & More (asi/113357), sometimes bidding on smaller orders is a better option. That's because state and local government agencies are often not required to seek multiple bids on deals less than a certain dollar amount, like \$2,500 and under. That makes these contracts less competitive – ideal for first-time bidders.

All strategies aside, though, small businesses do have some advantages in the government bidding process. First, the federal government mandates that 23% of all procurement goes to U.S. small businesses. Secondly, there's the so-called 5/5/3/3 requirement, says Shoraka, where the government works to purchase 5% of goods and services from female-owned businesses, 5% from small, socially and economically-disadvantaged companies, 3% from service-disabled veterans, and 3% from

How To Selling to the Government

Rote bidding and low margins aside, government contracts offer a potentially fruitful stream of revenue for distributors. But, no doubt, landing business with local, state or federal agencies takes persistence and a way in. Here are some free or low-cost resources you can use to become more successful.

- **SBA Classes:** The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has launched an online government contracting classroom. Courses like Government Contracting 101, HUBZone Primer and Business Opportunities Guide are typically 30-minute videos (or transcripts, depending on preference) offering free advice on how to win government deals. Go to www.sba.gov/gcclassroom for information.

- **OPEN Forum:** Similar to the SBA, American Express also provides an OPEN online forum for small-business owners. The site covers a multitude of topics for conducting business and features a section on government contracting. To see the offerings, go to www.openforum.com/governmentcontracting.

- **Challenge Her:** A joint venture between the SBA, OPEN and Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP), Challenge Her is an initiative to help female entrepreneurs compete for government contracts. The site offers online classes as well as a mentoring program to help women secure work from government agencies. Check out www.wipp.org/?challengeher for details.

- **NASBC:** The National Association of Small Business Contractors offers online information about landing government deals as well. However, it provides something other sites don't: Webinars that let you ask federal contracting experts any question you want. The catch? There's a small cost. Find more information at www.nasbc.org.

HUB (historically underutilized business) zones. Distributors who can prove that they fall into one of these categories have an instant edge over competitors who don't.

► The Value of Research

Even with one or more of those designations working in your favor, however, it's necessary to do your homework and bid smarter, experts say, since competition for government business can be fierce. "You really need to do your due diligence on how your city and state is buying," says Storey. Once you know that, "take a look at the stability of those budgets."

If they're contracting, maybe it's time to move on and target another government

sector. Likewise, she adds, look at past procurements within a particular government office, including the exact products they've purchased previously. "Research what they're buying," Storey says. "If, based upon what you're selling, you don't have a feeling that you have a 75% chance of winning the bid, move on to the next procurement."

Here's Storey's point: Selling to the government, as in the private sector, is often a numbers game. And while a government sales cycle can be double or triple that of one in the corporate world, it doesn't mean you have to wait around for months to close. If a deal looks like a reach for your company, it probably is. Better to hedge your bets and move on to the next one.

Promo Close-Up Extreme Turnaround

A distributor earns high marks from a big-time client.

By Jennifer Vishnevsky

Sports broadcast network ESPN is always looking for innovative ways to market the Winter and Summer X Games, which feature extreme sports like surfing, BMX and snowboarding. ESPN has carried the Games since 1995 and counts on highly customized promotional products to build fan and athlete enthusiasm.

“ESPN never wants to do something off-the-shelf,” says Lauren Laschewer, branding specialist at Axis Promotions (asi/128263), which counts the sports network among its clients. “They always want their items to have amazing full-color graphics that convey the action-packed spirit of the X Games.”

Most recently, ESPN approached Axis with a unique idea for the Summer Games – one that led to an especially challenging project. The network sent Axis a photo of a snowboard made into a clock and wanted 250 of them put together on skateboards in a little more than a month. “They had no artwork or board dimensions, but they wanted full-color art on it,” says Laschewer. “At first we thought we would have to use a skateboard deck company, but skate decks are produced overseas and we had no time. We were also told that even if they aired these in, they couldn’t source or assemble the clock hands.”

After a lot of brainstorming and research, Axis reached

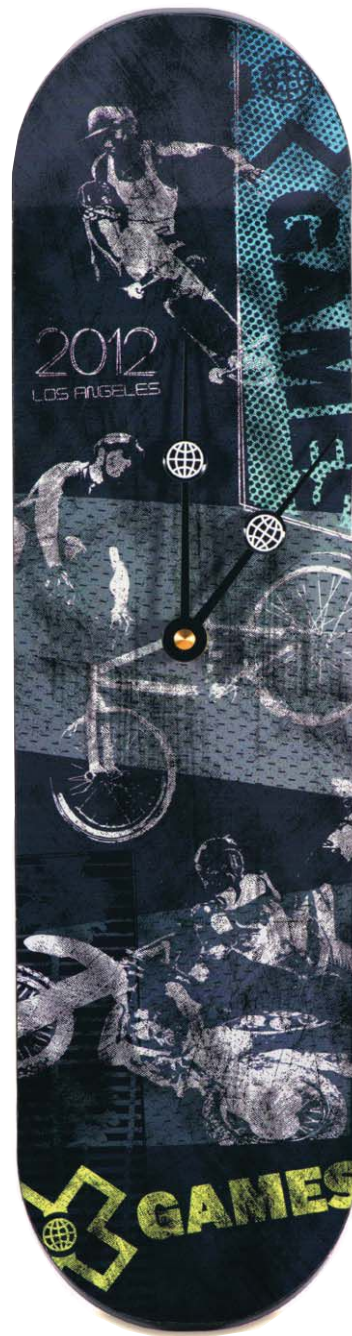
out to Commerce, CA-based Premium Shapes, a promotional plastics company, which was able to construct the skateboards and the clock hands for ESPN’s marketing campaign. It was a close call, but the finished product was a crowd-pleaser.

“The campaign was effective because it strengthened sports

“They always want their items to have amazing full-color graphics that convey the action-packed spirit of the X Games.”

Lauren Laschewer, Axis

fans’ personal connection with the X Games’ brand by offering a collector’s item to be hung in their homes and workplaces,” says Janet Dickerson, co-founder and principal of brand management firm Pixel Prose Media. “By taking the collector’s item approach, ESPN and Axis Promotions were able to meaningfully connect with sports fans, which likely expanded the event’s reach to an



Skateboard clocks worked for an ESPN marketing campaign.

even greater audience.”

While the order was a big success in the end, there were certainly tense moments and some risk. Premium Shapes had to lay out elements of the art on the skateboards, source the clock parts and assemble them – all in a short time. “They even suggested that we put the ESPN globe on each clock hand,” Laschewer says. “This was time-consuming, but they knew it would be the perfect touch.”

Dickerson believes Axis pulled off the order because it understood ESPN’s audience and the network’s willingness to try new promotional ideas. “In shifting focus from a skate deck to a plastic promotional products manufacturer, Axis Promotions was able to successfully troubleshoot each project issue without compromising quality and timely delivery to the client,” Dickerson says.

Take note: Every marketing team should have an effective contingency plan in place should the original strategy suddenly fall through. It took work, but in this case Axis turned a simple photo into a \$10,000 deal. “Axis Promotions’ decision to order from Premium Shapes proved to be an acute move, and showcased its bold and swift decision-making skills,” says Dickerson. “This will undoubtedly contribute to increased client confidence, and helps project a strong positive image of the company to potential customers and competitors.”

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Apparel

Trends • Keep an Eye On • Manufacturing

Trends Wool Works

A timeless fabric proves its flexibility and continues to shine today.

By Chuck Zak

You'd have to go a long way back to find a time when wool wasn't in fashion. The benefits that were obvious then are still there today, though: Wool regulates temperature in both warm and cold weather, it naturally wicks away moisture, it's easy to clean and it resists odor buildup.

Aside from its practicality, wool enjoys a perception of superior quality that adds an intangible advantage to any garment. "Due to its origin as a fiber from a living animal," says Bayo Simmonds, president of Assertive Creativity LLC (asi/37166), "wool is often regarded as higher in value."

For anyone looking to make a professional impression, that's a strong appeal. "There is a special connection to the wearer when they put on a fine wool blend suit or suit separate," says Taraynn Lloyd, marketing director for Edwards Garment (asi/51752). "You feel great wearing the garment and the quality is immediately noticed." Lloyd notes how the unique comfort and timeless style of wool make those handsome

garments perfect for a long night on the town, as well as a full day at the office.

Wool is hard to match, not just for desirability, but also for

versatility. Wool socks possess unbeatable moisture-wicking and odor-resistant qualities, while a classic Merino wool V-neck sweater is the perfect

combination of carefree ease and humble luxury. "The fabric has a soft hand and provides a supple drape to ensure that any style looks great," says Lloyd.

Even irrepressibly hip headwear, from retro-chic Gatsby caps to always-cool baseball caps, have an undeniable authenticity when made with wool.

The ever-popular woolen varsity jacket is a mainstay for schools, but Simmonds also recommends them for any "team-driven markets" such as "companies who view their corporation as one big team," or as a high-end gift item.

And as temperatures plunge, he suggests adding a quilted fill and a wool hood to make the jacket a deep-winter favorite for any client. To give Edwards' clients a crucial upscale appeal, Lloyd says her company uses wool blend suits and separates to outfit staff at hotels and retail outlets or for restaurant and casino personnel. All of these choices allow clients to share what Lloyd rightfully calls wool's "endless possibilities with style, color and comfort."

Wool-blend suits and separates from Edwards Garment are classically fashionable but have the wrinkle-free quality of today.



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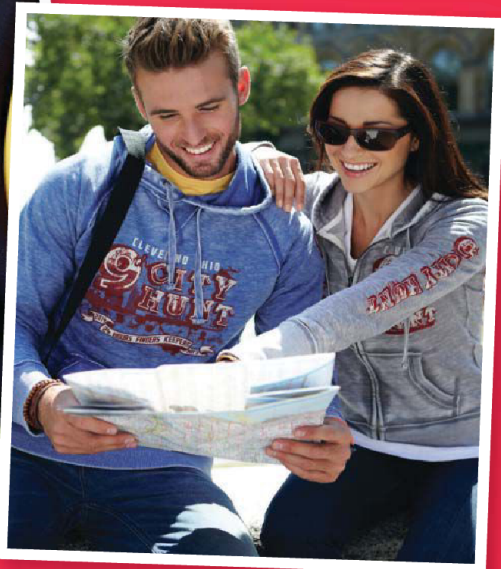
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Keep an Eye On Knit Beanies

A grunge trend hits the fashion runways – and the promotional market.

By Alissa Tallman

The recent revival of the 1990s grunge trend has brought the knit beanie to the forefront, as evidenced in Autumn/Winter 2013 Fashion Week ensembles by Chanel, Armani and Ralph Lauren. This simple-yet-hip accessory not only oozes chic, it's a promotional industry favorite for its versatility across age and gender lines, as well as its notable capacity for brand advertising.

"Beanies are budget-friendly promotional items that are unisex in nature

and come in several colors, lengths and fabrics," says Cynthia Sims, PR and promotions manager for Virginia T's Inc. (asi/93917). "Popular at retail and wholesale levels, beanies are here to stay."

She notes that one of the major advantages to beanies is their varied styles and flexibility. "Wear it your way' is today's message," she says. "For example, you can choose a long beanie and cuff it, or pull it down close to your head for less of a fashion statement and

more of a 'keep me warm' purpose." Plus, they come in a variety of stripes and other patterns as well as solids.

Sims suggests outdoor events as a promotional opportunity for beanies; she also suggests considering them as baby shower gifts. "Hosting a bonfire, an ice skating event or a 'jingle bell run' will call for a beanie," she says. "Even brand new babies are often presented with a little knit beanie in the hospital to keep their body heat contained."

The key, apparel suppliers say, of promoting the beanie is to target it to clients who are trying to reach a progressive audience. While it's versatile and can appeal to many markets and buyers, it is a fashion-forward product right now. Target clients that are giving products out at youth events and even college campuses. Those are where promotional recipients will tend to use the product the most – and ultimately will garner the most advertising impressions.



▲ Striped men's beanie (100766) from Broberry Mfg. Inc. (asi/42057)



◀ Women's fashion knit hat (5063) from Mega Cap Inc. (asi/70434)



◀ Men's camouflage acrylic beanie (3820) from Virginia T's Inc. (asi/93917)



▼ Slouch acrylic/polyester beanie (DT618) from SanMar (asi/84863)

Manufacturing

Zip Up Your Zipper Knowledge

Sellers of apparel need to be intimately familiar with every piece of a garment.

By Tonia Kimbrough

Small but mighty details determine whether a garment functions properly or has an embarrassing malfunction. Knowing what type of closures are on the garment you're presenting matters, particularly when it comes to zippers – an unzipped pair of pants certainly doesn't appear professional, but more importantly you want to be the apparel provider that has answers about every single piece of a garment's construction.

Zippers come in a variety of types. For most apparel, like pants, skirts and shorts, the common option is a closed-end zipper, which, as the name suggests, has a single slider that zips up in only one direction. These are non-separating.

For jackets and coats, you'll encounter two other choices. Open-end zippers have two halves that completely disengage from each other, perfect for a jacket. Two-way open-end zippers also present separated ends, but have slider movement that can close from the top or bottom of the garment. This allows for a zipper to be opened near the garment's bottom but closed near the top. Long, heavy winter coats and raincoats frequently use this version.

The structure of the zipper is comprised of the slider, elements and tape. The slider is the moveable tab that joins or separates the elements. Think

of elements as "teeth"; these are the parts along each side of the zipper that engage when the slider opens or closes. The tape is the fabric sides to which the zipper is embedded.

Polyester is commonly used because of its strength and durability. The material that makes up the slider and elements really affects how a zipper looks and performs. There are metal, plastic and nylon versions. Within the metal choices you find variants from aluminum to nickel to brass.

A well-known and reputable brand of zipper is YKK. Dunbrooke (asi/50930), for example, only puts YKK's polished brass zippers in its line of workwear jackets. Not only are these zippers proven to last, they also open and close smoothly. When purchasing a garment with a zipper, examine its parts and try it out. Be sure there is no loss of elements and that the track is straight.

Are there any threads or frays of fabric that can get caught in the zipper? Once a garment is zipped does it lie flat or hang straight? Examining and discussing these details with your client positions you as an expert and gives them a reason for investing more in long-term quality.

The Cumberland workwear jacket from Dunbrooke features a YKK brass zipper for a classic look and reliable performance.



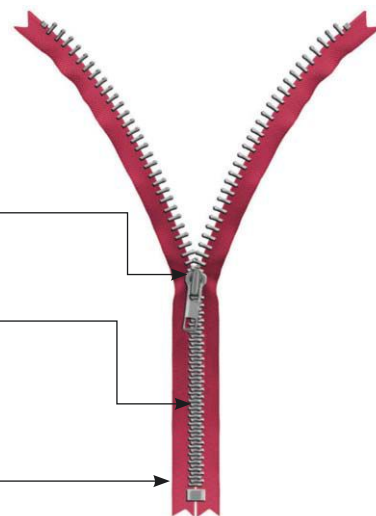
Zip to it

Do you know the three main parts of a zipper? Here's the breakdown:

Slider: The moveable tab or pull that joins the parts together.

Elements: Known as the "teeth" of the zipper, they join together or come apart when the zipper is opened and closed.

Tape: The fabric sides to which the zipper is attached.







one

off

Apparel suppliers are increasingly focused on offering decoration services. Are the days of blanks suppliers dead?

By Betsy Cummings

What do distributors want from apparel suppliers today? Everything, it seems. Many suppliers have heard from distributors that want a more one-stop-shop buying experience for apparel. The result? A concerted effort to move away from supplying just blank apparel, and moving toward also offering decoration services, as well. The key, these suppliers say, is being able to provide an easy ordering and delivery system for distributors. And, ultimately, that is what's helping to enhance the customer service experience today.

"Absolutely it builds loyalty," says Taraynn Lloyd, director of Edwards Garment Company (asi/51752), based in Kalamazoo, MI.

When the company began offering decoration services eight years ago, it had only a six-head and two-head embroidery machine. Now they have enough equipment to run 10,000 pieces a week, working three shifts a day.

"More and more customers are asking for this one-stop shop," Lloyd says.

And that demand from distributors – and their end-user clients – is beginning to create a fundamental shift in the apparel buying process in the promotional products market. The move of suppliers toward providing decoration would start to shift the overall processes, timelines and expectations of distributors and their corporate clients, experts say.

"What we're really seeing is decorating capability now on both sides," says David Blaise, an industry consultant and president of Blaise Drake & Company, a consulting firm in Wyomissing, PA. By that, Blaise means that suppliers and distributors who now decorate have a hand in the decorating busi-

ness in addition to decorators. For some, that may seem counterintuitive to the nature of this industry's business model.

For others, though, it's simply the future of where the market is going.

A Fundamental Shift?

Those suppliers who have made the leap to decorating insist that they're not throwing out the traditional client-distributor-blank supplier-decorator business model – rather, they're offering distributors what they say they and their clients are looking for.

Companies like Trimark Sportswear Group Inc. (asi/92122), which added decoration capabilities 18 months ago, say that by including decorating among their offerings, they're enhancing the industry, not simply altering it.

"Our offering is really moving the mind-shift to branded apparel," says Bill Horst, Trimark's marketing manager. "We're constantly looking at ways we can offer more value to our distributors," says Horst, who adds that Trimark offers all its decorating services at the same price (\$2.40 per piece) regardless of the decorating method, with prices of apparel changing based on the quantity ordered. "Whether it's a \$100 jacket or a \$10 polo, \$2.40 is the charge regardless."

Horst says this simplifies the ordering process, a move that has encouraged corporate clients to become more specific and aggressive about their decorating specs. "We've made offers so simple that people are looking at other decorating options to be more brand-accurate." In that sense, it's a move that's advancing the industry as much as the capabilities of suppliers offering decorating. Lasers and true-edge transfers have increased 400%, while embroidery, still the bulk of Trimark's decorating service, is actually down, with only half of the garments being embroidered these days as opposed to between 60% and 70% in recent years, Horst says.

One-Stop Shopping

More than anything else, simplicity (keeping orders and decorating in one location) is what's driving the move to decorate, say suppliers who are offering those services. That's largely a response to a marketplace of tight budgets and shortened turnaround times. "When budgets are tight and orders get more competitive, every dollar counts," says Ira Neaman, owner of Avenel, NJ-based Vantage

Apparel (asi/93390). "That's why we've made it a priority to re-focus on communicating the hard dollar savings and benefits of a single-vendor purchasing environment," he says. The company tries to make its decorating services as competitive as possible by offering same-day decorating with a one-garment minimum.

"It's not a new idea, but one that seems impressively relevant given the current economic climate and industry shift to smaller orders with faster turnaround."

The real expense in apparel items, Neaman and others say, is not the cost of the garment, but the cost to move it – from supplier to decorator to distributor to corporate customer. That's a lot of shipping invoices, not to mention opportunities for packages to get lost or items to get damaged, they say.

But the trend for suppliers to do so is increasing because of added costs associated with buying blanks and shipping them to an independent decorator. "People are

"More and more customers are asking for this one-stop shop."

Taraynn Lloyd, Edwards Garment

realizing how their costs are just skyrocketing for really no good benefit," Neaman says. With multiple purchase orders, the costs of potential apparel damage and the impact on customer service those problems can have, people are seeing the benefit of blanks and decorating coming from the same place.

The ease of ordering from a one-stop shop apparel provider is ultimately what today's increasingly diverse suppliers are pushing to their customers. The opportunity for problems exists when goods travel from the supplier to the decorator. "I don't care how smooth a distributor thinks their current program is," says Tom Flippo, senior vice president of Dunbrooke Apparel, Reebok Corp Apparel and Eagle Dry Goods (asi/50930), based in Independence, MO.

Too many mishaps can occur along the way, from simply getting the blanks themselves to machinery issues and everything in between. "I could make up a ton of rea-

sons why an order couldn't be completed," Flippo says.

Throw a glitch – any glitch – into the process of decorating apparel and an order can get bungled for days, if not longer, some insist. One or two missing shirts could put decorating on hold until the issue is resolved, often a messy situation when supplier and decorator both point fingers. It begins to escalate, and suddenly both sides are losing time. Suppliers who offer one-stop shopping eliminate that process entirely, Flippo says, by simply replacing lost items without ever having to tell the distributor there was an issue.

Purchasing Shifts

Whether these suppliers are driving the changing habits of distributors or the distributors are themselves are driving the need for one-stop shopping, the shift is occurring on the purchasing side as well. Plenty of distributors are starting to see things the same way, particularly with certain orders. "When you buy blank goods and send them to a decorator and a decorator loses or damages a piece, now you've got to get one piece," says Susan Gillard, a sales rep with Image Group Inc. (asi/230059), based in Vancouver. Suppliers have inventory at their fingertips and can replace a single piece instantly. "If you're buying goods that you've got to ship to a decorator and then the client, you're looking at double freight, and everybody's watching their money these days," Gillard adds.

Still, the idea of supplier-as-decorator disrupting the market isn't an idea that's entirely arrived yet, some say, particularly the decorators in the industry. "Most of our distributor customers are still looking for a multi-source vendor relationship," says Rob Dubow, CEO of Dubow Textile Inc. (asi/700107), based in St. Cloud, MN. In fact, Dubow says his clients are coming to Dubow Textile for image consistency. Corporate customers seeking a unified look may not get what they're looking for if they use the decorating services of the various suppliers fulfilling a particular order. Having the same decorator apply every logo or image, regardless of technique, means the colors, artistry, style and application are the same from order to order, something distributors can't promise to their clients if they place one apparel order with a supplier and fulfill another order with another supplier, critics say.

Still, as both distributors and corporate

clients demand more streamlined processes, suppliers are starting to deliver, with same-day turnaround on decorating and multiple shifts to make that happen. But not all suppliers are set up to make the transition. For those who have pursued a sales model that's heavily reliant upon decorators, suddenly switching to decorating and taking business from some of their top decorator clients could seriously damage their current business relationships. SanMar (asi/84863) is one large-scale supplier that has no plans to start offering decorating services. "SanMar is a supplier of blank apparel, bags and caps, and we believe that's where our expertise lies," says company marketing executive Lee Strom in an e-mail statement. "We'll leave it to our customers to be the experts in decorating and logoing our products."

Strom went on to say, "We don't see our competitiveness being compromised by not offering decorating services." Others say the SanMars of the world are simply too entrenched in the blanks side of the business to make the transition to decorating.

Yet even for those who can provide blanks as well as decorate them, there remains a fine line between satisfying a decorating niche in the marketplace while not stepping on too many decorators' toes. "It's a smart business model as long as the business model doesn't take away from your core business," says Flippo.

Offering decorating services isn't necessarily a cash cow, those who do it point out. "Our embroidery is a loss leader," says Dunbrooke's Flippo. "It's kind of like a convenience store advertising milk as being \$2 when it's \$4 at a grocery store. They're just trying to get you to come in there and spend money on stuff they really make money on."

For example, Dunbrooke clients are offered free embroidery on certain orders, particularly if they're a regular or high-volume client. "We're not making money on the embroidery," Flippo says. "Our business model isn't to make money on the embroidery – it's to bring in apparel orders as a result of having a one-stop shop."

The Business of Decorating

Many suppliers offering decorating services say that's not where they make their money – an interesting admission considering the substantial investment required to offer decorating. Decorating's real purpose, they insist, is to bring in and retain business. For

customers who order both apparel and decorating services with a supplier, "we see an increase in garment sales overall with those customers," says Chris Clark, vice president of sales, eastern U.S. for Ash City Worldwide (asi/37127), based in Richmond Hill, Ontario.

That retention and business expansion rate is so stark that the percentage of growth from clients requesting decorating services on the blanks they buy is growing by double digits every year, says Clark, making the company's \$1 million investment in embroidery machines (300 in their Kansas City location and 150 in Canada) well worth the money.

Ordering and decorating in one location also saves hours, says Judy Guerrero, an account executive with Northbrook, IL-based distributor Corporate Imaging Concepts Inc. (asi/168962). But Guerrero, like other distributors, isn't willing to let go of the supplier/decorator model just yet. "I order from other decorators too," says Guerrero, who places a portion of her apparel decorating orders with Edwards. She estimates that

"Our embroidery is a loss leader."

Tom Flippo, Dunbrooke

she sends about one-third of her apparel to an outside embroidery company.

Those orders, Guerrero says, run like clockwork. In fact, for distributors accustomed to the traditional model of ordering blanks that are then sent to a decorator, stepping away from what's worked in the past can be a difficult tradition to break. Part of the problem may be in the size of the firms they're dealing with. Small decorators may be limited in the size of decorating orders they can handle. "I've got a 700-piece jacket order and my supplier is doing all the decorating," Gillard says. "I would never dream of buying that and sending it to my decorator. That's too big a job for my little decorator."

However, a smaller decorator may have fewer customers, which means they can give each client more attention. Despite the convenience of one-stop shopping with large apparel suppliers, "you're in a big queue with a big company," Gillard says, "whereas if we just order blanks they go out the door right away." Those orders are sent to a few select decorators, all of whom Image Group

gives a lot of business to. These decorators give good turnaround times because of the amount of business they give, and in a world where everybody wants immediate results, that's an important element to the order-fulfillment process.

Still, distributors like Gillard are starting to recognize that a natural split is being created in the industry between traditional decorators and suppliers who now also decorate. As Image Group relies more and more on suppliers to decorate blank goods, they're remaining loyal to existing decorators but with specific size orders. "I like having both options," Gillard says. But she also recognizes the potential benefits of supplier-decorated apparel. "They're responsible for the goods," she says. "If a supplier makes a mistake additional inventory is right there."

And that saves on additional shipping of replaced pieces. It probably doesn't make decorators any happier, but as Gillard notes, "there's always going to be somebody who's unhappy." She adds that if smaller decorators get knocked out of the marketplace that may make smaller distributors unhappy. Ultimately, she adds, it's nice to have suppliers and decorators providing the same service – as long as there are enough orders to sustain that balance in the marketplace.

That's really where concerns are appearing, say experts, although, so far, nobody seems to be nosing anyone out of a job. "If an end-user can go directly to a supplier and get apparel decorated and a distributor is cut out, that's different," says Blaise.

So far, nobody's saying that there's been any shift in the natural order of things – corporate clients order from a distributor who orders apparel from a supplier, whether it's blank or decorated. But one thing to consider, Blaise adds, is that now suppliers are essentially becoming manufacturers rather than simply distributors of apparel products.

Those are all necessary steps to remain competitive in the industry, says Vantage's Neaman. "Understanding how to leverage a complete source for logo apparel will enhance a salesperson's profits and overall book of business," he says, which is why it only makes sense for apparel suppliers to continue to offer decorating services. "The real challenge is to be equally successful and competitive at both."

– E-mail: betsycummings23@gmail.com



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asi/40788

Decor ART NAVIGATION

How does a decorator turn simple artwork into stylish apparel? Follow along as an embroiderer explains the process and gives decoration tips to help you save time and money. *By Dave Vagnoni*

Drew Coufal never planned

on being an embroiderer – after all, his college degree is in marketing and management. But, a summer job became the start of a full-time career and in 1997 Coufal took over ownership of the popular Ohio-based shop Sew &

Sew Embroidery. “We get 25 to 35 new orders every day,” he says. “We do a good amount of corporate, but we also do resort wear, some education and we work with customers that hold licenses with the NFL and NHL.”

While Sew & Sew offers clients the latest in

decorating trends, like applique, rhinestones and transfers, the shop – as its name suggests – is known for its embroidery. Here, in five basic steps, Coufal embroiders a T-shirt, offering distributors an insider’s take on what will lead to the best finished product.

STEP 1: ARTWORK

“Before any stitch work can be done, a decorator needs art – like a logo – from a distributor. It’s best to send decorators camera-ready art, like vector files created in Adobe or Corel. That’s because vector files can be infinitely enlarged without losing pixels, meaning the art remains crisp at any scale. While jpeg files sometimes work for embroidery, they don’t always. Here’s a tip: An easy way to tell if an art file is high-quality is to open it in a Windows browser and zoom in as far as you can. If the image appears crisp and not blurry, the file will likely be acceptable for digitizing. In the hypothetical example to the right, the image is not good enough quality for embroidery.”



STEP 2: TROUBLESHOOTING

“Before any digitizing can be done, the art has to be reviewed. Because the first logo submitted wasn’t able to be reproduced, the project required better quality art. With the new art in hand, it’s now time to review the details of the order, verifying both logo size and the imprint location. With embroidery, most charges are based on the stitch count in a logo as well as the total pieces being run, so finding the right size is important to the project and budget.”



STEP 3: DIGITIZING

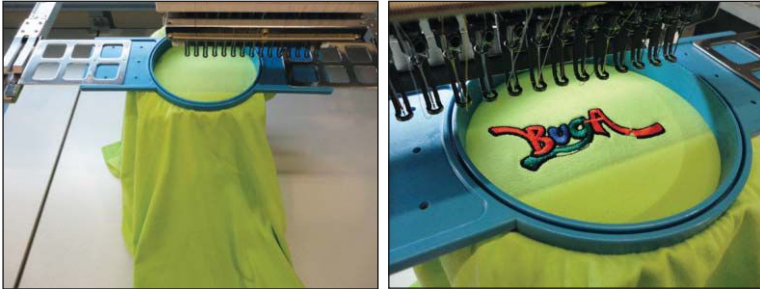
“The digitized embroidery file is the single most important factor in determining how well a logo will stitch. But what exactly is digitizing? It’s a fancy term for the converting of artwork into a stitch file that can be read by an embroidery machine. When we digitize, we typically set up a base version that can be used on various items to ensure high quality. We set up this particular design in three sections to hold the registration better as the high stitch count logo sews out. It usually takes one to two business days to produce the first digital proof along with the stitch-out. Another tip: If the design scale makes the embroidery stitch count too high and expensive for the project, you can simplify most art. With just the outline of the main text and no filling, for example, we reduced the stitch count on our sample logo by 50%.”



STEP 4: PRODUCTION

"At this point, a distributor has some proofing options to use to gain client approval. A distributor can request a digital proof of the embroidery, an actual stitch-out, or a pre-production sample.

"After approval and the arrival of merchandise, it takes, on average, five to seven business days to produce an order. In our example, several different colors of T-shirts were produced on a Barudan multi-head machine. A production tip to keep in mind: Let your decorator know on the purchase order (PO) if there are items on back-order or items that may be shipping from multiple warehouses that will arrive on different days. Also note on the PO if orders can be shipped as partials, or if they should be held until the order is complete. Bottom line: Give the decorator something to do – with deadlines – to save time."



STEP 5: FINISHING

"The last step is finishing. This is the time when the merchandise will be trimmed for the backing used, and any loose threads will be removed. Items will be folded, bagged or packaged according to the PO directions. This is also the final quality-control check-point. It's good to allow one to two business days to finish an order, especially if there are split shipments."



THE FINAL PRODUCT





A decorative graphic on the left side of the page features several dark blue arrows. One arrow points diagonally down and to the right. Another arrow points horizontally to the right. A third arrow points diagonally up and to the right. A fourth arrow points diagonally down and to the right. These arrows are layered and overlap, creating a sense of movement and direction.

DOUBLE OR NOTHING

Want 2014 to be your breakout year for wearables sales? Keep reading for five ways to help you potentially double your apparel revenues in the next 12 months.

By Shane Dale

Want a New Year's resolution for your business, one that is sure to grow revenues and expand your local footprint? Resolve to double your apparel sales in 2014.

There are many customers, markets, and programs that are looking for just the right help with their apparel programs. Now is the time to focus on these customers, and ramp up your apparel sales. Here are several tips from suppliers, decorators and distributors to give you the edge you've been looking for.

1 Understand What You're Selling

If you really want to rev-up sales, you have to know the nitty-gritty details of the apparel you're pitching. The greater your product knowledge, the more likely you are to ask clients better questions.

"Because over 35% of our garments today are what we'd call performance garments – garments that do a job rather than just convey a great brand image – you need to assess the customers' needs before you can recommend the perfect solution," says Mary Ellen Nichols, director of marketing communications for Top 40 supplier Bodek & Rhodes (asi/40788). "There are now nine categories of performance wear: Wicking shirts, stain-resistant, wrinkle-resistant, stretch, wind and water protection, UV protection, odor resistance and insect repellent."

With so many category options available, Nichols recommends asking customers these four questions: What would you like the garment to do? What type of environment will the garment be worn in the most? Who will be wearing the garment? What special features are needed? "This helps you show your expertise, as well as up your sale by recommending higher-end solutions," she says.

John Perez, a spokesperson for Top 40 firm Tri-Mountain (asi/92125), says distributors must be equally prepared to answer a customer's questions – and talk about why their apparel is better than a competitor's.

"Clients may be willing to pay a little more for products that are unique, but they need to understand why they're paying more," he says. "Explaining the science behind new fabric technologies is important to help close a sale."

On higher-end or performance apparel, Nichols thinks an in-person demonstration will give you an advantage. "We recommend

you actually show the garment from the inside out – show the professional finish of the seams, the reinforced collar, stability of sweat patches, the fused linings on cuffs. It all goes to your bottom line," she says.

Buyers also love visuals, and the more true-to-life your demonstration is, the better, according to Nichols. "If the fabric does something special, like resists stains well or is water-repellent, pour water on it in your presentation," she says. "Show-and-tell works in this experiential economy we're in."

Nichols also says distributors should read up on apparel facts listed on suppliers' websites. Learning a few extra pointers can give distributors greater command of trends in front of clients. "Knowing answers to questions like, 'Why does a woman's shirt button on the opposite side than a man's?' or 'What makes cotton truly organic?' will position you as the authority and help you gain confidence from the buyer," she says.

"Explaining the science behind new fabric technologies is important to help close a sale."

John Perez, Tri-Mountain

2 Wear Your Stuff

After you master apparel styles and fabrics, you need to dress for success – but in a different way than you have before. Jeff Schmitt, an account executive for Cedric Spring & Associates (asi/332750), says distributors should never try to sell their clients a piece of clothing that they wouldn't be willing to wear themselves. "When you're selling apparel, you've got to be wearing it," he says. "It drives my wife nuts, but she can't buy me clothing at the store. It has to be out of one of our catalogs with my logo on it."

In fact, Schmitt wears something that he sells every day. "That's a mistake that distributors make – they don't wear enough of what they sell," Schmitt says. "They go to the store and buy retail."

Schmitt has earned the trust of many customers by discouraging them from

buying something that he knows isn't high-quality. He serves as a product tester and is a walking testimonial for the best apparel items. "There are things I've worn myself that I'll never show a customer," he says. "If I don't like it, why would I want to sell it to them? That just makes me look bad."

Instead, Schmitt takes a different and more productive tact. "There are times when I own a certain brand T-shirt and someone will say, 'I like this,' and I'll say to them, 'I've worn it. It doesn't hold up as well as this other shirt. With the extra 10 cents you'll spend on this product, you'll be much happier.' And they'll say, 'We appreciate your candor, and we'll go with that other one for the extra 10 cents.'"

Schmitt firmly believes that going into a meeting wearing a high-quality garment gives you a better chance of selling the item. "If you're wearing a piece, it sells a lot easier than if it's on a hanger," he says. "They'll see it in a real-life application and they'll ask you questions about it."

From a supplier's point of view, Nichols says Schmitt has it exactly right. "Model what you want to sell. If you're wearing it, you're the ultimate poster child for your favorites," she says. "Bring an extra in the buyer's size to try on."

3 Make It Personal

Since apparel is the ultimate show-me category, you have to bring samples when you visit a potential customer. There are no exceptions. "Be able to put it into their hands and the customer will say, 'Wow, I never thought of that,'" says Greg Kitson, president of decorating company Mind's Eye Graphics. "It's a great door opener. It gets you past a gatekeeper many times – even that receptionist whose job it is to say 'no' to salespeople."

But remember, you can't just bring random shirts and jackets. Instead, you have to connect with prospects by introducing apparel items that already have their logo on them.

"If you've got a sample in your hands that's got their logo on it – not the distributor's logo – you have a much better chance of talking to the person that has purchasing authority," says Kitson.

The trick to generating samples, according to Kitson, is for distributors to agree on a budget with their decorating partners. This is a point many distributors gloss over,

preventing them from consistently personalizing samples. "Sit down and establish a sample budget or arrangement because samples are something that decorators absolutely despise," Kitson says. "We spend time – equipment time, staff time – and we don't get adequately compensated for it. There's no way that we get compensated for the actual time we spend on samples."

But if a distributor can come up with a budget – say, 2% of a \$10,000 order – for samples, or at the very least, present a concrete argument for the creation of samples, Kitson believes decorators will be more likely to produce them.

Schmitt understands the need on the decorator's end to know that the production of samples will ultimately be profitable. "They have to shut down their machines to do that," he says. "But I do a lot of business with my decorators, so for them to do a sample, they're OK with it."

There are times when pushing hard for samples are more important than others. "If you see an opening where there's been shoddy workmanship from competitors, you can show how you're better," Schmitt says. "It's not about price; it's about delivering the best product to the customer. You can't put a price on that, and customers are willing to work with you because of that."

4 **Verify the Customer's Logo**

Distributors too often cost themselves additional business, according to Kitson, by botching a logo. Here's a key point: Logo verification isn't just about checking spelling and colors, it's about making sure a logo is being reproduced as intended on the right types of garments.

"A lot of times, what we try to do is really reinforce the concept of what we call the art target," Kitson says. "The art target doesn't necessarily have to be apparel – what we're looking for is how their company's logo has been reproduced in the corporate world. Has this piece of artwork or a configuration of this artwork been reproduced in apparel or any other form prior to this use? It could be their business card. It could be their letterhead. It could be the header of a Facebook page. Without those art targets, we really don't know what the expectation is."

Kitson says he also tries to verify that art target on his end – and if what he finds doesn't match up with what the distributor sends over, it's a red flag. "If we go and we

get a piece of artwork from a website and we see that this logo is treated differently – there's a two-color vs. a three- or a four-color logo – we start asking questions at that point," he says. "But we're the backup. If the distributor has done this upfront, it shows them as being a professional with the best interest of the customer in mind."

Kitson estimates that 75% of his distributor partners understand the importance of submitting the proper color callouts prior to the creation of the logo on the apparel. "The other 25% are just in it for the short-term, or they don't care," he says, "and then we have to make a value judgment on our part. Is the business that this customer's bringing us worth the additional maintenance required? If the end-user is not happy, they're going someplace else."

5 **Finish Strong**

Winning new clients is great, but if you can't hold onto your current customers, doubling your annual apparel sales becomes a long shot. Nichols believes there are three things that distributors can do in closing a sale to generate repeat business with customers.

First, find out if there's anything else your client needs. You can even pull out a calendar and reference events and dates. "Never leave an appointment without asking what other apparel needs they have – whether it's for an upcoming anniversary program or trade show," says Nichols. "You never know when there might be another project in the wings, or even a personal need for an apparel program, like for fundraising or a related school or club project the buyer is involved with. Keep digging, or ask for a referral to a friend who could use your services. It sure beats a cold call."

Next, be sure to offer packaging and special delivery options. "Always ask how the customer would like you to deliver the garments," Nichols says. "Do they need tote bags? Boxes? Poly bags? Other accessories? You can help with it all, and add to your sale, almost every time."

Finally, tap into your generous side. "When you ship an order, include another type of garment also decorated in the size of the buyer as a gift," Nichols says. "Before you know it, you'll generate another new order, or an additional inquiry. It works over 40% of the time."

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SCREEN PRINTING RATES

QUANTITY	1 COLOR	2 COLOR	3 COLOR	4 COLOR	5 COLOR	6 COLOR	EACH ADD.
6-23 PCS	\$1.75	\$2.50	\$3.25	\$4.00	UNIFORMS W/NUMBERING ONLY!		
24-71 PCS	\$0.75	\$0.96	\$1.17	\$1.33	\$1.43	>6 COLORS Min. 72 pcs.	
72-143 PCS	\$0.69	\$0.90	\$1.10	\$1.26	\$1.37	\$1.47	+ \$0.10
144-239 PCS	\$0.62	\$0.78	\$0.99	\$1.15	\$1.25	\$1.37	+ \$0.10
240-359 PCS	\$0.57	\$0.73	\$0.94	\$1.10	\$1.20	\$1.31	+ \$0.10
360-499 PCS	\$0.52	\$0.68	\$0.83	\$0.94	\$1.04	\$1.15	+ \$0.10
500-1199 PCS	\$0.45	\$0.57	\$0.62	\$0.68	\$0.73	\$0.78	+ \$0.05
1200-2,499 PCS	\$0.37	\$0.44	\$0.55	\$0.60	\$0.65	\$0.71	+ \$0.05
2500-4,999 PCS	\$0.32	\$0.39	\$0.50	\$0.55	\$0.60	\$0.65	+ \$0.05
5000-9,999 PCS	\$0.26	\$0.34	\$0.44	\$0.50	\$0.55	\$0.60	+ \$0.05
10,000 & UP	\$0.23	\$0.33	\$0.42	\$0.47	\$0.53	\$0.57	+ \$0.04

EMBROIDERY RATES

QUANTITY	STITCHES	PRICE	STITCHES	PRICE	ADDITIONAL STITCHES
6 PCS Min.	0-6,999	\$3.50	7K-10K	\$4.00	Add \$0.40 Per K
7-12 PCS	0-6,999	\$3.00	7K-10K	\$3.50	Add \$0.35 Per K
13-24 PCS	0-6,999	\$2.50	7K-10K	\$3.00	Add \$0.30 Per K
25-60 PCS	0-6,999	\$2.25	OVER 7K		Add \$0.25 Per K
61-120 PCS	0-6,999	\$2.15	OVER 7K		Add \$0.23 Per K
121-249 PCS	0-6,999	\$2.10	OVER 7K		Add \$0.20 Per K
250-499 PCS	0-6,999	\$2.00	OVER 7K		Add \$0.19 Per K
500-749 PCS	0-6,999	\$1.90	OVER 7K		Add \$0.18 Per K
750-1200 PCS	0-6,999	\$1.80	OVER 7K		Add \$0.17 Per K
1201-2500	0-6,999	\$1.70	OVER 7K		Add \$0.16 Per K
2501-5000	0-6,999	\$1.60	OVER 7K		Add \$0.15 Per K

DIGITAL DIRECT TO GARMENT RATES

WHITE GARMENTS				
QUANTITY	up to 5" X 5"	5"X5" to 10"X10"	10"X10" - 14"X15"	14"X15" to 14"X18"
1-5	\$3.00	\$5.00	\$6.00	\$8.15
6-23	\$2.50	\$4.00	\$4.75	\$6.85
24-47	\$2.00	\$3.00	\$3.75	\$5.85
48-143	\$1.75	\$2.50	\$3.25	\$5.35
144-499	\$1.50	\$2.00	\$3.00	\$5.00
500 & UP	\$1.25	\$1.75	\$2.75	\$4.75
NON - WHITE GARMENTS				
QUANTITY	up to 5" X 5"	5"X5" to 10"X10"	10"X10" - 14"X15"	14"X15" to 14"X18"
1-5	\$4.00	\$7.00	\$8.00	\$10.25
6-23	\$3.00	\$5.50	\$6.75	\$8.85
24-47	\$2.75	\$5.00	\$5.50	\$7.65
48-143	\$2.50	\$4.00	\$4.50	\$6.65
144-499	\$2.25	\$3.50	\$4.00	\$6.25
500 & UP	\$2.00	\$3.25	\$3.75	\$6.00

APPAREL'S
NEWEST



CONTENDER

Polyconcept built itself into one of the industry's largest suppliers. Now, the hard goods company is fighting to redefine the business of decorated apparel.

By C.J. Mittica

Was this the mountaintop? Over the span of two decades, Polyconcept North America had grown from a mid-size company to one of the top five largest suppliers in the industry. Loyal distributors lauded its trio of companies – Leed's (asi/66887) and sister companies Bullet (asi/42424) and Journalbooks (asi/91340) – for their design prowess and pain-free customer service. The Leed's SureShip model it launched 15 years ago accelerating service times everywhere into hyperdrive. Was there anything left to do?

In fact, there was one summit left to climb. Apparel is the industry's number-one product category, the domain in which seven of the top 10 suppliers in *Counselor's* Top 40 rankings primarily trade. Polyconcept searched for a partner – a company it hoped had more than me-too product, and one that shared Leed's slavish devotion to design. It found what Leed's COO Sharon Willochell calls “a kindred spirit” in the form of Canada-based Trimark Sportswear Group (asi/92122).

And so in 2011, Trimark became the latest addition to Polyconcept's stable of companies. Over the span of two years, the new partnership was rolled out at a crawl to distributors, step by achingly measured step. Now, Polyconcept has removed its self-imposed restrictions, and Trimark Powered by Leed's (asi/66888), as the U.S. entity is called, is poised to offer nationwide coverage. The company is promising and delivering entirely new approaches to everything from in-house decoration to turnaround times. It clearly has long-term designs of becoming a significant player in the apparel realm. But amid the building buzz and curi-

osity, an even bigger question hangs in the balance: Will Polyconcept forever change the business of promotional apparel?

Finding a Partner

In the fall of 2011, shortly after the acquisition, three Polyconcept executives met with the Trimark brain trust. Polyconcept's initial intention, according to Willochell, was to round out its portfolio with a solid apparel company that happened to have a strong footprint in Canada. Entry into the U.S. market would come somewhere down the line. But as Polyconcept got to know more about Trimark, the company changed its mind about the U.S. The meeting con-

“None of our customers really needed another apparel supplier.”

Sharon Willochell, Trimark Powered by Leed's (asi/66888)

firmed what everyone had come to believe: they would enter the U.S. much sooner than originally planned. “That was a really exciting meeting, actually,” says Willochell, a PCNA veteran of 15 years and the newly-installed president of Trimark Powered by Leed's. “We realized this could be a very powerful combination.”

Trimark was no mere cipher in the deal. The Ontario-based company thrived in the last decade as one of the leading suppliers in Canada, jousting with its down-the-block rival Ash City (asi/37143) for country supremacy. “If you are a distribu-

tor in Canada, you have an Ash City and Trimark account. That's as simple as it can be said,” says Neil Piitz, a respected voice in the Canadian market who founded Top 40 distributor Accolade Promotion Group (asi/102905) and had previously worked at Ash City.

Even though Trimark laid its foundation in Canada, the U.S. is not foreign territory. In 2000, the supplier purchased a trio of companies and leapt into the American market. But four years later, presented with what President Will Andrew says was “an offer we couldn't refuse,” Trimark divested its U.S. business to what is now River's End Trading Company (asi/82588). It was a necessary move to reinvigorate its brand and seize market share in its home country as Ash City invested in its own U.S. push. “We really had an opportunity to take a very bold approach with the product development and be a bit more fashion forward,” says Andrew, who has been with Trimark since 2005.

The company reimaged itself as a mid- to high-end private label that excelled in design. A deal to create licensed apparel for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver and an agreement with popular Canadian retailer Roots raised its standing in the Canadian market. All the while, the apparel company trained its eye across the border and imagined the scenario in which it would return to the U.S. Discussions with Polyconcept began in 2008, but the struggling economy dampened initial enthusiasm. Once the Olympics concluded and Trimark moved into its new facility in the early part of 2010, dialog between the two companies began in earnest.

Through its relationship with Polyconcept, Trimark won an instant reputation

boost with the backing to grow its inventory and cash flow. “Polyconcept gives them instant credibility,” says Piitz, who now works with Add Impact (asi/106606) in Woodbridge, Ontario. “Trimark goes into the heavyweight division instantly. Being able to leverage the relationships that Polyconcept has with its distributor base just opens so many doors for them.”

On the other side, Polyconcept wanted to avoid merely marrying its famed service model with an apparel company and calling it a day. “None of our customers really needed another apparel supplier,” says Willochell. “We didn’t want to just say, ‘Hooray it’s Leed’s and we’re into apparel.’ We wanted to be very careful about making sure we had a reason to be and it was something that made sense for our customers.”

Ultimately, customer buy-in began with Trimark’s approach to product design, which covers a range of corporate and performance options. That’s what first impressed Michael Snyder, vice president of merchandising for Trimark Powered by Leed’s and the company’s first U.S. sales rep. “I looked at this collection,” says Snyder, “and said, ‘If nothing else, when we come to the U.S. market, we have an outstanding apparel collection that will find its own way.’”

And as the company teased out its product offering in the U.S., it won over distributors even before they put in their first order. “I thought they might come out with what everybody else is doing, and that’s why I was skeptical,” says Jill Albers, business development for Shumsky (asi/326300), one of the early participants in the U.S. pilot program. “But that’s not what they did at all.”

Time to Change

Decoration is the *raison d’être* for the wearables industry, but it’s also the most complicated element. Trimark Powered by Leed’s trained its sights early on in-house decoration – as opposed to being a blanks provider. The company is presenting four decoration techniques initially, three of which have elements that were developed exclusively by the company: deboss, laser and transfer with True Edge. The latter is something that Trimark Powered by Leed’s is especially bullish about – a new means of

heat transfer that allows for free-standing text and can be placed in places an embroidery hoop can’t reach. Leed’s had already pioneered the process for its bags, but its potential for apparel wasn’t unearthed until the companies teamed up. “It’s the fastest growing decoration technique we have,” says Andrew. “That was truly a collaboration. I would say they were sitting on a diamond in the rough and didn’t realize it because they hadn’t worked on apparel.”

Currently, 65% of the apparel that Trimark Powered by Leed’s sells in the U.S. comes decorated. But that’s only part of the equation. The company is striving for simplicity with a one-price solution for decoration and sizing. Also, it is essentially bringing the Leed’s shipping model to decorated apparel. New orders go out in five business

“By coming out with a powerhouse like Polyconcept, Trimark goes into the heavyweight division instantly.”

Neil Piitz, Add Impact Inc.

days, re-orders in three. SureShip one-day shipping is even available with certain requirements (one-location decoration and waiving the right to artwork approval).

It’s a major change from the typical decorated apparel order, which involves shipping to multiple locations and is often measured by the week rather than the day. And in an industry where rush service is quickly becoming standard, the potential is massive. InkHead Promotional Products (asi/231159), an online provider that is built for speed, works with Trimark Powered by Leed’s and embraces the pace. “The way apparel was ordered in our industry was so antiquated, clumsy and out-of-date,” says Jim Franklyn, InkHead’s vice president of sales and marketing. “From a productivity standpoint, it needed somebody to come in and do exactly what they did. You talk about low-hanging fruit.”

The ripple effects will be felt in the industry. Franklyn sees several apparel suppliers who could prepare similar decoration services in short order. “The ones that do not have the volume, who do not have too much of a risk, they’ll do it,” he says. “And the ones who do have too much volume with decorator sub-contractors, they’re the ones who will pause.” Meanwhile, Albers sees larger hard goods companies exploring the additions of decoration and apparel lines. “You already see lines starting to bring in hats,” she says. “Hats are the gateway drug to apparel.”

However, for now Polyconcept has admittedly slow played its hand. The company has erected several barriers in the U.S. over the last 18 months with Trimark Powered by Leed’s. Its apparel was only available in a handful of markets; its U.S. website was hidden behind password protection; and its wares were not available on industry search engines. Polyconcept says it was necessary to gauge interest, fine-tune its processes and build inventory while determining which of Trimark’s collection would sell best in the U.S. market. “It helped us to invest wisely in the proper equipment, personnel, everything,” says Snyder. “Looking back, it was the smartest thing that we’ve done.”

Not everything has been perfected yet. Trimark Powered by Leed’s has integrated apparel experts to work in tandem with distributors’ normal Leed’s customer service rep; distributor clients say the set-up is good but not completely fine-tuned. (Trimark Sportswear still handles all Canadian orders, while Leed’s handles the U.S.) The company has more in the offing, including at least two additional decoration techniques that it has yet to introduce. In addition, it will be proactive about adding brand names to its collection, as it has already done with Puma, which is only available in the U.S.

With all that said, Trimark Powered by Leed’s has been clear about its goal to stay focused and achieve its current objectives. “I think we have a place,” Willochell says. “We’re focused on where our product is differentiated, where our model can add value to people. But we’re never going to be all things to all people.”

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Revenue *rev-up*

Increase apparel sales by targeting these four key markets in 2014.

By Christopher Ruvo

When it comes to selling imprinted apparel and accessories, the two top markets remain the same: education and clubs/associations. While it obviously makes sense to pursue business in those markets, it's also important not to overlook ample opportunities that exist in other sectors poised for growth in 2014 and beyond. Here are industry profiles, success stories and sales strategies for four growing markets that will help you rev-up revenue in the next year.



Financial Industry Profile

After bailouts, recessionary turmoil and slower-than-hoped growth, things are looking up for the financial industry. Consider that the six largest U.S. banks all increased revenue in the first half of the year. In June, the financial industry regained its previous place as the U.S.'s most profitable sector in Standard & Poor's 500-stock index, ending technology's reign. More broadly, revenue within the financial/insurance industry has been rising; the U.S. Census Bureau reports that the industry's second quarter tally reached \$879.9 billion, a 4.2% jump over the same quarter the previous year.

Meanwhile, the data on jobs is good, too. Wages are rising, and the federal government predicts total employment within the sector will increase by 16% between 2010 and 2020. Looked at even closer, sub-sectors that could perform particularly well include investment banking, retail banking and commercial banking, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit.

Success Story

Among their key clients, husband-and-wife team Jill and Jay Harman count a large holding company that has 42 banks under its umbrella. The Harmans, Georgia-based marketing consultants for American Solutions for Business (asi/120075), beat out a host of competitors for the account, going through a process that involved RFPs, multiple suit-and-tie presentations and more.

To keep this massive customer happy, the Harmans focus on providing outstanding service. Those efforts have included building a comprehensive online store stocked with a range of apparel, including crisp wovens, traditional polo shirts

and attractively imprinted jackets. New products are frequently added to the store. "When I go to the trade shows, I'm always looking for new fabrics and styles to present to them," says Jill Harman.

Of course, the Harmans do a lot more for this top account. They're always creating unique promotional packages for the various banks within the network. To do this effectively, the pair has invested much time in learning about the goals, expectations and needs of each bank, some of which are small and others of which have scores of branches. "We're definitely seeing a growth trend with this client, especially over the last six months," says Jill Harman, who believes financial market is a hot one to target. "They buy a whole gamut of products, so there's a lot of potential."

Sales Strategy

Help financial planning firms hit a hole in one with a select golf outing in which their top clients receive imprinted retail-brand golf shirts and caps, along with golf balls and gloves, all delivered in a golf bag embellished with the firm's company logo.



Manufacturing Industry Profile

In August, output from U.S. factories surged, driven by a six-year high in motor vehicle manufacturing. The same month, production of consumer goods, machinery, appliances, and aerospace and high-tech equipment also increased. Such a performance could be indicative of a longer-term positive trend in America's manufacturing sector.

Over the next several months, U.S. manufacturing is on target for 3.5% growth according to the National Association of Manufacturers. Continued gains in automotive, aerospace and machinery could power the increase. "In the coming years," says Chad Moutray, the association's chief economist, "we could see 3% to 4% growth."

Such advancement would build on a positive 2012 in which manufacturers contributed \$1.87 trillion to the U.S. economy, an 8% increase over the prior year and a contribution of 11.9% of total gross domestic product. While high taxes and regulatory burdens could slow manufacturing's acceleration, there is much in the U.S. industry's favor, including rising global transportation costs and the highest worker productivity in the world.

Success Story

Through cold-calling, networking and persistence, HDS Marketing (asi/216807) has built a thick book of business with industrial and electronics manufacturers. Given their vertically-integrated businesses, such companies have many departments, and HDS strives to saturate each one of these with its services. "From marketing to sales to executives to production departments, there are so many different avenues you can pursue with each manufacturer," says HDS Owner Howard Schwartz. "If you focus on service and relationship-building, you can have 15 different programs with a single company."

For its manufacturing clients, HDS delivers everything from online stores to imprinted apparel that serves as rewards for employees who follow safety procedures. HDS also sets up temporary stores, traveling to clients several times a year with merchandise to be sold on the spot. Says Schwartz: "We expect manufacturing to be a growth market for us."

So does Joe Meininger. The account executive at HALO Branded Solutions (asi/356000) works primarily with human resources departments at manufacturers. Business has been booming. "The last year or two, I've seen 10-15% growth with this client base," says Meininger, who sells apparel through employee purchase programs or inventory the HR department holds and gives to new hires. "I also supply hard goods, which are used as employee recognition gifts, career fairs and holiday gifts." Meininger's advice for cracking the manufacturing market? "Start with the human resources manager and employee benefits manager and grow from there. Make it easy for them with service."

Sales Strategy

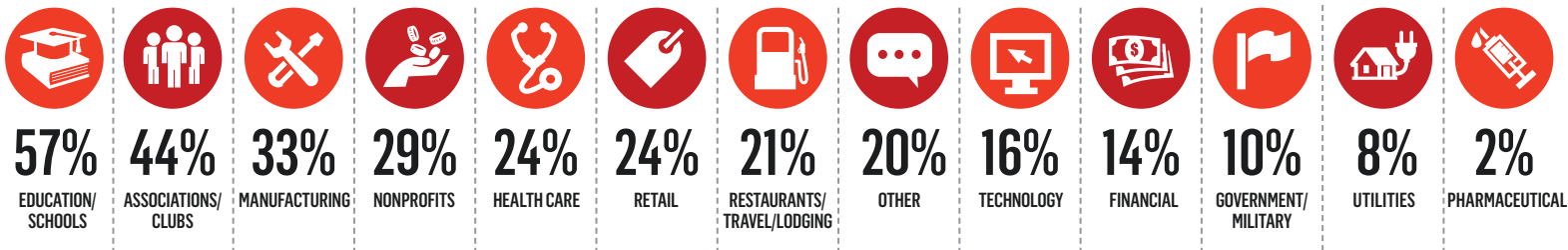
Create safety rewards programs. As employees meet safety goals over time, they earn logoed apparel and other imprinted products. The longer employees go without accident, injury or protocol breach, the nicer the rewards for which they're eligible. Include durable work jackets, hooded sweatshirts and caps.



Travel, Tourism & Hospitality Industry Profile

With job security and increased discretionary spending, people can afford to eat out and travel more. That is contributing to the rising optimism for this sector.

Top Apparel Markets



Methodology: Survey respondents were asked to name their top three markets for selling wearables.
Source: Wearables magazine sales forecast survey

In 2012, travel and tourism's total contribution to the U.S. economy was \$1.348 trillion, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council – a tally that was predicted to rise by 2.1% by the end of 2013. In fact, growth is projected through at least 2023, with the sector even accounting for a slightly greater share of U.S. GDP over that time. As this industry gains dollar and economic share, employment within it is expected to rise too, from 5.57 million jobs in 2012 to 6.57 million in 2023.

Success Story

In travel, tourism and hospitality, Malory Dempster has found fertile ground for sales. Based in Los Angeles, Dempster has generated a wealth of business from property management companies whose holdings are populated primarily by hotels, restaurants and nightclubs.

A promotional marketing account executive at Jack Nadel International (asi/279600), Dempster leveraged her fashion training and hip sensibility to impress buyers within the nightclub division of these management companies, which are based primarily in Las Vegas and the City of Angels. The creative apparel and hard-good solutions Dempster devised, along with her always-pick-up-the-phone-and-help service, helped her earn referrals to other divisions. Before long, Dempster was doing business with the management companies' restaurants and hotels, too. "It's grown from positive word-of-mouth," she says.

When it comes to providing apparel to this sector, Dempster has dabbled in everything from custom-dyed crop tops and cocktail dresses to T-shirts for the Hard Rock Café in Las Vegas. She sees potential to expand into providing uniforms for everyone from valets and security personnel to hotel staff. Diversified beyond apparel, Dempster has also delivered solutions like high-end invite boxes that beckoned the well-heeled to attend

the launch of an upscale restaurant in Las Vegas and Beverly Hills. "It's a great industry to pursue if you like to get creative," says Dempster. Her advice for pleasing clients in this industry: "Be easy to get a hold of. Listen to what they have to say. And then put your creativity to work to give them something special."

Sales Strategy

Don't overlook tourism bureaus. Staff uniforms that evoke the essence of the locale the bureau is trying to promote are just one route to take. T-shirts that promote the locale with the bureau's branding printed subtly somewhere on the shirt are another option.



Health Care Industry Profile

Despite turbulence resulting from federal health-care reform, the sector figures to be one of the nation's biggest and strongest for the foreseeable future. Health care's contribution to gross domestic product has grown from \$790.1 billion in 2004 to \$1.16 trillion last year, the Bureau of Economic Analysis reports. Plus, with demand for health care growing at a rate of twice that of the national economy, the industry is on track to create 5.6 million new jobs by 2020, according to a study from Georgetown University's Center on Education and Workforce. (There's no secret where the demand is coming from – the aging Baby Boomer population.) Such job growth would build on employment gains of the last decade, which saw the health-care sector increase its workforce by what the Brookings Institution says was 22.7%.

Success Story

Years ago, Proforma Marjac broke into the health-care market with a sale of imprinted umbrellas to a local hospital. Since then, the Norcross, GA-based company has vastly expanded its business with this cli-

ent, providing everything from scrubs, lab coats and T-shirts to sweatshirts, jackets and hard good items like pens. Fortunately for Proforma Marjac, the hospital has grown too, blossoming into a network of five health-care facilities. That expansion has resulted in more sales of apparel and other promotional items for the distributor. "This is one of our top clients," says Lisa Nixon, account manager. "We focus on them very closely."

Not surprisingly, competitors are focused closely too. They're always trying to break Proforma Marjac's connection with the account. Still, the firm has beat back the would-be usurpers. "We've done it with service," says Co-Owner Mason Israel. "Of course you have to be strong on price, but service and relationship-building are even more important. We do things for them others won't do."

For instance, Nixon and Israel once rented a U-Haul and drove nearly two hours to hand-deliver 300 packages for an executive retreat the client was holding. The packages consisted of an insulated grocery tote, inside of which were a custom-imprinted umbrella, blanket and tumbler. Both the blanket and tote were wrapped with satin ribbons. Nixon and Israel delivered the packages because they wanted to ensure they would be in perfect condition when received. "It may sound like a small thing," says Israel, "but that sort of effort endears us to them."

Sales Strategy

Beyond providing uniforms and logoed casual wear for health-care employees, be sure to capitalize on sales opportunities that arise from community events with which health-care clients are involved. For instance, provide T-shirts to be given to runners at 5K races a hospital is sponsoring. – E-mail: cruvo@asicentral.com; Twitter @ChrisR-ASI

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Bess Cohn Humanitarian Award Nominee Haley Bellows & Rachel Morrell

Can the creator of a line of T-shirts help to save her own life – and that of others?

By C.J. Mittica

With the help of a newly created T-shirt, Haley Bellows, 21-year-old college student and cancer patient, is on a mission to fight her Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The inspiration initially came by happenstance. As Rachel Morrell tells it now, the initial offer was a bit of a joke. "I'll buy you anything you want," she told Bellows.

The two had become fast friends, ever since Bellows worked under Rachel's husband Jonathan as a resident advisor at George Fox University in Newburg, OR. They bonded quickly over their contagious laughter.

But there was no laughter at this moment. Sitting on Morrell's office floor, Bellows was laid low by a double-whammy of grim news: The lymphoma, which had gone into complete remission just four months earlier, was back, and now she was told there was colon cancer as well.

Morrell offered what she could. As the sole proprietor of Ramalama Enterprises and the primary screen-printer for many

of the groups at George Fox, at the very least she could order shirts and print something. Presented with the open-ended invitation, Bellows grumbled a throw-away request: "All I can think is 'Eff Cancer.'"

Morrell took the request to heart. Without Bellows' knowledge, she ordered sweatshirts for the two of them and an additional 20 Gildan T-shirts. On them, she printed a plain-spoken "Eff Cancer" design. While printing the shirts, she posted a picture on Instagram and offered to sell the shirts for \$20 with all proceeds going to Bellows (whose insurance had just been dropped from her stepfather's job). "Before I got home from printing them," says Morrell, "I had pretty much sold out of them."

And so it has gone since April, with about 450 shirts sold – many to George Fox students and community members, some to people Bellows has never met. All of the profit goes directly to Bellows; at \$15-plus per T-shirt, it has translated into nearly \$7,000. "You're LITERALLY keeping me



alive," Bellows wrote to Morrell at one point. It's not hyperbole. "All the money that is incoming is literally putting treatment into my body," Bellows says.

Bellows makes a point to wear her "Eff Cancer" T-shirt to every treatment. "It properly expresses how I feel," says the Kalama, WA, native. "Cancer's hard, and if I could I would use every cuss word in the book to describe it. I don't know if it helps me to wear the shirt, but it's a statement of how I feel."

On campus, she is the Girl Who Has Cancer. With just

about 2,000 undergraduates, it's practically impossible at George Fox not to know the story of Haley Bellows. It was easier months before when Bellows had her hair and when Eff Cancer shirts weren't so ubiquitous on campus. Fame in a small fishbowl has its pros and cons. "It's been hard because a lot of people know me because I have cancer and not because of who I am as a person outside of that," admits Bellows.

But she remains incredibly appreciative of the support she receives – the chance to connect with people from her past, to see "Eff Cancer" shirts pop up everywhere from Disney Land to Romania. The bright hues of the shirts populate campus and offer a visual symbol of day-to-day support that is not possible otherwise. "People are always texting her and Instagramming her and saying 'I'm wearing my shirt for you today Haley. Thinking about you,'" says Morrell. "It's awesome for Haley but it's also been an important way for people to support her consistently."

Appointments & Promotions

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

Compiled by Sabrina Landry

► **Ash City** (asi/37127) hired Bobby Ramjist as dedicated sales representative, covering the Ottawa and Eastern Ontario Territory.

► **Big Bang Corporate Apparel** (asi/92883) hired Dave DeGreeff as its senior vice president of sales.

► **Chocolate Inn/Taylor & Grant** (asi/44900) named Elizabeth Cortes as its product development manager.

► **Crown Products** (asi/47700) announced the addition of Kathleen Donlin as regional sales manager for the Upper Midwest territory covering MN, IA, WI, ND and SD areas.

► **Crystal D** (asi/47759) hired Kyle Nordby and Michael Bles as production artists and John Mingo as a purchasing coordinator.

► **Eversole Run** (asi/53040) announced that Eric Withaar Sales & Associates will represent the company in Illinois, Indiana and Michigan.

► **EvPro** (asi/99552) hired Devon Posey as a graphic artist.

► **Falcon Safety Products** (asi/53530) hired Steve Smith as senior vice president of sales.

► **Fey Promotional Products Group** (asi/54040) hired Elizabeth Bennett as director of product development and Candy Cummings as territory



Bobby Ramjist
Ash City



Kathleen Donlin
Crown Products



Steve Smith
Falcon Safety



Bob Conley
Image Source



Laura Slagle
Image Source



Carla DeFlorio
Incentive Marketing



Megan Erber
Pop! Promos



Ken Cecco
Stromberg

sales manager. Bennett rejoins the ad specialty industry after most recently working at General Electric. Cummings will be responsible for selling Fey brands in Indiana, Michigan, Kentucky and Ohio.

► **GNP Branded Gear** (asi/200020) hired Jessica Enck as an account executive.

► **Heritage Sportswear, Inc.** (asi/60582) and Virginia Ts (asi/93917) added Jim Dunne to their team as vice president of strategic accounts.

► **Image Source** (asi/230121) hired Bob Conley as senior account executive and Laura Slagle as account coordinator.

► **Incentive Marketing Association** announced that it has welcomed Carla DeFlorio as its new executive director.

► **Innovative Marketing & Design** (asi/231237) named Felicia Lyn to lead its production department.

► **Jornik Manufacturing Corp.** (asi/63549) hired Elyse Strauss as its sales executive.

► **Penn Emblem** (asi/77120) announced that representatives of the company attended the 2013 Tom Ridge Homeland Security Awards to honor the men and women of the federal law enforcement community.

► **Pinnacle Designs** (asi/78140) added Larry Willis of WesCo Marketing to provide sales representation in AZ, CO, NM, UT and WY.

► **Pop! Promos/College Glasses** (asi/45657) announced that it has hired Megan Erber as vice president of sales.

► **PPAChicago** announced that it appointed Jaime Becker to its board of directors.

► **Specialty Advertising Association of California (SAAC)** announced its new officers and board members for 2014: Beverly Walter (Brown & Bigelow) will head the Executive Board as president, with Steve Parker (Halo Branded Solutions) serving as vice president. Sasha Pirrie (Logomark) will serve as treasurer, and Craig Hughes (Geiger) is the new secretary. Sarah deBoer (A.T. Cross) will continue on the board as immediate past president.

► **Spector & Co.** (asi/88660) announced that it hired Jennifer Young as an account manager on the company's customer service team.

► **Stromberg Brand Umbrellas** (asi/89955) welcomed Sergio Vippolis as its new graphic designer, and Ken Cecco as its new sales representative for Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, and Washington DC territories.

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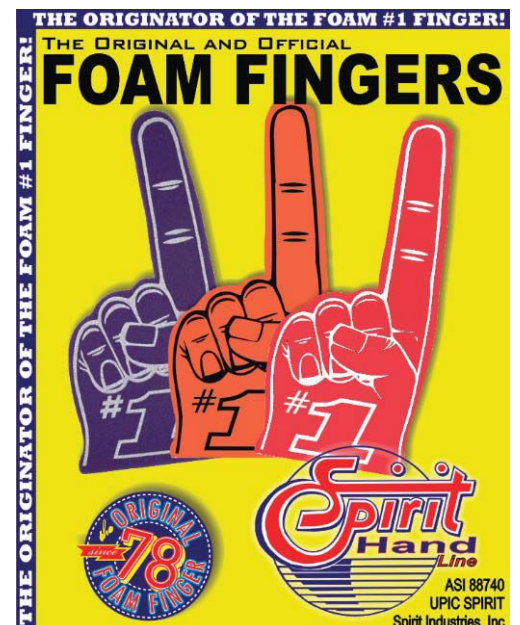
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Quote
of the
Month

"If you buy goods that you have to ship to a decorator and then the client, you're looking at double freight. Everybody's watching their money these days."

Susan Gillard, Image Group Inc. (asi/230059)

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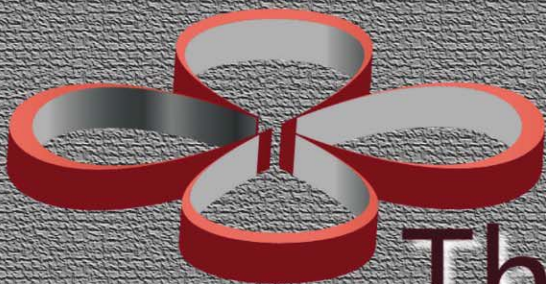
Portland, OR-based **CMD** (asi/170680), which operates as a marketing agency and distributor firm, is a definitively collaborative company. With about 150 employees, it houses 11 conference rooms (all named after board games like Battleship, Clue, Pictionary and Cranium). That means there's one conference room for every 13 employees. Also, staffers work in open areas to foster collaboration, and each employee uses a laptop so they're able to get up with it at any time. "We do a lot of sharing here," says Jeff Zabel, managing director of CMD's promotional marketing division. "We really brainstorm ideas for clients, and work with each other all the time to come up with creative solutions. It's a true team atmosphere."

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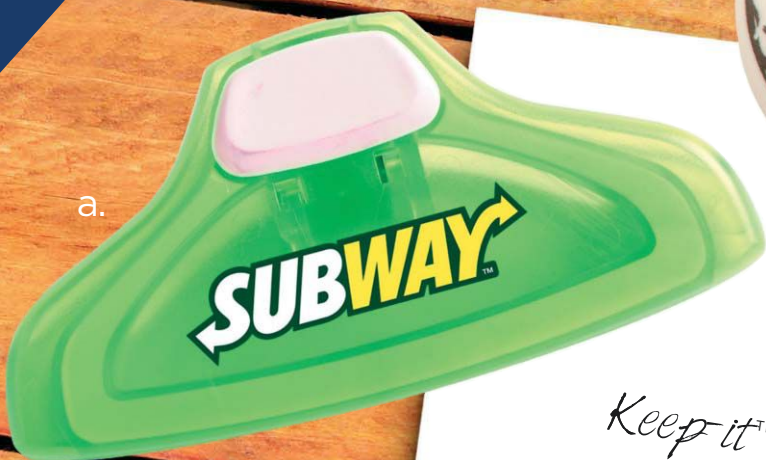
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