



#### ONE PRICE

Say goodbye to price bars and tiers and say hello to one simple price for most items regardless of quantity.

#### ONE SETUP

One consistent setup and repeat setup charge regardless of imprint method. Free setup on writing instruments.

#### ONE SIMPLE SYSTEM

Simplified standard run charge for additional colors and locations. Free run charge on writing instruments.

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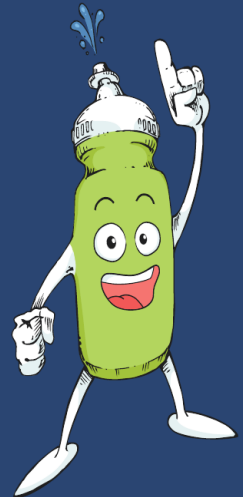
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## JOIN TEAM O.N.E.!



- **Order As Few As 1**
- **No Rush Charge**
- **EQP For All**

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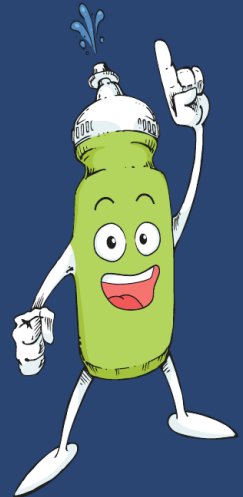
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## JOIN TEAM O.N.E.!



- **Order As Few As 1**
- **No Rush Charge**
- **EQP For All**

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# COUNSELOR

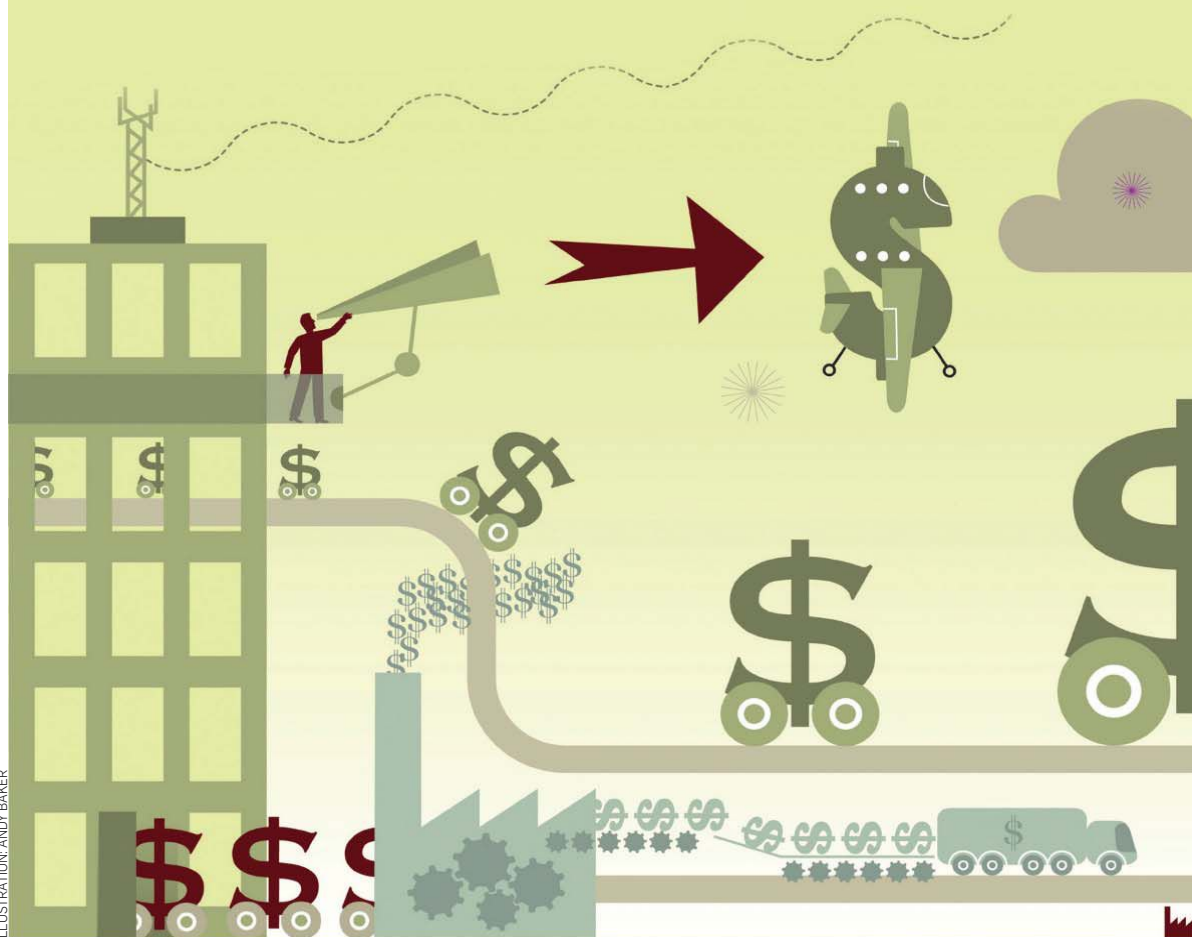
THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

MARCH 2015

**SPECIAL  
REPORT**

## GROWTH ENGINE

**SMART MOVES TO MAKE IN  
A THRIVING ECONOMY**



### TRADE SHOWS

**Reports  
From ASI  
Orlando  
And PPAI  
Expo**

### MARKETING

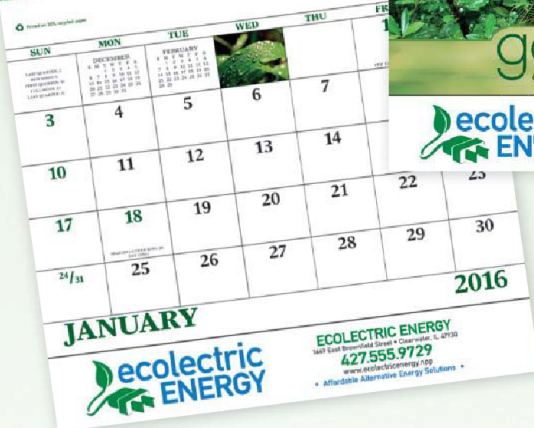
**4 Ways  
To Appeal  
To New  
Buyers**

### RESEARCH

**New Record!  
2014 Industry  
Sales Total  
\$21.5 Billion**

### FINANCIALS

**PE Firms  
Reveal Their  
Takeover  
Target  
Secrets**



**Good Value Calendars.**

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goinggreen® Stapled  
**NOW \$ .99 (C)**  
min. 150 | was \$1.33(C)



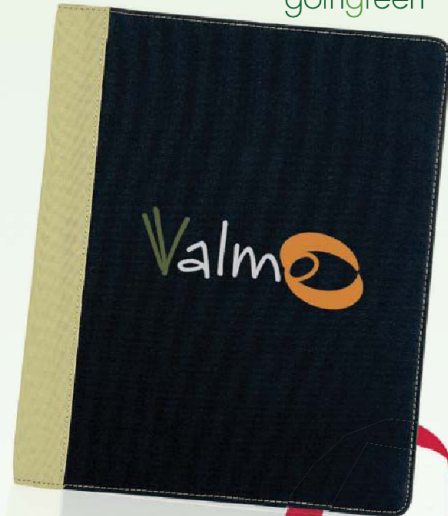
45823  
Collapsible Eco  
KOOZIE® Can Cooler  
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min. 200 | was \$1.89(C)  
goinggreen®



15420  
Berkeley  
Recycled Padfolio

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goinggreen®



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min. 300 | was \$.86(A)

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**Featured:**  
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### Flex Water Bottle with Carabiner

WKA-FW13

- Can be frozen to keep water cold
- Made from PVC and is BPA free
- Comes with handy carabiner clip
- Easy to use attached pull open top
- 16 oz. capacity

As Low As  
**\$1.12<sup>(R)</sup>**



### Flex Water Bottle with Carabiner

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- 16 oz. capacity
- Can be frozen to keep water cold
- Made from PVC and is BPA free

As Low As  
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## THE INDUSTRY'S BEST-RATED AND LARGEST SELECTION OF PEDOMETERS

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- Secure clip
- Single button operation

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**\$2.52<sup>(R)</sup>**





Wet Effect Inc. (asi/98103)

## Rash Guards Make Fun and Function Easy

*Close-fitting shirts specially made for water sports, athletics and recreation become an effective promotional garment for a range of audiences. Here's what you need to know.*

Combining a product that's unique and functional with a highly visible message is always a win-win. When it comes to apparel, a sure bet is the rash guard, a close-fitting shirt for water sports. "We are frequently contacted by distributors that have clients requesting rash guards, but the distributors are not familiar with what a rash guard is," says Roberta Lemon, president of Wet Effect Inc. (asi/98103). "We are here to provide all the information needed and the various decoration methods that can be used."

For example, did you know a rash guard actually offers sun protection and can be worn both in and out of the water? In fact, the name "rash guard" comes from the protection the shirt offers against rashes caused by abrasion and sunburn. Furthermore, they are engineered to have excellent wicking ability. "Rash guards originated in Australia and were created for surfers to wear to prevent irritation of the torso from sand in the wax on a surfboard," Lemon explains. "They are constructed with flatlock stitching, a seam that lies flat to the garment, which increases the strength of the shirt for recreational activities and prevents chafing on the skin from the seam. In addition to watersports, a rash guard is now worn frequently for mixed martial arts and fitness. Athletes who wear rash guards when training in mixed martial arts protect themselves against cuts, mat burns and the spread of skin diseases."

Choosing a quality rash guard that can be worn with peace of mind is vital. Those who wear the shirts expect a reliable level of shielding. Wet Effect rash guards provide UPF 50+ sun protection, which blocks out over 98% of the sun's harmful rays. "It is the combination of the yarn used and knit of the fabric that creates permanent protection from the sun," Lemon says. "There is no better solution to all-day sun protection in and out of the water." Wet Effects rash guards are constructed with an 85% polyester/15% spandex, 6-oz. performance fabric ensuring the person wearing it will be safe and comfortable.

The advertiser using the rash guard to promote a message to a recipient can also feel confident. The selection of the garment shows a level of caring and usability that can benefit everyone. The



Schlitterbahn Waterparks and Resorts

**"We needed a high-end product that celebs wouldn't balk at wearing that would let us place our brand in front of millions of people."**

Winter D. Prosapio, Schlitterbahn Waterparks & Resorts

a high-end product that celebs wouldn't balk at wearing that would let us place our brand in front of millions of people," says Winter D. Prosapio, Corporate Director of Communications and Government Relations, Schlitterbahn Waterparks & Resorts. It's an apt example of combining the fashionable with the functional. To learn more about the appeal, function and safety of rash guards, visit [www.weteffect.com](http://www.weteffect.com).

fabric content of a Wet Effect rash guard delivers a surface on which logos can be sublimated, silk screened or applied by heat transfer. The shirts are available in 11 bright colors in adult and youth long-sleeve and short-sleeve styles.

However, why stop with a shirt? "Rash guards paired with any of our men's and women's board shorts provide a great uniform for recreation or poolside staff at resorts and waterparks, lifeguards, yacht crew, paddle boarders, swim schools and teams," Lemon explains. "Fitness enthusiasts, we have you covered with our line of performance cross training shorts and capris that are designed for maximum comfort, style and durability."

Think through your client base. There are likely many markets and occasions with a need that a rash guard can easily satisfy. For example, those planning a company retreat or family reunion want a way to build group identity and stand out from a crowd. There is no easier way to locate members of a group at a busy beach or park than having everyone outfitted in one of Wet Effect's brightly colored rash guards. "This works especially well for youth summer camps or schools when visiting public pools or beaches," Lemon says. "Summer camps that provide rash guards for their members ensure that the kids have sun protection throughout the day, and when worn outside of camp, they provide great promotion for the camp."

That sort of walk-about exposure was one reason why Schlitterbahn Waterparks & Resorts used a rash guard to kick off the opening of Verruckt, the world's tallest waterslide. Official test riders and media personnel were outfitted in Wet Effect rash guards. "The Rash Guards were critical for the success of the event – we needed





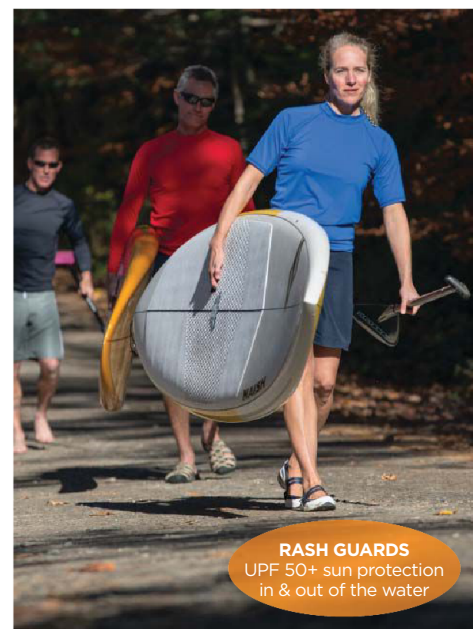
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- Water Parks
- Company Retreats

#### **WATER SPORTS**

- Paddle Boarding
- Surfing Schools
- Kite Boarding
- Scuba Diving
- Kayaking
- Water Skiing

AdvancedEMedia

# Greystone Specialties Builds Business With WebJaguar

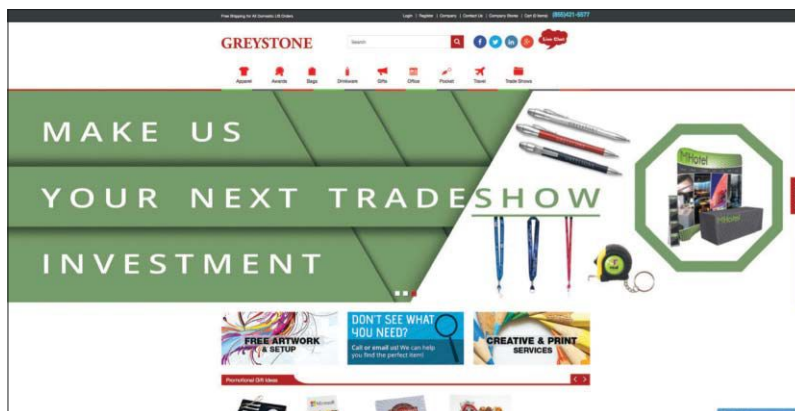
*Expanding one's e-commerce reach requires more than an information-only website. It demands a fully integrated website solution along with a comprehensive digital media presence.*

"We've been providing promotional products, creative services, print services, warehousing and e-commerce storefront solutions for over 25 years," says David Bynum, president of Greystone Specialties. "Our business model has always been built on relationship accounts that we've cultivated and nurtured over many years, providing services to the Travel, Banking, Insurance, Financial and Educational industries to name a few."

A desire to reach an even larger audience prompted Greystone Specialties to think big. Its previous website was an informative site only. "In preparing our Sales & Marketing strategy for 2014/2015, we decided we would expand our brand awareness through a new fully integrated website solution along with an comprehensive digital media presence,"

Bynum says. Greystone's new site had to be a complete Management Information System (MIS), including Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and reporting functionality. It needed to include an integrated Search Engine Optimization (SEO) site map for organic lead generation and comprehensive customer support. Ideally all upgrades would be included.

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



**"We're now in the middle of completing a small client storefront for their internal marketing collateral; the WebJaguar team helped me get it ready in less than three weeks."**

David Bynum, Greystone Specialties.

The WebJaguar platform checked all the boxes, but Bynum worried about support. "Not having a full-time IT on the premises, I needed to make sure the WebJaguar team was going to walk us through the process and continue to provide support long after the initial setup." The solution: "WebJaguar assigned a CSR to our account; he has responded to all contact and given us prompt responses as well as allowing our IT to handle all setup remotely."

After six months, Bynum sees a positive effect. From an administrative standpoint, the WebJaguar platform has streamlined business. "We have the flexibility of running a myriad of reports from the admin back-end or export just about any data," Bynum says. "Once we've accumulated more historical data, we'll experience even more efficiencies." Though

it's too early to share sales data, Bynum definitely sees a promising start. "In just two months we've had nearly 20 leads generated organically from Google keyword searches."

He also feels confident that he and his team will receive expert guidance whenever there's a challenge or new application: "Since my staff here is not tech-savvy, we've needed a lot of support and have received help from several other WebJaguar team members besides just our assigned CSR, including their president, Bachir. We're now in the middle of completing a small client storefront for their internal marketing collateral; the WebJaguar team helped me get it ready in less than three weeks."

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



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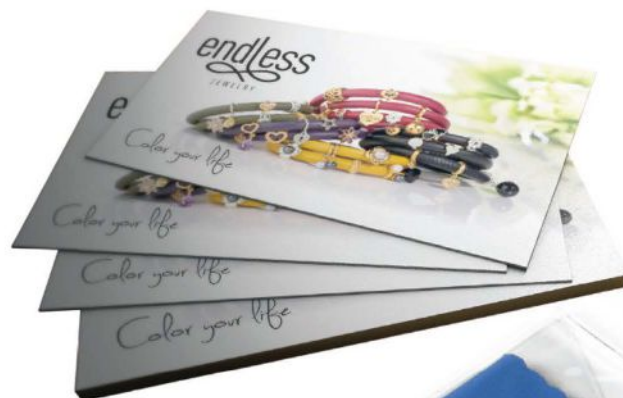


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Companies in the ad specialty industry are growing rapidly – some would say too fast. Here are five ways to ensure that your company isn't overwhelmed by growth.

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Apple founder Steve Wozniak headlined the first trade show of the year with a look at the future of technology and business. Plus, a slate of education sessions and new product offerings from suppliers paved the way for a winning 2015.



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### PPAI EXPO 82

#### Inspirational Bet

Actor Jeffrey Tambor keyed the PPAI Expo in Las Vegas in January. Check out his inspirational message, and take a look at some of the hottest products displayed at the show by exhibiting suppliers.

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Cooler Backpack



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12-Pack Cooler

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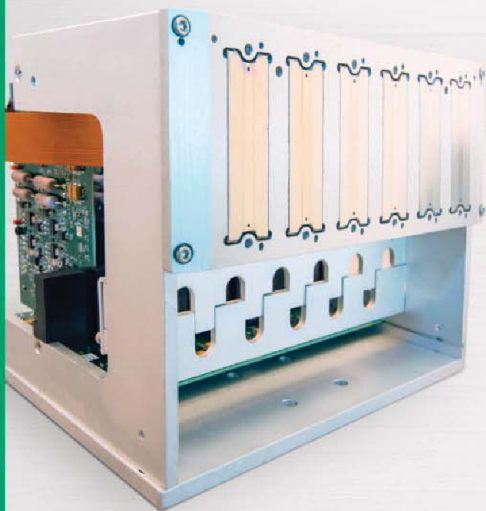
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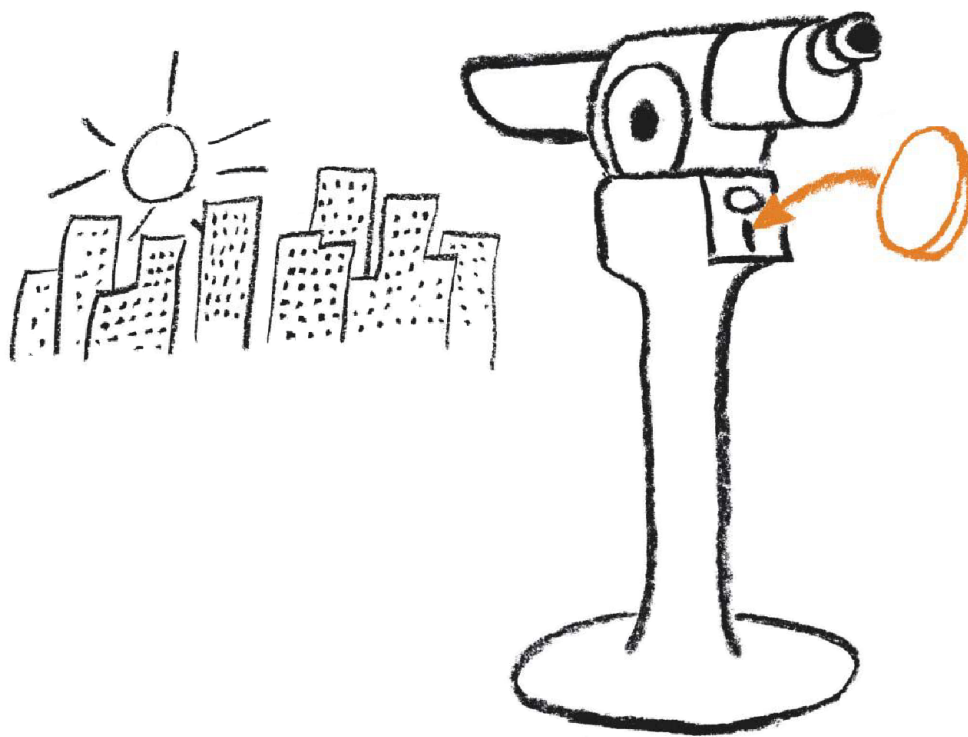
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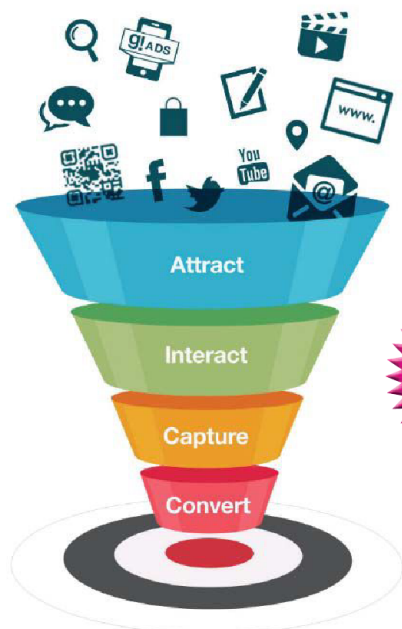
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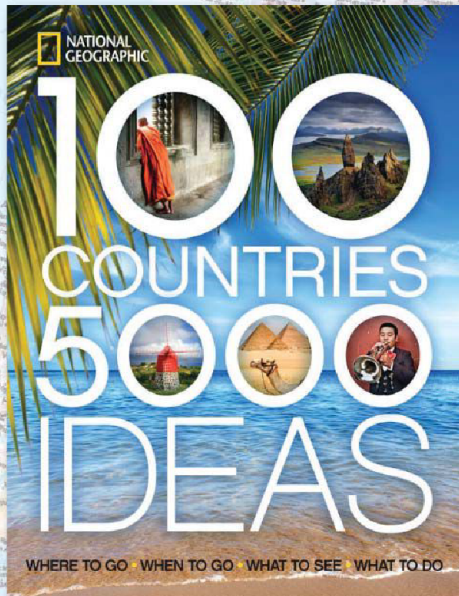
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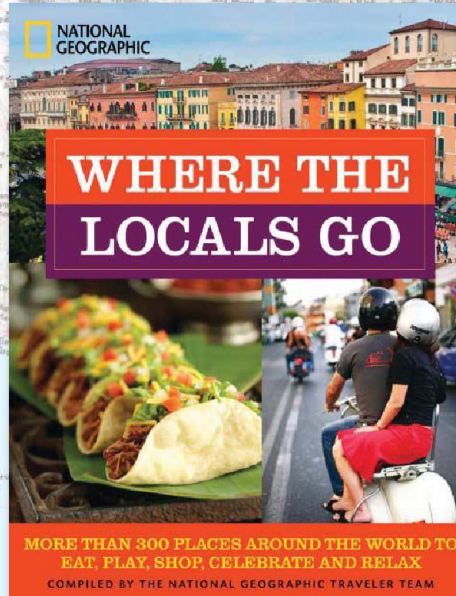
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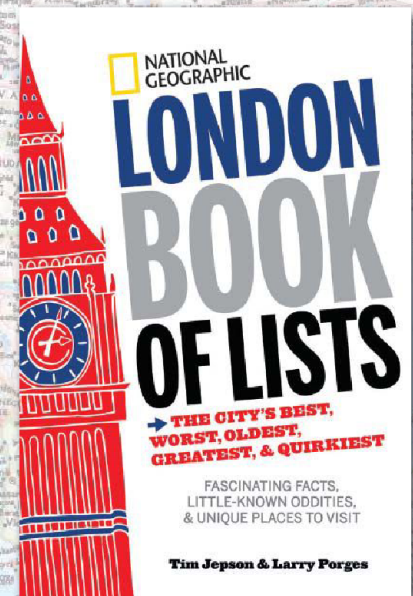
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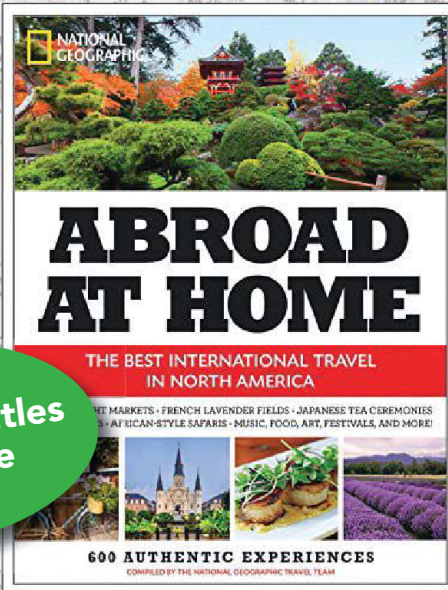
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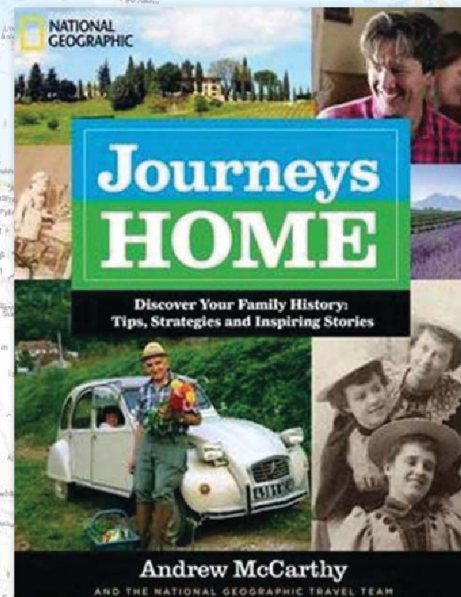
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# Editor's Letter

## Get Your Growth On

With the economy expanding, the time is now for distributors to capitalize on new business opportunities.

By Andy Cohen

Throughout the American economy, and in the ad specialty industry specifically, the sense of optimism is palpable. The National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) reported in January that small-business confidence reached an eight-year high. In fact, the NFIB said its much-followed Small Business Optimism Index increased 2.3 points to 100.4, the highest reading since October 2006. The index, which is back at its pre-recession average, was bolstered by a surge in sales expectations as well as hiring, capital outlays and business expansion plans.

Further, a separate survey later in January showed similar sentiments. The report from Endurance International Group showed that 66% of owners of companies that employ 10 people or fewer believe 2015 will be a better year economically than 2014. The result was an increase of eight percentage points over last year, when 54% of small business owners were planning for a jump in business in 2014. Buoyed by such confidence this year, more than a quarter (27%) of owners said they intend to hire new employees, while 54% stated that they plan to make financial investments, such as developing new products, in their businesses.

The feelings are similar to those seen in the promotional products industry, too. The

*Counselor* Confidence Index tied an all-time high in the fourth quarter, as distributors said their outlooks for 2015 are extremely bright. Even at the first two industry trade shows of the year – ASI Orlando and PPAI Expo – speaking with both

these kinds of big deals that are available. You might need more salespeople to take advantage of the additional opportunities. You might need new capabilities – like e-commerce and mobile marketing – to connect with a new wave of buyers

sustain growth over the long term. Many companies, as we learned from speaking to business experts and consultants for this month's cover story (see Growth Impact, beginning on page 60), can get overwhelmed by growth if it



**The *Counselor* Confidence Index tied an all-time high in the fourth quarter, as distributors said their outlooks for 2015 are extremely bright.**

suppliers and distributors, you got the sense that most companies in the ad specialty market are planning for a big year.

"It seems like clients are prepared to spend on bigger promotions and campaigns than they have been in previous years," the CEO of one Top 40 distributor company told me during the PPAI Expo in Las Vegas in January. "It's a different feeling right now. They're not just doing one-off buys. They're planning out campaigns. That's a better environment for all of us to operate in."

Indeed, 2015 may be able to be named The Year of Growth. Are you prepared to capitalize? You can't just go to market with the exact same plan as in previous years and expect to win

that aren't used to the traditional modes of purchasing. You might need new offerings – such as website design and on-site decoration services – that expanding corporate customers could call on you for.

The business climate is ripe for growth right now. Are you? Is your company set up to capitalize on expanding and new opportunities that clients are sure to present this year? The time is now to really begin focusing on growth and uncovering new business. It's there to be had. The most prepared companies – with the most diversity of service offerings – are the ones that will be able to capitalize.

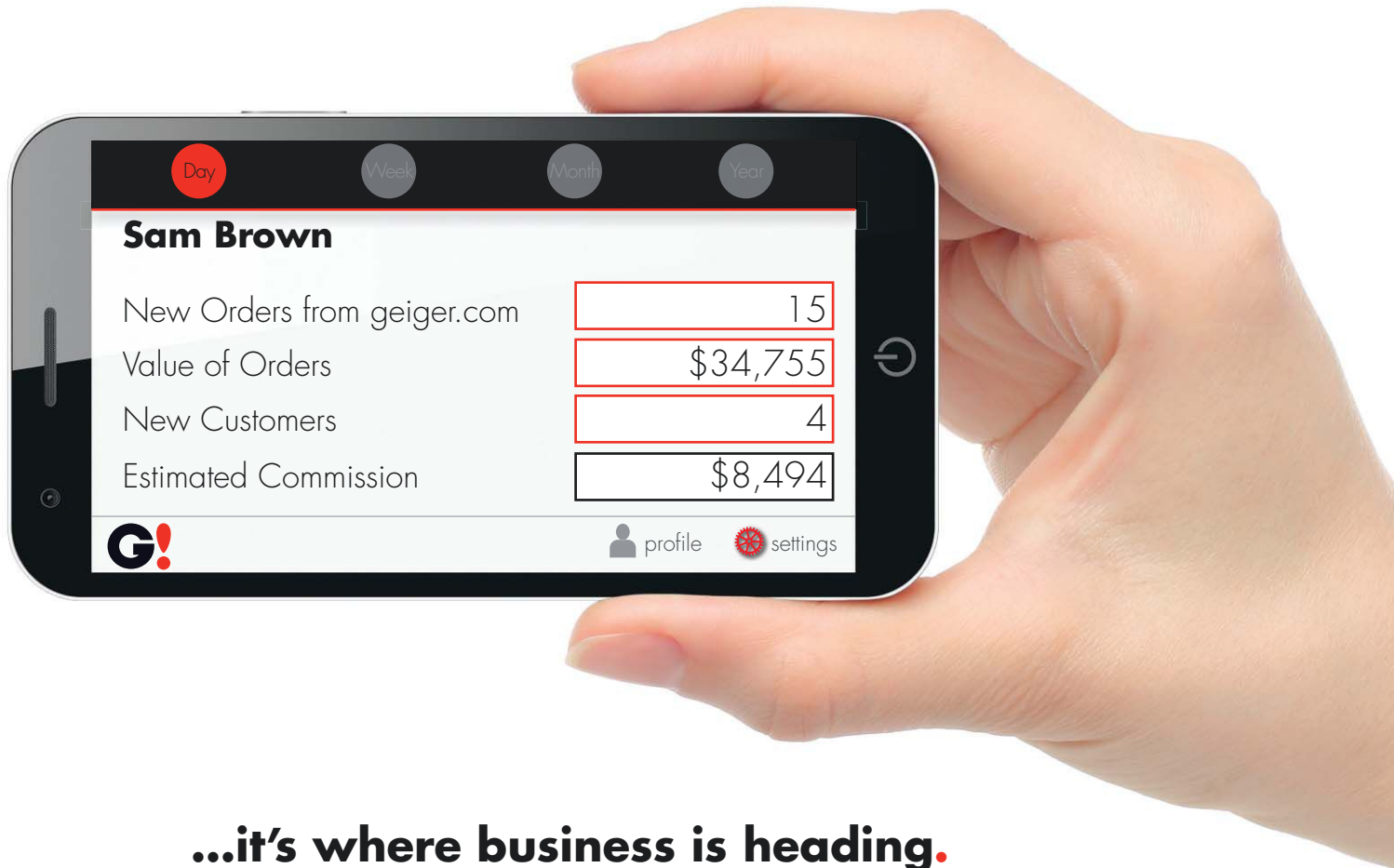
Of course, those are also the companies that will be able to

comes too fast and they're not prepared for it. The problems often lie in cash flow problems – as revenue increases, so can expenses as well as the cash on hand needed to float the bigger deals coming your way – as well as infrastructure and customer service issues.

Growing companies – of which there will certainly be many this year in the promotional products sector – need to ensure that they're set up to handle that growth. Capitalize on the big opportunities in front of you now, and carve out time to make sure you have the capital, staffing and technological resources to handle the big influx of business.

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# News

## SHOULD CONGRESS PASS A LAW GUARANTEEING U.S. WORKERS PAID SICK AND PARENTAL LEAVE?



**Mike Emoff**  
Shumsky (asi/326300)  
“This decision should be made by the employer and shouldn’t be a mandate. Competition should drive benefits, thus the employee chooses where to invest their career.”



**Katie Hallstrom**  
ASB (asi/120075)  
“With the change of the workforce having more female workers, I’d be in favor of having a paid parental leave for a period of time. I would look at 8 weeks.”



**Dan Taylor**  
BamBams (asi/38228)  
“The market can better control these things. Companies that compete for talent will provide more liberal benefits or they will lose employees to competition.”



**Paul Gittemeier**  
Tic Toc (asi/158990)  
“The wise employer caters to employee needs. Tic Toc provides new moms with eight weeks of paid leave and all employees with up to seven days of PTO and sick leave.”



**Alan Vaughn**  
Evans (asi/52840)  
“I’m fine with the proposed changes, as long as it’s done at the federal level. If we are on an even playing field with other states, we will adjust and adapt as needed.”



**Mitch Mounger**  
Sunrise (asi/339206)  
“I do not support the government’s proposals. Sunrise prides itself on having incredibly flexible policies and will always work to make employees feel supported.”

## Obama Proposes Expanded Employee Leave



In his State of the Union address, **President Obama** said the U.S. government needs to do more for working parents.

► Under current law, U.S. employers must allow 12 weeks of unpaid parental leave following the birth of a child.

► The U.S. and Papua New Guinea are the only two countries in the world that don’t guarantee paid parental leave.

► The president recently directed federal agencies to allow for six weeks of paid leave for parents with a new child or employees caring for a sick relative.

► Obama is asking Congress to pass legislation granting workers in the U.S. up to seven days of paid sick leave each year.

# Chatter

## Now Trending



“The future of work will be Time Arbitrage. You will get paid by people who can earn more from your time than you can. There will be a point where you won’t have a job. You will offer your time as a service.”

**MARK CUBAN**, INTERNET ENTREPRENEUR AND OWNER OF THE NBA'S DALLAS MAVERICKS VIA TWO CONSECUTIVE TWEETS @MCUBAN, IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION ABOUT HOW PEOPLE WILL WORK IN THE FUTURE

“#MLK: There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe nor politic nor popular but he must take it because...it is right.”

**APPLE CEO TIM COOK**, VIA TWITTER @TIM\_COOK, WITH A POST ON MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY IN JANUARY



“I knew if I was going to succeed I’d have to work twice as hard as the next guy w/fire in my belly. #MondayMotivation.”

**SHARK TANK JUDGE BARBARA CORCORAN**, VIA TWITTER @BARBARACORCORAN, WITH A MOTIVATIONAL MESSAGE FOR ENTREPRENEURS

“Innovation isn’t the same as product quality. A product breakthrough can sustain for awhile, but if quality is low, disruption is inevitable.”

**JEFF WEINER**, CEO OF LINKEDIN (@JEFFWEINER), IN RESPONSE TO A TWITTER QUESTION ABOUT HOW TO RAMP UP INNOVATION IN BUSINESS



“More crazy ideas this year than last #workresolutions.”

**ERIC SCHMIDT**, EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN OF GOOGLE, SHARING A NEW YEAR'S BUSINESS RESOLUTION VIA TWITTER @ERICSCHMIDT

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**“We’re not a very patient lot, and if it doesn’t happen pretty quickly, then they’ll be hearing from us.”**

Elliot Kaye, CPSC (see page 30)

Safety  
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## Distributor Sales Rise 5.1% in 2014

Ad specialty distributors increased their revenues by 5.1% in 2014, driving total industry sales to approximately \$21.5 billion last year, according to an exclusive report by ASI. The result is an all-time industry high for annual distributor sales, surpassing the 2013 mark of \$20.5 billion. Data also showed distributors grew sales by 5.9% in the fourth quarter of 2014, the 20th straight quarterly rise.

Meanwhile, the *Counselor* Confidence Index – a tool that

measures distributor health and optimism – improved slightly to 114 in the fourth quarter, hitting its highest point in nearly a year and tying the all-time high.

“I believe the economy is better, there is consumer confidence and clients feel it,” said Memo Kahan, president of Top 40 firm PromoShop (asi/300446), whose sales increased by double-digits last year. “When we feel good, we tend to spend more. Couple all this with gas prices going down, a stronger dollar and steady GDP growth and things are good.”

In 2014, 62% of distributors reported an increase in sales, with the largest firms seeing the most significant jumps. About 78% of larger distributors (more than \$1 million in annual revenues) reported a rise in sales, data showed. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of medium-size companies (\$250,000-\$1 million) and 57% of smaller firms (less than \$250,000) also reported an annual sales increase.

“Our sales were up 7.8% in 2014 and we hit \$43 million in total,” said Larry Cohen, president of Top 40 distributor Axis Promotions (asi/128263). “This is a big increase over 2013, which was also a good year for us. I think that many of our clients loosened some of their restraints as they became more comfortable with the overall direction of the economy and their own profit forecast.”

Going forward, most distributors feel 2015 will be another strong sales year. “For 2015, I would estimate industry growth at another 5%, and our growth should be a multiple of that,” said David Woods, president of Top 40 firm AIA Corporation (asi/109480). “Relatively solid economic growth in the U.S., plus very low interest rates, substantially lower oil prices, and an election year looming in 2016 are all factors that play into it.” – DV

## U.S. Denies Trade Benefits To Bangladesh

Trade benefits for Bangladesh will not be restored until the country does more to ensure worker safety and rights, the U.S. government formally announced in January. The U.S. originally revoked the country’s trade benefits in June of 2013 after over 1,100 factory workers died in a garment factory collapse in Bangladesh’s capital city.

A review issued by the Office of the United States Trade Representative found that more than 2,000 safety inspections of Bangladesh apparel factories have been conducted by private initiatives at the behest of North American and European brands and retailers. Those inspections resulted in the closure or partial closure of 48 factories with hundreds more needing “remedial measures.” Yet the U.S. says that several hundred factory inspections by the Bangladeshi government still must take place.

“We urge the government to complete remaining factory inspections as soon as possible to prevent recurrence of workplace tragedies such as those that occurred in 2012 and 2013,” said United States Trade Representative Michael Froman.

The report acknowledges that progress has been made, particularly fire and building safety within the factories. However, Froman said the Bangladeshi government must “accelerate its efforts to ensure workers’ rights and to take measures to address continuing reports of harassment of and violence against labor activists who are attempting to exercise their rights.” – CJM



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## Alibaba, CPSC to Prevent Sale of Recalled Goods

Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba is partnering with the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), in an effort to keep its online platforms from exporting unsafe goods to the U.S. The CPSC will provide Alibaba with a list of recalled products, which would, in turn, ensure those items aren't peddled to American companies and individuals.

According to Elliot F. Kaye, CPSC chairman, the agency will start out by giving Alibaba a list of five to 15 high-priority recalls, then expand that to include additional product categories. The CPSC would expect Alibaba to remove the listed items within hours of the notification.

"We're certainly going to hold their feet to the fire," Kaye

said in January at the Hong Kong Toys and Games Fair. "We're not a very patient lot, and if it doesn't happen pretty quickly, then they'll be hearing from us."

Kaye pointed to last year's recall of high-powered magnets being sold as toys in the U.S. The CPSC recalled the magnets in the wake of thousands of reported injuries, particularly from children requiring surgery after swallowing them. Some companies on Alibaba had been selling the magnets wholesale; the new partnership, Kaye said, would help keep such dangerous listings off Alibaba sites.

The CPSC first approached Alibaba about cooperating two years ago. The partnership would likely have the most

impact on the Chinese company's business-to-business site, which sells goods produced by Chinese manufacturers to American importers and businesses. The company said last month that it spent \$160 million combating the sale of fake goods on its sites over the last two years. However, critics say the company is slow to pull listings of pirated goods and that they often quickly reappear under different names.

"We look forward to working collaboratively with the chairman and his team to do everything possible to protect consumers," said Jim Wilkinson, Alibaba Group's senior vice president for corporate affairs, in a statement. — DV

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Crime





## Survey

# IRS Ill-Equipped to Help Taxpayers

Taxpayers should expect the worst service by the IRS in nearly 15 years in the upcoming tax season, according to a new report that was released in January. The National Taxpayer Advocate, a watchdog group within the IRS, said in its annual report that increased workload and reduced funding will create a “perfect storm” that will frustrate taxpayers.

“Taxpayers who need help are not getting it, and tax compliance is likely to suffer over the longer term if these problems are not quickly and decisively addressed,” wrote National Taxpayer Advocate Nina E. Olson, who oversees the report.

According to the report, the

IRS is unlikely to answer half of the more than 100 million phone calls it receives from taxpayers. Callers should expect to wait 30 minutes on average and “considerably longer at peak times” according to the report.

In addition, during the upcoming filing season, the IRS will only answer “basic tax-law questions and will not answer any after the filing season concludes – even though 15 million taxpayers file later in the year. Tax assistance by the IRS has been completely eliminated.

“We do not think it is acceptable for the government to tell millions of taxpayers who seek help each year, in essence, ‘We’re sorry. You’re on your



own,” the report says.

The report says that compared to a decade ago, the IRS is receiving 11% more returns from individuals, 18% more returns from business entities and 70% more telephone calls – and that implementation of the Affordable Care Act, among other things, will create considerably more work. But the

IRS’ budget has been reduced by about 17% from five years ago, resulting in a reduction of nearly 12,000 employees.

“Like any agency, the IRS can operate more effectively and efficiently in certain areas,” Olson wrote. “However, we do not see any substitute for sufficient personnel if high-quality taxpayer service is to be provided.”

In addition to increased funding, Olson recommends taxpayers have access to individual names and contact information of IRS personnel who are assigned to an audit or tax matter. She also suggests that it should be more clear who the appropriate person is to speak to for specific questions. – CR

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# California Plastic Bag Ban To Face Ballot Repeal

A coalition of manufacturers and chemical companies are on the verge of forcing a California ballot measure that could repeal the state's single-use plastic bag ban. The likely referendum, which would take place in November of 2016, comes as opponents of the ban have gathered 500,000 signatures to compel a vote.

Under California law, the referendum would at least delay the pending plastic bag ban by 16 months – as challenged laws can't take effect until voters have cast their ballots on the issue.

"We are pleased to have reached this important milestone in the effort to repeal a terrible piece of job-killing

legislation, and look forward to giving California voters a chance to make their voice heard at the ballot box in 2016," said Lee Califf, executive director of the American Progressive Bag Alliance, which drove the referendum fight.

Prior to the measure, California was set to become the first state to officially ban single-use plastic bags on July 1, 2015. After a multi-year political battle, the state's legislature passed a ban earlier this year. The law – signed by California Governor Jerry Brown in September – would have given consumers the choice to either shop with reusable totes or pay 10 cents for

a paper bag or multiuse plastic carrier at checkout. It also would have let local governments impose fines of up to \$5,000 on businesses that didn't comply with the law.

Supporters of the ban contend the referendum initiative was effectively bought with nearly \$3 million from plastics manufacturers – many of them not even from California. "The problem with the referendum is that it would postpone implementation of the ban that's already been passed," said Mark Murray, a member of Californians Against Waste. "That means more plastic bags, more clean-up costs, more costs for



stores and consumers."

Polls have shown the majority of Californians support a state-wide single-use plastic bag ban. Already, 138 California cities and counties have approved plastic bag bans. – DV

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# Online Branding Vital for Small Businesses

A new survey reveals that most small businesses are planning for growth in 2015, and more than a third of them believe that online branding is going to help them succeed. In fact, 35% of small businesses surveyed by Rocket Lawyer, an online legal services company, said growing an online presence is their top priority in 2015. The survey pointed out that a strong online brand is vital for business success today, with 29% of small-business owners indicating this factor as their biggest concern.

"The main piece of advice we provide our small-business customers when engaging in

social media is to put together guidelines in advance," Charley Moore, CEO and founder of Rocket Lawyer, said. "They can do this in their employee handbook or in a separate social media policy. This way, all employees will understand the proper behavior when engaging with followers before they interact with the company's social channels."

While the survey showed that 61% of small businesses grew revenues in 2014 and 80% said they're expecting to do the same in 2015, it also revealed these companies' growing reliance on mobile technology to run their businesses. Sixty per-



cent of small businesses surveyed said they would consider adopting mobile payments in

2015 as a way to offer their customers a more seamless and simple payment experience.

"When deciding whether to adopt a mobile payment strategy, it's important for [a company] to determine if it makes sense for their business by considering the benefits and risks," Moore said. "For example, will it give them more of a competitive edge? Will it encourage one-time customers to become recurring customers due to its ease of use?"

Rocket Lawyer's survey included responses from nearly 500 U.S. small-business owners and was conducted in early January. – CR

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Mergers & Acquisitions

# Newspaper Owner Expands Into Ad Specialties

A.H. Belo, owner of *The Dallas Morning News*, is adding promotional products to its long-range strategy. The company purchased majority ownership of three Dallas-based marketing companies for \$15.3 million: Distribion, Vertical Nerve and Marketing FX (asi/154786). The three companies will maintain their current management team, day-to-day operations and location.

The companies will become part of the newly formed DMV Digital Holdings Co. Marketing FX provides print, packaging, promotional product and ful-

fillment services to companies nationwide, Distribion provides a local automation solution for marketing campaigns, while Vertical Nerve is a digital optimization agency that helps clients increase Web traffic. "The addition of these three new companies to our portfolio represents an opportunity for our advertising clients to take advantage of data-driven marketing automation technology and services," said Jim Moroney, chairman, president and CEO of A.H. Belo. "These are first-class companies, and we are excited to provide new

opportunities to help our clients grow their businesses."

The management team behind Distribion, Vertical Nerve and Marketing FX invested alongside A.H. Belo in the purchase. Tim Storer, CEO/chairman of the three companies, retains a minority stake. *The Dallas Morning News* reported that the three companies would have access to the 75 salespeople employed by the newspaper. Storer said he plans to hire up to 20 people over the next 18 months.

Distribion, Vertical Nerve and Marketing FX are expected

to bring A.H. Belo between \$9 million and \$11 million in revenue this year.

## ► Polyconcept Announces Sale of ADM Division

Polyconcept, parent company of *Counselor* Top 40 supplier Polyconcept North America and PF Concept, announced it has agreed to the sale of ADM. The company is a communications agency and distributor based in Europe that was started by Polyconcept in 1992. The sale effectively ends Polyconcept's role as a distributor in Europe.

The company was bought out



Jeff Meyer, MAS, CPA



John Schimmoller, CPA



Jamie Watson, CPA

## Valuation Time... Most business owners don't know the value of their companies. Their companies are the most valuable assets they have.



Some owners who track the value of their stocks and mutual funds and know how much their house is worth **don't have a clue** how much their companies are worth. Reasons to obtain and understand the value of your company include:

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- Evaluating & planning for the sale of your company
- Estate planning
- Independent valuation on a promotional product company you want to buy
- Marital dissolution

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by an investor group led by the ADM management team. No additional debt was accrued in the acquisition by the investor group, which has agreed to inject new financing into ADM. Financial details of the transaction were not revealed. "This is a very exciting development for ADM," said Justin Barton, CEO of ADM. "We are fortunate to have a stable business platform, the best people in our market and a global infrastructure we can build on. As a standalone business, we will have flexibility and focus to continue the development of our capabilities to better serve our clients."

ADM is based in London and has 18 offices in 13 countries. Polyconcept will act solely as a supplier in Europe through its PF Concept division and its four companies (Avenue, Bullet,

Label and WorldSource).

#### ► **Chocolate Inn Acquires A La Carte**

Chocolate Inn/Taylor & Grant (asi/44900) has acquired the assets of Chicago-based A La Carte (asi/30350). The deal marks the first major strategic growth initiative by Chocolate Inn/Taylor & Grant since their merger in 2011. Financial terms of the deal were not released. Through the deal, Chocolate Inn/Taylor & Grant has expanded its offerings to include new flexographic printing, custom candy imprinting and more die-cutting capabilities. In addition, the supplier firm will be adding a range of new products, such as customizable multicolor bags in a range of sizes, fortune cookies, mini roll mints and more. Over-

all, Chocolate Inn/Taylor & Grant expects to bolster its food gift product line this year with more than 75 new items from A La Carte.

Mike Shulkin, A La Carte's president, is joining Chocolate Inn/Taylor & Grant as Midwest regional sales manager.

#### ► **Wolfmark Acquires Designs by Anthony**

Wolfmark (asi/98085) has acquired the assets of Designs by Anthony. Financial terms of the deal were not released. The transaction provides Wolfmark with expanded product line in the custom ties and scarves category. Wolfmark, which was started in 1937, is a supplier of custom and stock accessories, including neckwear, blankets, sashes, scarves, culinary apparel and fleece accessories.

#### ► **Talbot Acquires Novack Uniform Solutions**

Ontario-based Talbot Marketing (asi/341500) has purchased the assets of Novack Uniform Solutions. Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed. "Workwear and uniforms have been a segment of the market growing for us in past years, so we identified this move as a real opportunity," Steve Levschuk, president of Talbot, told *Counselor*.

Founded in 2004 by Paul Caplan and his wife Sandi, Novack Uniform Solutions does business both in Canada and internationally. It mainly has served customers in the security, medical, hospitality and industrial markets. According to Levshuk, Novack's staff has moved to Talbot's location.

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Commentary

## ◀ Are You Growing Too Fast?



When clients are opening up their wallets and the economy is growing at a nice clip, distributor firms can certainly get ahead of themselves a little bit. Orders can come in fast, new business can surge and fulfillment projects that used to take one person to get done suddenly need multiple sets of hands. Fast-growing companies need to recognize the signs that they might be growing too fast, or else the success might begin to overwhelm them. Has customer service lagged? Can't return client calls as quickly as you used to?

Are employees overworked? These are some of the signs that growth may be coming too fast. Take our online quiz now at [www.CounselorMag.com](http://www.CounselorMag.com) to determine if you've taken the necessary steps to smartly thrive today.

### Art of an Apology

An excerpt from a recent **Counselor Commentary** on our website. Go to [www.CounselorMag.com](http://www.CounselorMag.com) to view the complete archive.

We've all had our failures at work, but they probably don't compare to Gary Szatkowski's colossal mess-up in late January. Szatkowski, the lead forecaster at the National Weather Service office in Mt. Holly, NJ, issued an aggressive snowfall map ahead of the so-called Blizzard of 2015. His forecast called for one to two feet of snow from the Philadelphia area up to New York City. Instead, the storm tracked farther east, burying New England, but leaving the Mid-Atlantic states mostly unscathed.

After the storm passed, Szatkowski took to Twitter to apologize. "My deepest apologies to many key decision makers and so many members of the general public," he wrote. "You made a lot of tough decisions expecting us to get it right, and we didn't. Once again, I'm sorry."

Curiously, the snap social media reaction to Szatkowski's mea culpa wasn't anger or ridicule, but appreciation. Apparently, in weather forecasting, just like in business, the words "I'm sorry" do wonders in diffusing a tense situation. Of course, there is an art to apologizing that makes some attempts more effective than others. Business author Bruna Martinuzzi has put together a simple five-step formula: First, say you are sorry; then, state what you did wrong; next, acknowledge how the receiving party must be feeling; fourth, express your sincere regret; and finally, promise not to repeat the behavior.

Any of us can easily follow this advice, whether we're dealing with a client upset with an order error, a business partner who feels he was mistreated, or a subordinate employee who was embarrassed in front of others. Even months or years after a misstep, a heartfelt apology can be a powerful way to repair hurt feelings.



### Great Outdoors

"Live events give clients a great way to reach their customers one on one. Think of items like T-shirts, signs, spirit products and high-tech gadgets that connect audiences."

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

### SOI Revealed

# 12.4%

The market share of distributor revenues represented by the health-care sector – annual total of more than **\$2.5 billion**, according to **Counselor's State of the Industry**.

### Facebook Comments We Loved

What one promo product would you want if you were stranded on a desert island?

Rhiannon Rowland

*A hat to keep the sun out of my eyes.*

Angie Gallo

*A solar charger, so I could read, send emails, orders & conduct business.*

Leon Kriner  
*Flashlight.*

Adam Brown  
*Solar Powered Power Bank.*

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# Stock Report

## Suppliers Start Strong

January tough for distributors.

► **Index Watch**  
December 18 - January 29

Distributor  
**-6.33%**

Supplier  
**+4.13%**

12/18/14-1/29/15								
Company	Stock Exchange	Symbol	52-week high	52-week low	Per-Share Price (1/29/15)	Market Capitalization (in millions)	Per-Share Change	Percent Change
<b>DISTRIBUTORS</b>								
► <b>4imprint Group</b>	LSE	FOURL	£ 8.50	£ 6.11	£ 8.83	£ 238	0.83 ↑	<b>10.38%</b>
► <b>Inner Workings Inc.</b>	NASDAQ	INWK	9.44	4.94	5.44	285	(2.35) ↓	<b>-30.17%</b>
► <b>Mobiquity Technologies Inc.*</b>	OTC	MOBQ	0.78	0.21	0.27	N/A	(0.08) ↓	<b>-22.86%</b>
► <b>New England Business Services Inc.</b> (Div. Deluxe Corp.)	NYSE	DLX	66.24	44.64	65.46	3,230	5.15 ↑	<b>8.54%</b>
► <b>Tic Toc</b> (Div. Omnicom Group Inc.)	NYSE	OMC	78.49	64.03	74.19	18,254	(2.05) ↓	<b>-2.69%</b>
► <b>Staples Promotional Products</b> (Div. Staples Inc.)	NASDAQ	SPLS	18.33	10.70	17.09	10,840	(0.20) ↓	<b>-1.16%</b>
<b>SUPPLIERS</b>								
► <b>3M Promotional Markets Dept.</b> (Div. 3M Corp.)	NYSE	MMM	168.16	123.61	166.13	104,230	5.53 ↑	<b>3.44%</b>
► <b>American Apparel Inc.</b>	AMEX	APP	1.30	0.46	0.87	149	0.18 ↑	<b>26.09%</b>
► <b>BIC Corp.</b>	PAR	BIC	€ 126.55	€ 84.01	€ 124.8	€ 5,980	16.80 ↑	<b>15.56%</b>
► <b>Cutter &amp; Buck</b> (Div. New Wave Group)	STO	NEWAB	€ 47.3	€ 26.8	€ 42.9	€ 2,001	4.50 ↑	<b>11.72%</b>
► <b>Delta Apparel Inc.</b>	AMEX	DLA	8.21	17.60	9.32	73	(0.68) ↓	<b>-6.80%</b>
► <b>Ennis Inc.</b> (Parent company of Admore and Alstyle Apparel)	NYSE	EBF	17.06	12.51	13.57	342	0.34 ↑	<b>2.57%</b>
► <b>Fossil Special Markets Division</b>	NASDAQ	FOSL	125	91.84	99.99	5,020	(6.56) ↓	<b>-6.16%</b>
► <b>Hanesbrands</b>	NYSE	HBI	118.27	67.40	116.07	11,112	5.18 ↑	<b>4.67%</b>
► <b>Hilton Apparel Group</b> (Div. Jarden Corp.)	NYSE	JAH	49.98	36.17	48.99	9,370	2.70 ↑	<b>5.83%</b>
► <b>Johnson Worldwide Assoc./JWA</b>	NASDAQ	JOUT	31.75	19.61	29.92	289	1.69 ↑	<b>5.99%</b>
► <b>Lancer Label</b> (Div. Mail Well Inc.)	NYSE	CVO	3.85	1.39	1.92	129	(0.14) ↓	<b>-6.80%</b>
► <b>Lee Printwear</b> (Div. VFCorp. Acquisition Co.)	NYSE	VFC	76.89	55.14	71.39	30,250	(1.74) ↓	<b>-2.38%</b>
► <b>Pfaelzer Brothers</b> (Div. ConAgra)	NYSE	CAG	37.46	28.09	36.47	15,270	(0.63) ↓	<b>-1.70%</b>
► <b>Sanford Business-To-Business</b> (Div. Newell Rubbermaid)	NYSE	NWL	38.77	28.27	37.97	10,180	2.10 ↑	<b>5.85%</b>

\*Formerly Ace Marketing & Promotions Inc.

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





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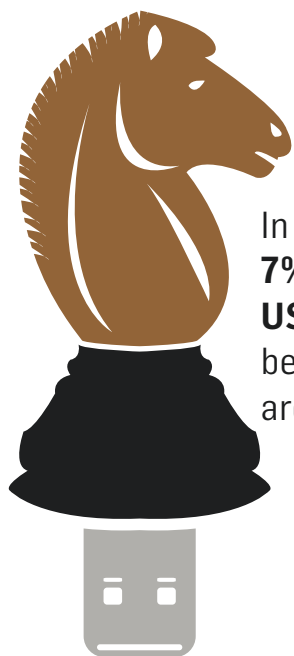


# Number Crunch

## USB Utility

Data shows that USB drives are favored promotional items to receive because of their extreme usefulness.

### Utility is Key

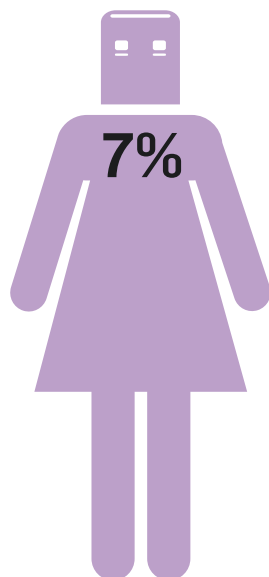
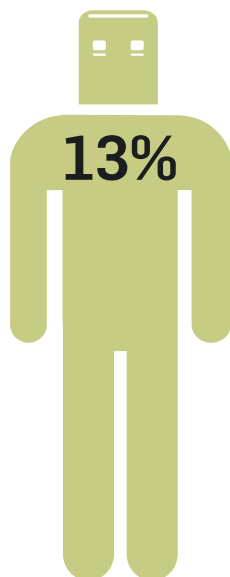


In the U.S.,  
**7% keep  
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because they  
are attractive.



In the U.S.,  
**91% keep  
USB drives**  
because they  
are useful.

**Men** are more likely to own a branded USB drive.

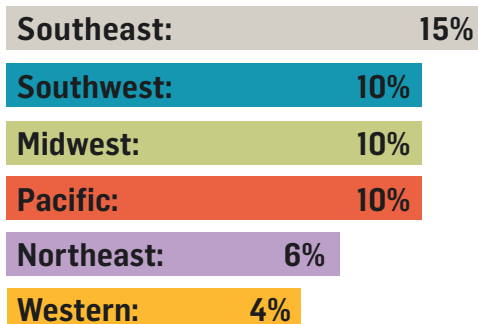


COUNSELOR | MARCH 2015

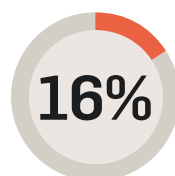
**10%**  
**OF U.S.  
CONSUMERS  
OWN LOGOED  
USB DRIVES**



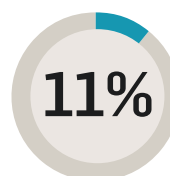
**Consumers in  
the Southeast  
are most likely  
to own a USB  
drive.**



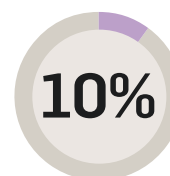
**In the U.S., Asian consumers are the  
most likely to own a USB drive.**



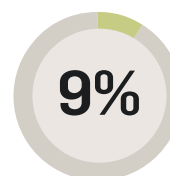
Asian



Black



Hispanic



White





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# Product Picks

A collection of unique products

By Chuck Zak

1

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## 6. EAT YOUR HEART OUT

With three custom-foiled chocolate pieces inside a full-bleed printed box (7325), this product combines satisfying milk or dark chocolate with two great packaging options. Sure-fire thank you gift for clients or an especially memorable self-promo for reaching potential customers. Available from Chocolate Chocolate (asi/44897); [www.chocolate2.com](http://www.chocolate2.com)

## 7. CAN TOO

Great color choices and a handy burlap/neoprene pocket highlight this can insulator (KK-ADDPKT-BUR) with colored stitching. Bright update on a classic product, perfect for casual restaurants or summer festivals. Available from NUMO (asi/74710); [www.numomfg.com](http://www.numomfg.com)

## 8. LAYERED LOOKS

The soft cotton blend and attractive styling of this men's quarter-zip sweater (4072) provides lightweight comfort in any climate. Easily embroidered, it's perfect for the office or for socializing at networking events or trade shows. Available from Edwards Garment (asi/51752); [www.edwardsgarment.com](http://www.edwardsgarment.com)

## 9. CARRY THAT WEIGHT

The Q is a mid-sized backpack (396-3-2001) with laptop and iPad protection and a front panel that unzips to reveal multiple accessory pockets. Lots of practical purpose for university stores or as an incentive for laptop-toting employees. Available from Timbuk2 (asi/91272); [www.timbuk2.com](http://www.timbuk2.com)

## 1. GOING PLACES

This cowhide leather luggage tag (2499) holds a business or ID card and features a heavy-duty swivel clasp that hooks on and off easily. Great giveaway to promote travel-related media or airport hotel chains. Available from Strong Leather (asi/89960); [www.strongleather.com](http://www.strongleather.com)

## 2. VINYL FANTASY

Bold graphics highlight this tote bag (E1302) made from repurposed vinyl banner with single-layer construction and an interior pocket. Imprint options include custom woven patches or hang tags, and it makes a sharp item for clients in retail or anyone promoting new eco-friendly initiatives. Available from Ecologic Designs (asi/51567); [www.ecologicdesigns.com](http://www.ecologicdesigns.com)

## 3. POUR CREDIT

BPA-free double-wall 14-ounce tumbler (MG945) features a two-tone stainless steel exterior and black polypropylene plastic liner. With a plastic screw-on slide-lock lid, this is an attractive drinkware choice for health care, automotive or financial customers. Available from Jetline (asi/63344); [www.jetlinepromo.com](http://www.jetlinepromo.com)

## 4. RAISE THE FLAG

The pull-out banner on this unique writing utensil (BP-805) has a generous imprint area on both sides so your client can get the most out of their message. A compact way to show off vivid logos and info-rich graphics or for clients to provide maps and schedules. Available from Quinn Flags (asi/80228); [www.promoflagmaker.com](http://www.promoflagmaker.com)

## 5. NOTES OF NOTE

This 320-page memo pad (BC906L) features a pen that magnetically sits on top and a smooth leather-like cover. Functional giveaway with very professional appearance for temp agencies,



3



4



5

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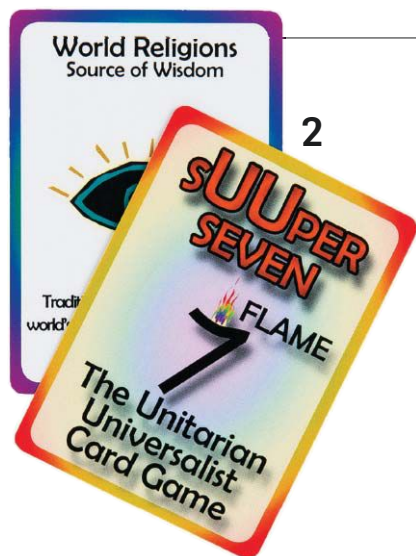


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### 1. SHINE ONLINE

The stainless steel elements of this crystal flash drive (Crystal Drive) give it an impressively solid look while the glass body illuminates when plugged in, highlighting the engraved logo. A tech item with upscale appeal for luxury auto dealers or investment banks. Available from Techtron Industries (asi/90696); [www.techtronindustries.com](http://www.techtronindustries.com)

### 2. IT'S A DEAL

Turn the goal of promotion into an entertaining game with a deck of cards that are fully customized on both sides. Try these for conferences, orientations or staff training to communicate your client's unique value proposition. Available from Engame Custom Card Games (asi/56501); [www.getwellgames.com](http://www.getwellgames.com)

### 3. SANDWICH CLUB

This lightweight non-insulated lunch tote bag (924) secures meals with a foldable flap and Velcro closure. Reusable and recyclable, it makes a colorful, practical promo with a large imprint area for clients operating campgrounds, parks or children's museums. Available from Innovation Line (asi/62660); [www.innovation-line.com](http://www.innovation-line.com)

### 4. MAKE THE CUT

Simply peel off the back strip from the Wizer wall scissors (53919) and stick to any flat surface for a safe and convenient option to standard scissors. Its stainless steel blade is great for cutting retail tags, yarn or string, making it ideal for real estate clients or safety promotions. Available from C3 Products International LLC (asi/47826); [www.thewizer.com](http://www.thewizer.com)



4



5

### 5. SKIN IN THE GAME

The SPF 30 Sun Stick (SSCF30) is great for either summer or winter sun when nose, cheeks, ears and lips need a little tropical scented sunscreen protection. Use to promote all-season resorts or dermatologists. Available from Natural Trends (asi/73497); [www.naturaltrends.com](http://www.naturaltrends.com)

### 6. REFRESH AND RECHARGE

The sleek JuiceBox is a 4000mAh lithium ion power bank (JUICE) with the capacity to give devices one-and-a-half full charges and comes in an immediately recognizable package. Perfect for beverage companies but also makes a unique travel or media promotion. Available from OrigAudio (asi/75254); [www.origaudio.com](http://www.origaudio.com)

### 7. THERE'S THE RUB

Relax tense muscles with this large acrylic massager (MA200) that brings the comfort of a spa anywhere. It's a great item for rehab clinics or to promote fitness centers. Available from Webb Company (asi/95838); [www.webbcompany.com](http://www.webbcompany.com)

### 8. LOCKED IN

The full-color imprint on this bright nickel finish circular keytag (SPKRO-1) includes a protective epoxy dome and the tag has a split keyring attachment and clear vinyl sleeve. An ideal give-away for spas, nail salons or even for health-care promotions. Available from EMT (asi/52263); [www.emteasy.com](http://www.emteasy.com)

### 9. WRAP IT UP

This soft, lightweight diamond-pattern Turkish towel (HC-PSH-DIA) is fast-drying and highly absorbent. The more you wash and use it, the softer it becomes. Great for travel or for child- and baby-care clients. Available from Chakir Linen (asi/88127); [www.chakirlinen.com](http://www.chakirlinen.com)

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# Case Studies

Profile • Management • Promo

## Profile

# How to Win Press Coverage

Relevancy, reliability and relationships are key.

By Dave Vagnoni

Securing positive media coverage is a real benefit to your company and should be part of your marketing strategy. When you're featured in a news article, TV report or social media post, you gain free publicity and often increased credibility. So what's the secret to winning over the press?

"The key to gaining positive media coverage is establishing yourself as a reliable source of relevant content," says Kendra Smith, manager of public relations at Top 40 distributor Proforma (asi/300046). "As you develop relationships, reporters will start turning to you for information and you'll have the opportunity to put your business in the spotlight."

Read Smith's advice on earning more press.

### **Q: How do you effectively reach out to journalists?**

**A:** We have the most success contacting journalists by email. Meeting in-person is also a great way to get to know journalists on a personal level, so we connect with them at industry shows.

### **Q: How do you identify what reporters and publications you should pitch?**

**A:** By reading what reporters are writing about, we can pitch stories that are relevant to the

theme of their publication. Then we identify the journalist who writes about topics most closely related to our story.

### **Q: What types of stories tend to win the most press?**

**A:** Stories that have a human interest angle, feature unique projects, include high-profile clients or are about a major business deal like an acquisition. It isn't always the biggest sale that attracts the most attention, but sometimes it's those unique events that are interesting, helpful or relatable to the audience.

### **Q: How do you make everyday stories more interesting?**

**A:** Local angles, tying your story to a current event or incorporating an emotional element are all very effective ways to gain coverage. When we pitch stories for our owners, we talk through a lot of different aspects of the story to try to find the right angle for the right publication. Sometimes it might take pitching the same story with several different angles before you find one that works.

### **Q: What are the keys to writing a good press release?**

**A:** There are a lot of elements, but I think one of the most important things to remem-



**Kendra Smith** is the manager of public relations at Proforma.

ber is to always write with the publication's target audience in mind. Reporters care about what their audience cares about. Explain the "who, what, when, where and why" upfront and why your announcement should matter to them.

### **Q: How has social media changed the way you communicate with the press?**

**A:** If you follow reporters' blogs, posts and tweets you can learn about what articles they're working on and what stories they like to cover. Because of the nature of social media, you can also learn about reporters' personal interests, which is helpful for relationship building.

### **Q: Do you train your owners on how to talk to reporters?**

**A:** We provide them with key

talking points. We also offer to have one of our PR team members join the interview to provide support and additional information the reporter may request. If an owner isn't comfortable speaking with a reporter, we encourage them to answer the interview questions by email, when possible. This takes some of the pressure off and we can help them carefully craft their message.

### **Q: How do you track the coverage you receive?**

**A:** Automated programs tend to be expensive. We use Google Alerts, which gives us an email notification when a new article is published online mentioning Proforma. We also gauge our coverage by scanning key industry publications each month.

### **Q: How do you respond to a media outlet when a story is incorrect or negative?**

**A:** Because of the media relationships we've established, this doesn't happen often. If we do have concerns about the coverage, we reach out to the reporter directly. We might ask: Could we have provided better information? Having an ongoing and open dialogue with media contacts helps us ensure our company is represented accurately.



# Management

## Keep Data Safe

There may be no more important step companies need to take today than ensuring their digital information is protected. Act now to avoid disaster later.

By Theresa Hegel

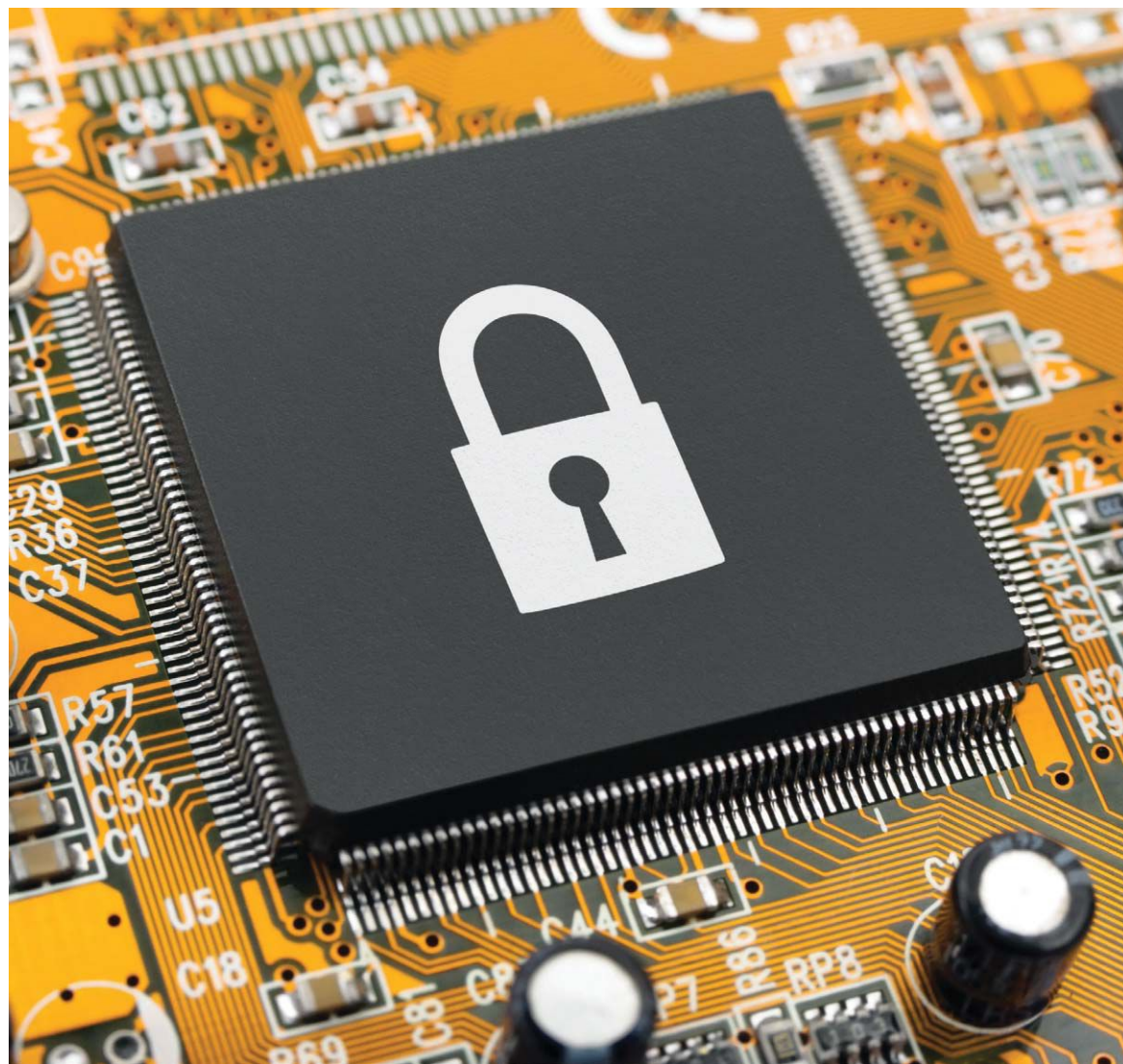
High-profile retailers have become the victims of a slew of recent data breaches, with hackers stealing incredible amounts of information. At Home Depot, for example, 56 million customer credit and debit cards were potentially compromised last year. Before that, Target took a major hit in 2013, as online thieves swiped data from 40 million of its customers.

But, experts believe, big-name companies and those who frequent them aren't the only ones who should be worried – the little guys are also vulnerable. "Hackers see small businesses as low-hanging fruit, not as being unworthy of their attention," says Kai Pfister, owner of New Jersey-based Black Cipher Security.

In fact, a recent study released by Experian Data Breach Resolution and the Ponemon Institute found that 43% of all U.S. companies had experienced a breach in the last year alone. Needless to say, that's a lot of compromised data. What can you do to avoid becoming the next victim? Here are several steps to take.

### Pick Strong Services

For many industry companies – regardless of size – improving data security comes down to choosing Web-hosting services and other online products that are established and trustwor-



you if any suspicious activity is detected. This is a key factor in knowing that you've purchased not only a software program, but also a comprehensive service that will proactively inform you if something suspicious arises, rather than solely reacting to hack attempts.

Finally, only go with hosts that guarantee 24/7 phone and Web chat support from technicians, not basic support reps.

### Use SSL Certificates

The most common method of protecting online data is to use Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) encryption technology. SSL certificates are like a secret handshake between two servers, ensuring data is transmitted privately. You can recognize whether a site is using SSL if the Web address begins with "https," rather than simply "http."

Some SSL certificates will also add a green bar or tiny pad-

## Practice Smart Security

Even if you're not a tech-savvy cyber guru, there are plenty of simple steps a small-business owner can take to help secure digital operations.

**Create strong passwords.** Dan Timpson, vice president of technology for DigiCert, a website authentication and encryption provider, recommends using long passphrases that include numbers and symbols, rather than just letters. Avoid simple combinations and phrases, too, like "iloveyou" and "abc123."

**Consider a password manager.** This enables you to create unique and "difficult-to-crack" passwords across multiple platforms, Timpson says. "Many password managers are available for free and will generate and store strong passwords for you," he adds. If you're worried you or your employees will forget complex passwords, there are secure sites that can store this information and keep it updated.

**Monitor your network.** Minimize the number

of programs you use, and keep an eye on Web traffic to make sure everything is running as it should, says John Murphy, a security researcher for network security firm FlowTraq. "There's no better pattern-matching system on the planet than the human brain," he says.

**Educate employees.** "Adopt the attitude that every one of your employees has to be a security officer," Murphy says. Create and train workers in "smart security" procedures, like being wary of email attachments, not sharing passwords or login credentials and data-handling protocols. Warn staffers not to use public Wi-Fi networks in coffee shops, hotels and airports that are breeding grounds for hackers.

**Stay up to date.** Make sure your operating system and application patches are current to protect against potential breaches. Also, when employees leave the company, be sure to turn off their accounts and access immediately.

lock icon to the browser to show the site is secure. SSL providers will often give out an emblem that can be posted on a website to show off its secure status.

In the past, the trend was only to use such certificates for sensitive pages that require data input because encryption slows sites down, Hunt says,

but that's changing. "It's getting more exposure now," he says. "Many consumers are getting concerned about security and asking, 'Is this website safe?'"

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Having a prominently displayed SSL certificate has become a marketing tool, too, according to Hunt. SSL certificates are available through some Web hosts, but also look to digital security companies such as Symantec.

Without question, SSL certificates are critical if you plan to sell promotional items on your website. As customers become savvier, research shows they look for markers to ensure their purchases are safe. As an example, a recent survey conducted by VeriSign showed 93% of online shoppers felt it was important for an e-commerce site to include a trust mark of some kind on its purchase page.

### Establish Firewalls

For companies that host their own servers, it's paramount to have a strong, commercial-

grade firewall in place to help separate networks from the outside world, says Melissa Minchala, CEO of DataVelocity, a managed IT services and solutions company in New York. The cost will run a business anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars – but it's necessary. It's also a good idea to have centrally managed virus protection software that limits viruses, malware and Trojans from gaining a toehold in your network, she adds.

### Limit Collection & Retention

It's good to remember, experts say, that the more information you collect, the more you're responsible for. That's why it's a smart strategy to only get client data you need for each deal, while erasing names, bank records and credit card

info from past transactions. You should routinely delete old and confidential data completely – not just hard copies, but hard drives as well.

Also, if you use free cloud storage technology – where files tend to float for years – be absolutely certain that all data is encrypted. Even though records might not be physically in your hands, your clients and employees still expect you to protect their information. Create protocols for what types of data your firm puts on the cloud, avoiding placing sensitive data there.

The real key for small businesses is to take note of where all of their data is housed, while measuring what really is important. “Do an inventory of your information and prioritize it and categorize it,” says Richard Kissel, an IT specialist with the National Institute

of Standards and Technology. “Then, you'll have a much greater feel of where you're going in your business and where the protection needs to be applied.”

### Remember To Back Up Files

Small businesses should regularly back up their data, both locally and remotely through an encrypted connection, Minchala says. “That way, should anything happen to the hardware, the database or the data in any manner, there are less points of failure,” she says.

Consider secure cloud-based data backup services, like Carbonite or Crashplan (which will cost close to \$1,000 a year), and a Managed Security Service Provider (MSSP) to ensure your system and data are protected, Pfiester says.

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# Promo Close-Up From the Heart

Signature promos share the fashion runway.

By Andraya Vantrease

Each year, Fashion Week in New York is christened by a stylish display of charity, as a host of celebrities turn out to support a national awareness campaign called The Heart Truth. The featured kick-off event – the Red Dress Collection Fashion Show – aims to bring attention to heart disease, the number one killer of women in the U.S.

“The Heart Truth has played a seminal role in nationwide efforts to raise awareness of heart disease in women, and Go Red For Women is proud to work together toward our shared goal of improving women’s heart health,” says Nancy Brown, CEO of the American Heart Association.

The annual fashion show is star-studded and has welcomed celebs ranging from Toni Braxton to Minka Kelly. Media personalities and noted designers also take to the runway, modeling the latest red gowns and dresses. The Heart Truth created and introduced the Red Dress as the national symbol for women and heart disease awareness in 2002, and each year at the fashion show the hype and enthusiasm is tangible.

In recent years, Diet Coke, Macy’s and Subway have all sponsored the show, with their national promotional partners providing branded materials. Banners and signs displaying the companies’ support of the Heart Truth



are seen throughout the venue. Meanwhile, showgoers receive brochures, pamphlets and other logoed educational items. Attendees are given goodie bags of branded products as well, including the event’s signature Red Dress pin.

According to Mariana Eberle-Blaylock, account director of social marketing at firm Ogilvy Washington, the pin has become the organization’s most symbolic promotional product throughout the years. “We give away pins at different campaigns year-round, but the fashion show is a big night for us,” Eberle-Blaylock says. “Each attendee gets a

Red Dress pin and we always secure it to a postcard that lists facts and messages about heart disease. We change the messages to fit our audiences because every race faces different risks.”

Eberle-Blaylock notes that Ogilvy translates all of the materials into Spanish, as heart disease hits Hispanic women especially hard. On average, Hispanic women are likely to develop heart disease 10 years earlier than non-Hispanics.

“The message is always customized to the audience, but the colors and symbols are the same in order to keep our Heart Truth brand consistent,” she says.

Although February is considered Heart Health Month, the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute outreach continues throughout the year with social marketing campaigns and events. Red Dress pins, DVDs, cookbooks, fact sheets, posters and other marketing materials are distributed to communities worldwide and the organization grows every year with new partnerships and campaigns – all geared toward a great cause.

“We’ve been able to reach millions of women with our lifesaving message of heart-healthy living and prevention,” Brown says.



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# Apparel

Trends • Products • Showcase

## Trends Dots All

Looking for a different pattern to suggest to progressive clients? Try the increasingly popular polka dots.

By Sara Lavenduski

Polka dots are a classic pattern that have been sported by everyone from flamenco dancers to rockabilly singers. Now they are back in a fresh way. Fashion house Dolce & Gabbana offers a calfskin box handbag with spicy red dots, while Fendi and Miu Miu currently carry heeled sandals featuring striking black-and-white dots in unique locations.

But polka dots aren't just for haute couture applications. In the promotional industry, Assertive Creativity (asi/37166) offers cashmere-feel scarves and polyester ties that feature this eye-catching design. Product Manager Peter Schlieck-

mann says that, while it's currently popular with younger demographics, the dotted pattern also evokes the staying power of a brand.

"They gained traction in the 1920s," he says, "and were made popular by Minnie Mouse. Then Frank Sinatra sang about them in 'Polka Dots and Moonbeams' in 1940, and fashion houses started to take them to the runways. Companies with an appreciation for retro American flavor would do well with them."

Boxercraft (asi/41325) serves up dotted flannel pants and boxers, which have proved very successful sellers. In fact, the company's polka dot pattern and related swiss dot, a smaller version of the polka dot, are its best-selling novelty prints ever, according to marketing director Sherri McCarrell.

"Polka dots of all sizes are hot heading into 2015, and it doesn't seem to be slowing down," she adds. "They're very popular in the college market, especially in team colors. Clients can pair dotted bottoms with a tee or hoodie decorated with a dot pattern, or even use the dotted fabric as an appliqué on top."

Fortunately, polka dots' versatility means they're an ideal fit for men's looks as well. Wolfmark (asi/98085) offers them on ties for a variety of applications. "They've been a favorite traditional pattern," says owner Bruce Everakes, "so we've offered a polka-dot pattern in several solid ground colors with white polka dots in both ties and scarves for several seasons. Our most popular seller is the black-and-white combination. It's perfect for an upscale restaurant: The servers wear a white shirt, white bistro apron and black-and-white dotted tie."

In addition to apparel, think polka-dotted accessories. Terry Town (asi/90913) offers beach towels and spa wraps in this whimsical pattern.

"Polka dots evoke a youthful look that's also retro-inspired, so it does really well in younger markets," says John Thompson, art and advertising supervisor at Terry Town. "These are really popular with home embroiderers and Etsy stores. The spa wraps in particular are popular for bridal parties and sorority events because the large dots frame Greek letters nicely."



Polka dots have become a common sight on promotional apparel, as well as on fashion runways.

**"Polka dots evoke a youthful look that's also retro-inspired."**

John Thompson,  
Terry Town



# Products

## Functionally Warm

Mixing apparel with technology, one of the most popular wearable accessories gets a makeover.

By Theresa Hegel

No matter what kind of cold weather Mother Nature decides to bring, one thing consumers won't forgo is constant activity on their cellphones, particularly smartphones with touchscreens. Retail and wholesale suppliers are meeting the need for combined warmth and function with touchscreen-activated gloves, which contain special filament that allow for conductivity even when fingers are covered up.

"A majority of our recent orders have been acrylic gloves with three-finger touchscreen activation," says Ian Kalna, vice president of West Coast sales at Pop! Promos (asi/45657). "We also offer five-finger activation, as well as cotton and synthetic options for work gloves."

In the coming months, suppliers will offer even more

**"The classic lines go well with bomber or fashion jackets, and debossing the cuffs adds a truly custom look."**

Joy Nelson,  
Nucom/Burk's Bay

touchscreen glove options, says Alex Morin, executive vice president of sales and marketing at Debco (asi/48885). "Specifically, they'll have added insulation for ultra-cold days and will incorporate more retail-inspired fabrics," he says.

Nucom/Burk's Bay (asi/74600), for example, has had significant success with lambskin touchscreen gloves, which offer a professional, mature look in addition to convenience. "They can be worn dressed up or dressed down," says Creative Director Joy Nelson. "The classic lines go well with bomber or fashion jackets, and debossing the cuffs adds a truly custom look."

Some of the best markets for touchscreen gloves include colleges and universities, as well as sports teams, says Morin. He also cites the energy industry, in which employers give them as gifts to their laborers.

"We've been pleasantly surprised at the broad base of interest in this accessory," says Nelson. "We've had orders from luxury car dealerships as well as 18-wheel truck drivers."

Pop! Promos, for its part, has had recent success with the wireless communications market. "Verizon, Sprint and AT&T are battling for market share, and these PMS color-matched touchscreen gloves are very applicable to their products," Kalna says. "Distributors usually start with a one-color imprint, and then perhaps add



▲ Pop! Promos offers these high-quality acrylic gloves with touchscreen-sensitive microfilament sewn directly into the fingertips. Available in three- or five-finger sensitivity in men's, women's and children's sizes, they come standard with Pantone-matched fabric.



► These lambskin touchscreen gloves from Nucom/Burk's Bay have a comfortable fleece lining.

colors or go full-color. We can also add PMS color-matched rubber dots to the palms for extra grip, and a customized sewn-in tag."

While embroidery, sublimation and screen printing are popular embellishments, decorators will often create

an eye-catching imprint for the ultimate impressions. "A world-renowned zoo turned the fingers of their gloves into crocodile teeth," says Morin. "It was a marvelous example of ingenuity when it comes to incorporating the brand into the product."

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# Color Splash

Pantone names the popular colors, suppliers provide a variety of options.



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**3. Vantage Apparel** (asi/93390),  
www.vantageapparel.com



**4. Vitronic Promotional Group**  
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**6. Bella-Alo** (asi/39590),  
www.bella.com/distributor-  
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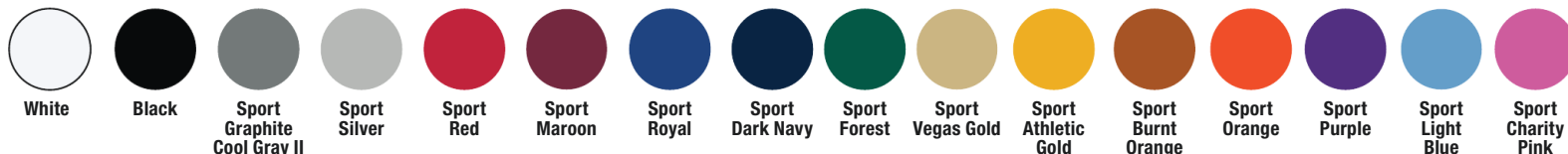
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# GROWTH



# IMPACT



## Companies in the ad specialty industry are growing rapidly – some would say too fast. Here are five ways to ensure that your company isn't overwhelmed by growth.

*By Betsy Cummings*

**A**fter 10 years of flat growth, things were looking up a few years ago for Custom Logos (asi/173183), when suddenly promotional product sales jumped by 50%. In 2014, the San Diego-based distributorship was boosted by an additional 25% sales growth in screen printing. Seeing so much consistent new business over several years, the company acted accordingly, says Jeff Golumbuk, the firm's CEO.

Company executives expanded their sales force by 20%. They increased their total staff from 49 to 65. They doubled their screen-printing staff, acquired new equipment and added a second shift.

When sales are flat for a decade, sudden growth of 25% or 50%, as Custom Logos experienced in various aspects of its business, is a welcome change. Until it's not.

Growth may be the holy grail of ad specialty firms, particularly those like Custom Logos, which, with such consistent growth, is poised to move from a smaller distributor at \$2.5 million a year in sales to a more powerful industry player. But, as Golumbuk and his team discovered, growth can be fraught with challenges as well. The company's IT infrastructure is being revamped to keep up, staffing is a constant struggle, and that all-important second shift "has been problematic to manage," Golumbuk admits.

Certainly, growth of any kind is almost always a welcome event, and many in the market are poised for success this year. In fact, the industry posted its best-ever year in terms of revenue in 2014 – seeing a record-high of more than \$21 billion taken in by ad specialty distributors. Further, those distributors have an extremely bright outlook on 2015, as the *Counselor* Confidence Index – a measure of distributor's views on their ability to grow in the future – reached 114 in the fourth quarter of 2014, tying the all-time high.

Yes, opportunities abound for distribu-

tors right now, and confidence is as high as it's ever been. But as many distributors have found out in previous growth periods, high growth years can present a host of headaches that can negatively impact companies if they aren't careful with how they manage that expansion.

Here, we highlight some of the biggest challenges distributors can face in times of high growth.

### **Propping Up an Overworked Staff**

Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the most notable strains on a company during intense periods of growth is among staff members, says Jen Lawrence, a Toronto-based management coach and business consultant, and co-author of *Engage the Fox: A Business Fable About Thinking Critically and Motivating Your Team*.

"When businesses are scaling, growth tends to outpace staffing," Lawrence says. Obvious signs include longer lunch breaks, more sick days and absenteeism and increased tardiness among workers. "Employees who are feeling stressed tend to disappear and get 'sick,'" Lawrence says.

That may be the time to take employees to lunch, acknowledge the increased workload, and even promise time off or other incentives when business calms down, she says.

It may also mean it's time to bring on additional team members. The first rule of staff expansion? "Be prepared to understand that hiring one person is different than hiring 10 people," says Dennis Ceru, adjunct professor of entrepreneurship at Babson College in Wellesley, MA, and CEO of Strategic Management Associates LLC, a growth management consultancy. Most small-business owners, Ceru says, "don't anticipate the lead time or training time for bringing on new employees."

More to the point, he says, companies experiencing or anticipating substantial



revenue increases should also be aware of when to hire, so that they don't overextend their personnel needs and suddenly get caught paying for full-time employees should business dry up.

At Houston-based Bullpen Marketing (asi/150076), the company was careful to build an ongoing pool of potential full-time hires, first by bringing them on part time, says Colin Hageney, the company's president. "We take baby steps toward the full-time position," he says, adding that the company makes a point of emphasizing in job listings that part-time work at Bullpen can – and does – sometimes lead to full-time employment.

Even before recruiting and hiring part-timers, though, the company outsources services during an initial growth uptick. For example, when they started receiving more orders in

marketing director for San Diego-based Brilliant Marketing Ideas (asi/146083). After tiring of an industry that was limping along post-recession, Neumann decided it was time to shake things up. While she had worn a multitude of hats as the company's founder, she decided to shift up roles and make her brother-in-law the company's CEO after a three-year stint at the distributorship. Doing so allowed Neumann to focus her activities on sales and marketing. "Before, I was managing the staff, selling, dealing with HR issues and other corporate needs as they arose," she says.

Freeing up her time to focus on nothing but sales accounted for the company's 10% growth in 2014, Neumann says. "I think that helped tremendously because my focus was totally on marketing and sales, and I didn't worry about all the day-to-day

principals to realize that, even though they started the company, they may not be the right person to lead it through a time of high growth. And, successfully navigating intense periods of expansion often means rethinking employee roles, cross-training efforts and staffing needs from the CEO down.

### Keep the Cash Coming

Too often, a small business expands like this: "They get excited over growth and revenue, and it almost becomes a drug where they want more," says George Athan, chief strategist at MindStorm Strategic Consulting, a business management consultancy based in New York. An insatiable need to conquer new markets takes over, but "while they're putting time and energy into expansion, they're not putting energy into the infrastructure to handle it," Athan says.



2014 than they had the previous year, they hired outside design firms to help create artwork, rather than bringing a designer in-house immediately. That way, Hageney says, they're able to complete client orders in a timely manner, but aren't committed to bringing on new workers until a pattern of consistent new business is established.

### Reframing the Old Guard

Small-business owners often don't realize the multiple roles they play within a company prior to hiring new staff. As a result, they sometimes struggle to readjust personnel roles and responsibilities as added business calls for additional staff, sometimes with newly needed job skills.

That was true for Linda Neumann,

staffing, invoicing and other stuff that goes into running a business," she says.

But even with those changes, Neumann adds, she still gets pulled away from pure sales and marketing, and struggles to tweak staffing needs as the company enjoys sustained growth. "It would be nice to have support that can jump in and do presentations, fulfill orders and deal with day-to-day customer requests," she says.

For Neumann, realizing that the many directions she was pulled in wasn't working is a market advantage, Ceru says. Not every executive has that perspective. "I knew one CEO who told me it took him over six months to realize he was unhappy in the corporate role he was playing," Ceru says.

In addition, it's important for distributor

What's more, he adds, small-business owners often fail to recognize profit differentials that may occur and can essentially become blinded by all the added business coming in – not necessarily recognizing the impact that extra revenue is having on profit and cash flow.

For example, a distributor might add some new large clients in a growth period and see sales jump markedly. But the profit on those particular clients may not be as great as with the clients that the distributor firm was fulfilling orders for previously.

"You might go from a 40% gross profit to 25%," Athan says. "So, even though the number of orders is increasing and you see revenue and growth, it's not real. The only thing that matters is profit."

To that end, experts say that distributors in growth modes should always be aware of the margins needed to make additional investments in order to financially support that new growth. A new employee should never be hired unless his hiring generates enough revenue to cover his hiring expense, Athan says.

Too often, companies base new capital expenses, staffing hires and added infrastructure on an increasing workload. But that isn't always the best indicator of a company's growth. "There could be mismanagement when new business or orders start to come in," Athan says, "leading executives to think the company needs additional support, when revamping of current tasks might accomplish the same level of work more efficiently."

but also for ongoing growth over time.

For instance, AlphaGraphics had a last-minute order for 300 counter mats last year during the World Series, something the client needed in less than four days, Haar says. Her usual vendor declined, unable to meet the timeline. So, Haar began contacting alternate vendors and finally found one that could meet the rushed timeline.

That's precisely when it occurred to Haar that she may have more orders like this in the future, and she started strategizing about how she might line up suppliers for upcoming months or years at rates that would help maintain her growth and margins. The key, she says, was making her business relationship with them increasingly appealing. So Haar began approaching familiar and unknown vendors to say "we need better pricing now," and, in exchange, "we can promise

## Keep Customers Informed

"When it comes to business and profits, the highest cost is acquiring a new customer," Athan says. "Where the profits come in is when a customer comes back over and over. That's why the customer experience is so important."

Most companies grow by gaining new clients, enticing existing ones to spend more, or increasing the volume of orders with the customers they have, Athan says. Too often, business owners gravitate toward trying to drive new business with additional clients, which is the most expensive, time-consuming, resource-draining approach, he says. Instead, companies should focus on building relationships with existing customers to increase and sustain growth.

In all their struggles to manage growth, Custom Logos was able to retain its clients,



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## Play Nice With Suppliers

For many distributors, the key to supporting sustained growth comes from working with vendors that can meet sudden spikes in orders. That was certainly the case with AlphaGraphics (asi/373210), based in Kansas City, MO, says Haley Haar, president and owner. After the company saw 40% growth last year, up from 20% the year before, Haar realized it was in a sustained growth phase.

"We haven't seen growth this large before," Haar says. And one of the company's first concerns was to line up vendors that could support that level of consistent expansion. It was an issue of not only finding vendors that could meet immediate needs for larger orders and greater volume, she says,

you additional business for the duration."

A key factor, Haar says, was to leverage her company's strengths when negotiating with vendors. One of her company's greatest revenue streams is its printing side of the business. She may not be able to guarantee consistent counter mat orders, for example, but "people are always going to need booklets, envelopes and other printed materials," she says. By promising increased orders in that area, as well as in steady promotional product items, such as drinkware and pens, Haar was able to negotiate better pricing among the suppliers she talked to.

The most important question to ask of suppliers, Haar says, is "how can we work together to make this advantageous for both of us?"

Golumbuk says. That's in part due to Custom Logos' transparency with customers as they navigated growing pains. That's a smart strategy, says Ceru. "At the first sign you're hitting a spike – communicate, communicate, communicate," he says. "Let them know about business increases and resulting strains on the company and ask, 'How can we work together on this?'"

It helped, Golumbuk adds, that the company overextended itself to clients and offered unprecedented services during their growth spurt to meet customer needs. "We ate a lot of freight costs and delivered orders ourselves that we wouldn't normally deliver," he says.

But the biggest key to maintaining customer loyalty as the company navigated its





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## Know the Signs

Eight clues that your business is growing too fast.

By Chris Anderson

Here are eight signs that your business is growing too fast, and things might be getting out of control. Make sure to be on the lookout for these signals as your company grows this year.

### Negative Cash Flow

For a business, cash-flow problems can stem from rapid expansion because a growing business translates to growing business costs. When a business expands, so do its expenses, and if cash going out of your company is greater than what's coming in, you might be forced to borrow and take on debt. Ideally, a distributor firm should be self-sustainable, which means that all business expenses should be catered for through its revenues.

### Increasing Customer Complaints

A jump in the number of customer complaints is one of the clearest signs that you might have to step back and reassess how you're doing business. A business with a small number of customers, for instance, can easily provide individual attention to each one of them, and produce tailor-made solutions for them. When a business grows, however, it may be forced to cut corners, which results in an increase in customer complaints.

### Overworked and Unhappy Employees

Are your employees taxed? Are they unhappy and, as a result, is productivity slipping? If your business is growing uncontrollably, naturally a large proportion of that added burden will have to be borne by your employees. To keep up, they might find themselves working late, for instance. This usually results in a dip in productivity, and a rise in employee absenteeism and turnover – all of which can have a negative impact on your business. You may find yourself occupied with hiring and training new staff, when other much more sensitive and important aspects of your business might need your attention.

### Are You Overworked and Unhappy?

If you've been working 24/7 in order to manage your business and keep up with growing demand and the ever-increasing needs of your business, you might be overworked as well. The truth is that along with your employees, you too need time to relax, and overworking yourself will just make you hate what you do.

### Suppliers & Vendors Can't Keep Up

Often when a business grows too quickly, suppliers, vendors and other partners might get caught off-guard and may not be able to keep up with the increased number of demand for orders and other resources essential for the functioning and running of your business. In such cases, it might be a good idea to add to your list of suppliers, or get in touch with suppliers who might be able to cater to your growing needs in a better way.

### Systems and Process Can't Keep Up

Growing business demands can render your business processes and systems completely redundant. You might, for instance, need to invest in new hardware and software. Over-the-counter software might not be adequate, and old hardware systems may not be able to cope with the increase in demand – hence the need to invest in better software and hardware solutions. In addition, business process – the core of your business – and how your business runs may need to be changed.

### Quantity Over Quality

When demand is on the rise and supply is struggling to keep up, what do many companies do? They often cut corners in many aspects of their business. One of the biggest red-flags for expanding companies is when they start prioritizing quantity over quality. Your customers will notice this shift in priorities, and you will end up losing business. Never lose sight of what makes a business successful: an emphasis on providing quality products and services.

### Customer Defections

Your company's ability to keep existing customers, while adding profitable ones, is a benchmark of its success. If your customers start feeling that they're not being given proper attention, their complaints are not being handled properly, and that there's a dip in the quality of your products and services, you might end up losing customers. Be on the early lookout for any sign of customer dissatisfaction and defection.

new growth potential and challenges was being "up front and transparent with customers," Golombok says. For example, an overburdened production schedule meant lead times increased from two to three weeks on many orders.

"A customer who has been working with us for 20 years doesn't want to hear that it will take another week to get the product out,"

Golombok says.

So, rather than overpromise and under-deliver, the company decided to preempt customer frustrations by explaining the company's current – but presumably temporary – predicament. The honesty paid off, Golombok says. "We didn't lose a single customer." Email: [betsycummings23@gmail.com](mailto:betsycummings23@gmail.com)

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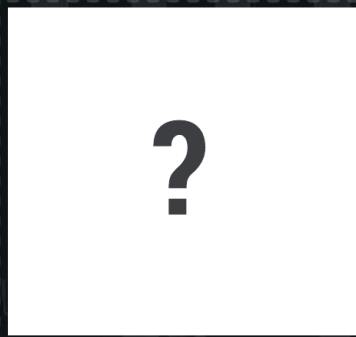
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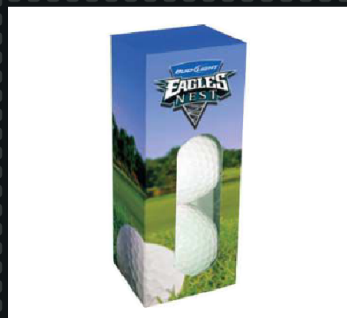
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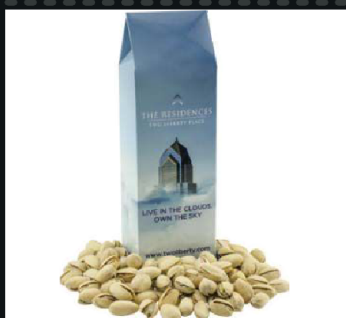
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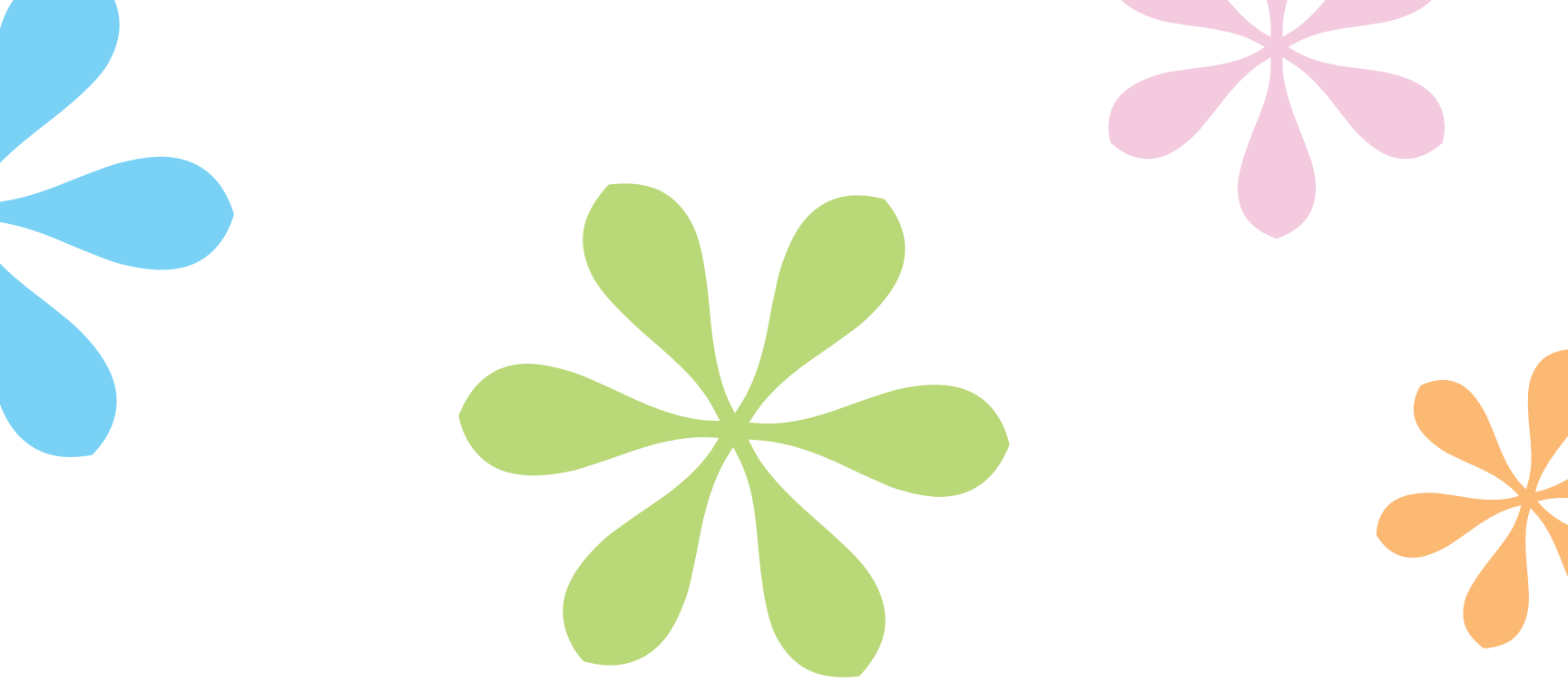


JELLY BEAN BOX





# DATING GAMES



## Getting the attention of a new set of buyers is job one for distributors today. Here are four ways to market your business to woo new customers and gain maximum exposure.

*By Shane Dale*

**T**hink of marketing like dating. In both, you want to get the attention of a desired group. You want that group (or a single person, in dating's case) to spend more time with you, to enjoy that time, and to agree to spend an increasing amount of time with you in the future.

But today's new set of buyers are a tricky group to appeal to. They're younger, they don't spend the usual nine-to-five time in the office, they communicate in different ways, and they expect their service providers to provide, well, more than just the one service they pay for. They're a group looking for added value from their vendors. They want information and advice, not just the products they purchase.

Yeah, they're a demanding bunch – think high-maintenance dating. But, the distributor firms that appeal to them and market to them on the level these new breed of buyers expect will succeed at attracting them and building long-term relationships.

Here are four marketing strategies to implement today that will help you appeal to these new types of buyers.

### **Write Informative, Attention-Grabbing Articles**

Adding relevant, fact-based, well-written articles to your website is one of the best ways to come across as an authority on the markets you're targeting, according to Trevor Gnesin, CEO of Top 40 supplier Logomark ([asi/67866](http://asi/67866)).

"First and foremost," he says, "relevance to an audience or reader should be considered. Distributors should think strategically about why the topic they are considering writing about would matter to his or her key audiences."

Once that's in place, Gnesin says articles based on lists or items targeted toward a specific season, demographic, or company department get read, as long as they include a strong headline. For example, articles with names like, "Five hottest promotional items for summer," "Best gift picks for dads and grads," or "Employee recognition programs that wow" will get clicks – and garner the attention of buyers who are looking for more than just a vendor. They want to know that the person they're buying promotional products from is an expert. Online articles with your name attached to them will help to provide that.

Lists are especially popular for today's

readers with shorter attention spans. "A headline that implies a numbered or bulleted list lets the reader know that the article to come should be a short, informational read," Gnesin says. "Beyond that, it's a matter of thinking through what will appeal to the audience."

Perhaps they'd be interested in learning about the hottest trends of the season or personal picks for branded items with maximum return-on-investment, he says. Or, even provide content that gives them ideas on how to succeed at their own business. Articles focused on branding, marketing strategies, outshining the competition, and using live events to attract new customers could all be topics that distributors' clients and prospects could learn from and implement into their own businesses.

Of course, once readers click on your article, the key is to keep their attention from beginning to end. Gnesin says a quick opening paragraph that summarizes the article, along with short, succinct paragraphs, will help. "Lead paragraphs should provide a nice summary of what a reader can expect to come throughout the article, and writers should consider that many readers are actually more accurately 'scanners,' so bulleted lists, content that is bro-



ken up with subheads or images, can help to keep readers engaged,” he says.

Gnesin says adding high-res photos of products, along with informational boxes that help to summarize and support your article, are another good way to maintain the reader’s attention. “Articles and posts with powerful imagery consistently get better readership and engagement,” he says. “The content of your article or write-up should dictate an appropriate picture, which should always be professional and well-lit. In addition to product photography and lifestyle shots, any video content should be promoted here, as well. Infographics are useful and well-received by audiences across the board.”

Distributors should also remember to embed appropriate links, including links to certain promotional products on their website, and any case studies or third-party articles that support the piece.

One big no-no, according to Gnesin, is loading up your article with keywords that can detract from its overall quality. “Writers shouldn’t get so distracted by SEO relevance that they neglect basic rules of grammar,” he says. “All writing should be highly professional to ensure writers come off as experts in their content marketing pieces.”

Ultimately, the goal is to grab attention and connect to your audience in a unique way that makes them remember you. Online content is king right now.

### Create Buzz with Images & Videos

While thinking about online content and how to use it to connect with today’s buyers, Mike Michalowicz, author of *Profit First*, says leveraging pictures and videos in social media is crucial to spreading the word of your company.

“Pictures get a huge click rate. We can absorb the information so fast and easily,” he says. “Pictures are preferable over words. It’s a little bit unfortunate, but that’s the reality.”

But Michalowicz says your images and videos definitely won’t go viral if you post the same kind of content as everyone else. “Show pictures of anything that makes it different,” he says. “Showing a mug on a desk is boring. Showing a mug while someone’s pouring coffee in it and their hand is outside a moving car window, and someone else is in a different car racing down the highway pouring coffee into that mug – it’s still a mug, but the scenario is so absurd

that now it gets attention. Show crazy, unexpected, different things, and that’s how you’ll grab attention.”

Michalowicz says the same concept holds true with videos, in which distributors can take standard promotional items and use them in completely unique applications. A classic example of using an everyday product in an unusual and entertaining way is a series of videos created by blender manufacturer Blendtec. “Talk about a boring business; these guys only make blenders. But they started a video series called ‘Will It Blend?’” Michalowicz says. “They blend marbles, they blend an iPhone, they blend anything. That company exploded in growth. I think their revenue quadrupled after the introduction of these absurd videos.”

There are a number of social-media platforms in which this strategy can be leveraged. Michalowicz believes Twitter is the number-one platform, with Facebook lagging behind because of the amount of noise and activity he thinks can muck up messages posted to Facebook.

He also sees Pinterest as an up-and-coming social medium, especially for sellers of promotional products who can show those items in unique and engaging ways. “Pinterest is focused simply on pictures,” he says. “Pinterest promotes the interesting and the different. People are encouraged and inspired to share. If I share something on Pinterest that’s unique, I’ll be rewarded by multiple people sharing it. It’s a wonderful network to spread the attention of something that’s different.”

But before diving into multiple platforms, Michalowicz suggests investing most of your energies into one network in order to avoid stretching yourself too thin – and with each photo and video, he says you must remind your customers why you’re a better choice than the other guy. “I believe in going all-in on one platform that speaks to the community that you’re targeting,” he says. “Absurd, different, weird gets attention. But of course, you have to produce value behind it.”

### Link Up Through LinkedIn

Sticking with the social marketing that’s so popular today, industry consultant Rosalie Marcus says LinkedIn can be a boon to distributors, as long as they utilize it to its full potential. “I think LinkedIn is the most powerful social media site for distributors that are interested in connecting with the bigger clients, because it has more CFOs

and CEOs than any other social media platform,” she says.

Here, Marcus provides a checklist for success with using LinkedIn to connect with new buyers and today’s clients:


Invest in a professional photo. “That’s your first impression. You don’t want your photo that was taken at your last fraternity party or a Christmas party or something like that,” she says. “You should spend the money and have a professional photo taken.”

Utilize keywords in your headline. Marcus says that your LinkedIn page headline is extremely important. Instead of putting ‘advertising specialty distributor’ or ‘promotional product distributor,’ put in keywords that someone would use if they were searching for someone like you. “For example, use words like ‘awards,’ ‘branded merchandise,’ and ‘trade show gifts,’ so that it sort of highlights what you do,” Marcus says. “Most people won’t generally put into a search ‘promotional products’ or ‘advertising specialties.’ And, if you have a niche market, put that in there. If you are a health-care marketing specialist, that should be somewhere in your headline, as well.”

Create a story with your summary. “Your summary should not read like a résumé; it should read more like a story that talks about what you’ve done and maybe highlights your best accomplishments,” she says. “For example, if you are a trade show specialist, you might say, ‘We helped one company increase qualified leads at their trade show booth by 30%,’ so you’re showing the ROI in your summary.”

Provide useful information. Marcus is also a big believer in providing information on the front of your LinkedIn page that provides added value for the people you’re trying to target. Research or reports on marketing strategy success or how to use promotional products effectively could attract the attention of buyers on the social network. “I know ASI has some great research about the power of promotional products and how they are the most cost-effective advertising medium ([www.asicentral.com/study](http://www.asicentral.com/study)),” she says. “Offering something like that on your LinkedIn site will give you a lot of credibility and position you above the competition. Or, you can add your own white paper – maybe the 10 best trade show gifts or five great promotions in the health-care arena.”

Include customer testimonials. “If you have a client that says they love working



with you and everything you do is top-notch, see if they're willing to write a recommendation for you, because that's really what people look at," Marcus says. "Those are actual testimonials and you want them to be from people that aren't just your family; they're people that you've done business with."

Join groups in your target market. If you are going after meeting planners, for example, you should join a group that meeting planners participate in on LinkedIn, just to see what they're talking about and what's important to them, Marcus suggests. "If you participate in the group, don't try to sell them something," she says. "Try to give thoughtful comments or tips that would be useful to them. And, listen to what people are talking about so that you know what's important to people in your target market."

### Use a "Blend" Strategy

Michalowicz is a proponent of what he calls a "blend strategy" – sending prospective clients an off-the-wall promotional item to get their attention, but including with it a more practical item to show what kind of value your company can offer.

Michalowicz says the traditional promo-


tional items such as pens and mugs – items he calls "permanent products" – have their place, but don't typically create the ice-breaker you're looking for today. In other words, they could very well be the bread-and-butter of your overall sales, but when you're thinking about marketing to a different and new breed of buyer, you should try to connect with self-promos that garner more interest.

"The first thing is you need to catch attention," he says. "A product that can invoke a conversation is the ultimate item because that causes that brand to go viral. I believe in permanent products, but I've never had a colleague come up to my desk and say, 'Hey, tell me about your mug, what's the story behind that thing?'"

Michalowicz recalls an innovative twist on a popular item sent to him by an ad specialty company that sought his business. "When Keurig was just getting hot, they sent us a Keurig with their logo on it, and then they would send coffee with their logo on each one, with notes that would say, 'Here's the favorite flavor at our office: blueberry. Hopefully you guys like it, too,'" he says.

The Keurig and coffee that accompanied

it got the attention of Michalowicz and the rest of his office. "They said, 'I've never had blueberry coffee before; where did you get it?'" he says. "So, they effectively turned the product into a point of discussion."



Michalowicz says introductions like these take advantage of basic human nature. Essentially, we pay attention to what's different and unique. "Our minds are wired that way," he says. "When something unexpected presents itself, it cannot help but to draw our immediate, full attention – but only to the point where we determine its value – if it's dangerous, if it's a threat, or could be ignored."

That's why Michalowicz says distributors have to offer something behind the unusual item that brings substance to the customer. "A gimmick can quickly be ruled out as a gimmick: It's got my attention, but it's got no value. It's not worth having a conversation about," he says. "So, I'd couple the gimmick with a mug or something else, and maybe even a letter that says, 'Hope we caught your attention and we hope you enjoy this mug, and we suspect you'll see our brand in front of you for the next 20 years.'"

*Shane Dale is an AZ-based freelance writer.*



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WHAT'S NEW

TB-6564

Overture Streak  
Convention Tote Bag

600 D polyester with PVC backing  
14"W x 16"H x 3"D

- \* A simple, flash color block tote bag with pen loop for trade show

\*Colors:  
Gray / Black / Apple Green  
Gray / Black / Black  
Gray / Black / Royal Blue  
Gray / Black / Red

\$ 2.99  
(D)



CB-6639

Grea Tech  
Compu-Backpack

600 D polyester & 300 D Ripstop polyester with PVC backing  
13"W x 18"H x 8"D

- \* Multi-compartment backpack with padded can hold up to 15.6" laptop and Ipad or Table sleeve.

\*Colors:  
Black / Apple Green  
Black / Red  
Black / Royal Blue

\$ 15.49  
(D)



TB-6562

Slender Color Block  
Convention Tote Bag

600 D polyester with PVC backing  
17"W x 14"H x 3"D

- \* A simple convention tote with a color accent triangle gusset.  
Main zippered compartment. Self fabric pen loop.

\*Colors:  
Gray / White / Apple Green  
Gray / White / Purple  
Gray / Black / Black  
Gray / Black / Red  
Gray / Black / Royal Blue

\$ 3.60  
(D)



CP-6524

Convertible 24 Pack  
Cooler Backpack

300 D Ripstop polyester and 600 D polyester with PVC backing  
12"W x 15"H x 8"D

- \* Keep your drink or food in this insulated cooler backpack with P-EVA heat sealed lining while going out for picnic.

\*Colors:  
Black / Black  
Black / Red  
Black / Royal Blue

\$ 9.99  
(D)



CT-6556

Opulent Utility

56 Pack Cooler Tote

600 D polyester with PVC backing  
22"W x 16"H x 8"D

- \* Keep your food and drinks cold in this insulated with P-EVA heat sealed lining and reinforced bottom cooler tote.

\*Colors:  
Black / Black  
Black / Red  
Black / Royal Blue

\$ 10.99  
(D)



MB-6523

Full Tuck  
Messenger Briefbag

600 D polyester with PVC backing  
15"W x 11"H x 3.5"D

- \* A colorblock design to the daily messenger brief is a fun alternative to carry to work.

\*Colors:  
Black / Apple Green  
Black / Black  
Black / Royal Blue  
Black / Red

\$ 4.99  
(D)



LP-7315

Rugby Multi-Tech  
Laptop Portfolio

Neonprene & Microfiber with PVC backing

15.25"W x 11"H x 1.5"D

- \* A padded everyday laptop case and Ipad or Tablet holder for working or travel.

\*Colors:  
Black / Royal Blue  
Black / Silver Gray

\$ 6.75  
(D)



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Screen set up charge: \$50.00 ( F )

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WHAT'S NEW

WHAT'S NEW





# HOW TO ATTRACT INVESTORS

Private equity firms have an abundance of capital to spend in 2015. Here's what they're looking for from companies to invest in.

*By C.J. Mittica*



**A**ny new CEO enters the job with big ideas, and John Maher was no different when he was brought in to River's End Trading Company (asi/82588) in December 2013. "We realized there were definitely opportunities to run the business more efficiently and position the business for growth," says the apparel veteran, who had previously spent 30 years at Land's End. "We knew that to position the company for growth down the road, we were going to require some additional capital."

Maher reached out to people he knew at GCI, a family-funded private equity firm based in Wisconsin. The deal came together unusually fast – just about a month. By last April, GCI had put in a capital investment that Maher says has allowed the *Counselor* Top 40 supplier to undertake a number of initiatives, from enhancing its Web and customer service capabilities to expanding its decoration services. Moreover, Maher adds, GCI has provided much-needed support for IT, HR and finances.

"It's been a tremendous resource," Maher says. "At the end of the day, we're not chasing our tails on a daily basis. We're trying to focus on the things that long-term will make River's End a leader in this space."

Such is the appeal of private equity (PE). Businesses receive capital to fund ambitious new endeavors or even facilitate their own mergers, as well as resources they can leverage to greater success. "Private equity is an attractive source of capital to help us grow the business at an efficient rate," says Marc Simon, who has overseen deals with three PE firms in his 14-year tenure as CEO of Top 40 distributor HALO Branded Solutions (asi/356000).

### Capital Source

PE firms typically manage a collective fund for any number of investors, such as corporate pension funds or high net-worth individuals. The fund is invested directly into private companies. (It can also be a buyout of a public company that then delists and becomes private.) Unlike venture capital – which tends to fund startups with high-growth potential and little in the way of structure – PE is directed toward established companies whose performance can be optimized. It can save failing businesses that are squandering their potential, as well as growing companies ready to scale up.

"If a business was hitting on all eight



cylinders with nothing else to tweak, they wouldn't be interested," says Terry Gallagher, president of Battalia Winston, a mid-size search firm that works closely with PE firms.

The goal of PE firms is simple: help their portfolio businesses grow to ensure a positive return on their investment. And there is a lot invested. Over 3,000 firms in the U.S. handled, on average, \$133 billion per quarter in invested capital last year. Good investment opportunities are the lifeblood of these firms, and they are exceptional at identifying where their funds will succeed.

"We're looking for businesses where we can add value with capital and bring to bear our network of resources to add value," says Mike Oleshansky, a director in the Private Investments Group of PSP Capital Partners, which purchased HALO in 2012.

Attracting PE money can be an incred-

ible lifeline for a promotional product company, but to do it successfully takes a tremendous amount of organization and discipline. In the typical 60-day run-up to a deal, firms like PSP require complete access to exhaustive amounts of data. With Halo, "we sliced and diced the business about a million different ways," says Oleshansky. "We asked them questions and asked them to look at their business in ways they had never looked at it before."

That requires business owners to provide accurate information with realistic expectations, says Lee Duran, private equity practice leader with BDO, which assists PE firms with management of their funds and portfolio investments. Showmanship only goes so far before PE firms peek under the hood. "You'd be surprised," he says, "at how often people just kind

of shoot from the hip and say inaccurate things about underlying revenue numbers, growth expectations, etc. ... They lose credibility extremely quick.”

## What They’re Looking For

When gauging potential investments, PE firms want to see a consistent track record of success. A leading indicator they often look at is EBITDA (Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation and Amortization). Unlike straight revenue figures, EBITDA can offer a clearer picture of profitability by removing influencing factors like financing or tax environments.

But it’s not just about what a company has done, but what it can do in the future. There must be opportunity for growth. Earnings are extremely important, but Oleshansky cites a number of other significant factors for evaluating ad specialty companies: stability of vendor and customer relationships, processes to help understand what drives success, and a strong management team to shepherd the company into the future. Businesses that are too reliant on a single large customer or a key management figure (like a founder or past buyer) will prove to be too risky for equity firms.

All those factors must convince a PE firm that its investment will pay off, and often sooner rather than later. The typical length of an investment ranges between four and seven years. In the current market, firms are increasingly unwilling to ride out the long term without results. “Every time we take on a new private equity partner,” says Simon, “I say to my management team. ‘If these guys still own us five years from now, we haven’t done our job.’”

PE firms want the companies in their portfolios to be successful – which usually doesn’t mean standing by idly and waiting to recoup their investment. “We don’t look for investment opportunities where we’re just providing capital, where we’re just silent investors and owners of the business,” says Oleshansky.

Many PE firms have experts familiar with the promotional products industry and what it takes to be successful. They offer robust services to help their businesses; PSP offers strategic planning, management support and much more for companies in its portfolio.

## Beneficial Partnership

In many cases, though, the involvement goes much deeper. “I would say the vast majority of private equity firms want con-

## Talk the Talk

The private equity world, like many distinct industries, has its own language. Here are some key terms to know. For a comprehensive listing of helpful terms, go to [www.CounselorMag.com](http://www.CounselorMag.com) now.

### Adventure Capitalist

A specific type of venture capitalist who is more accessible, but who may be harder to find and whose pockets are not as deep as a traditional venture capitalist. Or, a specific type of venture capitalist who is willing to invest in endeavors that would be considered too risky for traditional venture capitalists.

### BIMBO, ‘buy-in management buy-out’

A BIMBO enables a company to re-shuffle its allocation of share capital to bring about a change in management. Internally, a group of managers will acquire enough capital to ‘buy out’ the company from within. An outside team of managers will simultaneously ‘buy in’ to the company management. Both parties may require financial assistance from venture capitalists or equity firms in order to achieve this end.

### Business angels

Individuals who provide seed or start-up finance to entrepreneurs in return for equity. Angels usually contribute more than pure cash – they often have industry knowledge and contacts that they can pass on to entrepreneurs. Angels sometimes have non-executive directorships in the companies they invest in.

### Escalator Pitch

A slang term used to describe the quick delivery of a presentation outlining an idea for a product, service or project. The name comes from the notion that the pitch should be succinct enough to be delivered to another party while riding an escalator. An escalator pitch should last no more than 60 seconds.

### Venture-Capital-Backed IPO

The selling to the public of shares in a company that has previously been funded primarily by private investors. The alternative to an IPO for a venture-capital-backed company is an acquisition (getting purchased by another company). Both options are known as “exit strategies” because they allow venture capitalists and entrepreneurs to get money out of their investments.

trol,” says Duran.

PE firms typically won’t get involved in day-to-day operations, but they will install new management teams and top talent who have experience growing businesses in rapid fashion. For PE firms, the changes are a necessary vehicle to greater success.

There are exceptions, of course. Maher from River’s End says there is nobody from GCI who stays on site, and the only required interaction is a formal phone call once a month. Still, Maher doesn’t hesitate to call when he can utilize the firm’s support. “They’re not looking to actively get involved in any of their businesses,” he says. “They are there when I need them.”

It illustrates the fact that, just as PE firms exercise their due diligence to find the best investment opportunities, so too can ad specialty companies choose the best partner to align with. “I would always counsel clients to not talk to one equity firm,” says Michael Schwerdtfeger, managing director for Chapman Associates, which advises sell-side clients through the mergers & acquisitions process. “Instead, you create a situation where there’s a market for your business and you talk to multiple potential buyers.” By talking with various firms, you can negotiate the best terms, gauge involvement and identify the best fit based on the PE firm’s personality and culture.

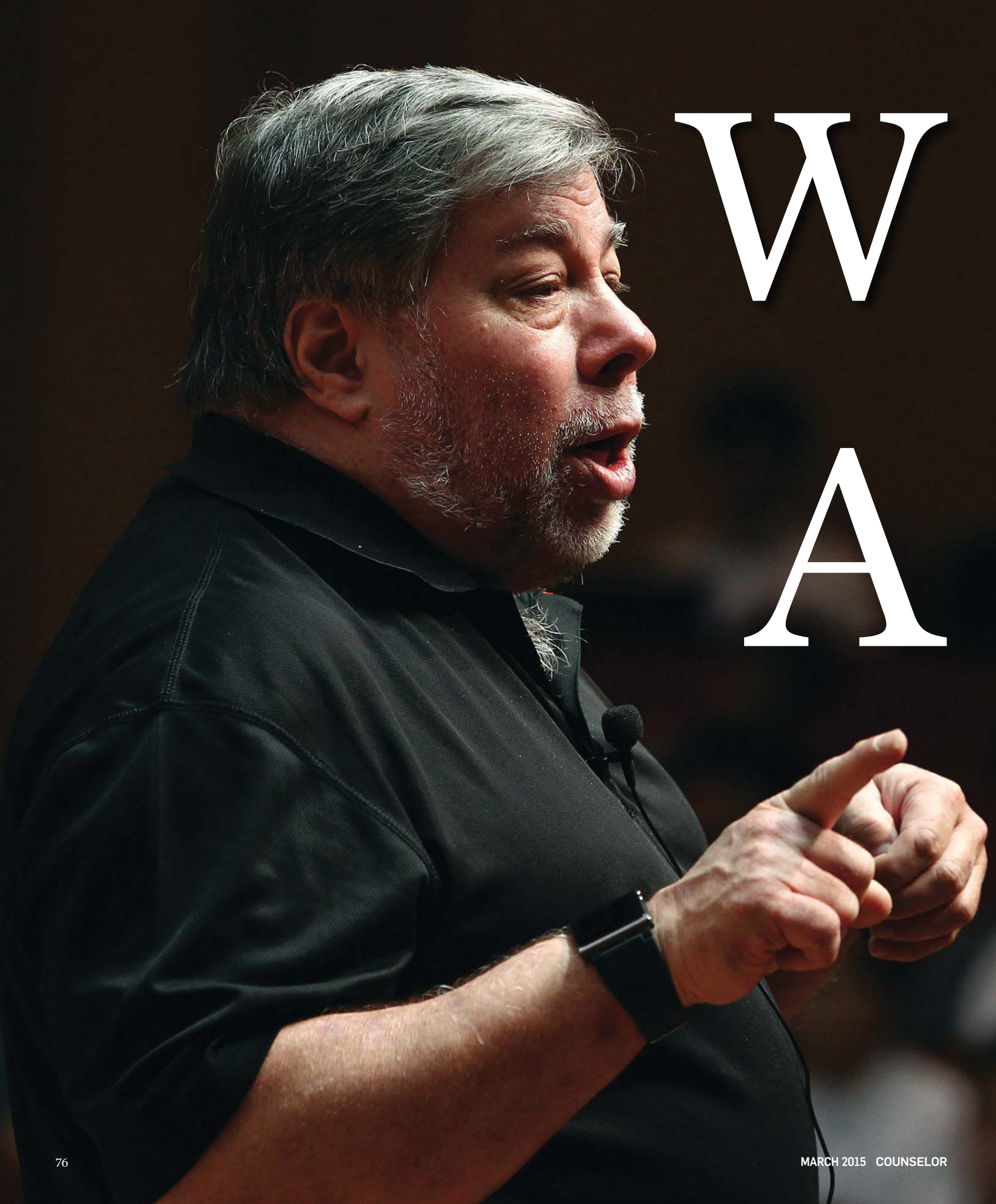
And the truth is PE firms are very hungry for deals. In the current economy, equity firms put a premium on growth – selectivity that has created a competitive marketplace with lots of buyers chasing a few good sellers.

But the pendulum has begun to swing, with American PE firms holding on to \$750 billion in “dry powder” – money that the firms raised but have not invested, essentially burning a hole in their pockets. “There’s so much capital on the sidelines these days that private equity firms have relaxed their standards as to the companies that they’ll consider acquiring,” says Howard Berkower, an attorney at McCarter & English, which represents private equity funds and managers. “That goes to size of acquisition targets as well as industry sectors. Even the bigger PE firms are looking farther downstream than they traditionally have because there’s a market imbalance.”

Quite simply, the conditions are never better to sell. “Right now,” says Schwerdtfeger. “I don’t know if there’s going to be another year for M&A that will be as good as 2015.”

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W

A

# What Lies Ahead

Apple founder Steve Wozniak headlined the first trade show of the year with a look at the future of technology and business. Plus, a slate of education sessions and new product offerings from suppliers paved the way for a winning 2015.

*By Counselor Staff*

**W**ho better to forecast where technology is headed than the man who created the first Apple computers?

“We’re going to be living in a world where our voices can operate all technology,” Steve Wozniak, one of the founders of Apple and the man often credited with founding the personal computer expansion in the 1980s, told a standing-room-only audience at the ASI Show in Orlando in early January. “This will make technology more accessible to more demographics, and it will make it all much easier to use. That’s the point of technology – to improve our lives and make simple tasks more efficient. We’ll be seeing a lot of that through mobile devices and the interconnected home – everything will be WiFi enabled and consumers will operate nearly everything in their homes via the Internet. It’s not far away now.”

In the keynote speech of the show, Wozniak shared his vision for the future of technology and provided some advice for budding entrepreneurs. He also took a bit of a wistful walk down memory lane, as he recounted his early days of creating Apple’s first personal computers, which changed computing forever.

“Computers were in my soul; there were no books about them, so I was self-taught,” said Wozniak, during his Q&A format keynote session, which was moderated by Tim Andrews, ASI’s president and CEO. “I was such a geek, I had no chance for a girlfriend or a wife or parties, so I came home at night and designed stuff.”

In the session, which took place on the last morning of ASI Orlando, Wozniak also provided some technology predictions for the future. He told the audience that he expects tech items and accessories to begin to operate solely at the direction of people’s voices. And, he can foresee a time when cars drive themselves and people’s homes are so connected that homeowners can talk to turn lights on and lock doors.

“Now, you see people speaking into their phone like it’s their friend,” said Wozniak. “I like that we can speak to computers in a human way. Maybe we won’t make machines conscious. If we do, I really hope they take good care of us.”

## **Create a Sales Game Plan**

While Wozniak set the tone of the ASI Show in Orlando with some predictions for the future in his keynote speech, the education



sessions at the show provided attendees with some concrete strategies for succeeding in business today.

According to ASI Orlando Education Day speaker Lisa Peskin, the best thing you can do right now to prepare your business for growth and success is to develop a well-defined selling game plan. “You don’t want to wing it every day,” she said during her session. “Successful people make a plan and stay committed to it.”

Peskin, CEO of consultancy Business Development University, believes every plan should start with a close look at how you spend each day now. If you’re simply answering emails every morning, you’re likely losing valuable time that’s better spent on marketing, prospecting or meeting with clients. “You need to prioritize properly and eliminate the non-productive parts of your day,” she said. “Then, you should try hard to cluster your activities. Maybe that’s sitting down and not getting up until you’ve made 30 phone calls or set up two appointments.”

Also in her session, titled “Develop a Highly Effective Sales Game Plan,” Peskin emphasized the importance of goal-setting in business strategy. She thinks using the S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timed) system gives salespeople a strong benchmark for continued improvement. “You can have a 30-day, 60-day and 90-day plan with clear goals,” said Peskin.

Additionally, one of the many benefits of game-planning, according to Peskin, is the boost of confidence you gain from having targets and a method to win them over. “You’ll find you’re going after better, higher margin and higher profit deals,” she said. “A rich pipeline makes you a lion, but a poor pipeline makes you a coward.”

### She Knows What You’re Thinking

In addition to having a good plan for your company’s selling approach, it’s also vital for salespeople to be able to accurately read the body language of their clients.

During her Education Day session, “The Power of Body Language: Discover What Your Clients Aren’t Telling You,” Dr. Lillian Glass dispelled various myths about what you and your client’s body language conveys. While the command of “look directly into your client’s eyes” has been drummed into many a salesperson’s head, that is flat-out wrong. “Unless you are madly in love with each other,” the body language expert said, “don’t do it.”

Rather, make total face contact: two seconds on the eyes, two seconds on the nose

and two on the mouth. This establishes a nonthreatening connection.

Another myth dispelled: Do not mirror your client or prospect. “It’s a turn-off,” Glass said. “People are hip to it.”

Glass engaged the audience in several interactive demonstrations to illustrate good body language vs. off-putting body language. Good: a palm-to-palm handshake; bad: leaning away from you. “He’s not into you,” she said.

### Build a Stellar Sales Team

With a good plan and the understanding of nonverbal clues that clients give to salespeople, companies are well on their way to finding sales success. One more step: having managers who assist in the effort to building winning sales teams.

In fact, according to Peskin, sales managers should have a one-line job description: “Help their direct reports to be as successful as possible,” she said during her session, “Sales Superstars: Get the Most Out of Your Team.” “The challenge is to learn to manage people differently, along with teaching them tactics to help them increase their close rates.”

Here are of Peskin’s tips for helping your salespeople to perform at their highest potential:

**1. Encourage them to network.** “If your salespeople make networking part of their sales game plan, it’ll help them create strategic alliances,” said Peskin, who explained that if a salesperson aligns herself with five to 10 key contacts who can refer business to her on a consistent basis, her close rate will be much higher. “You need to be constantly networking to increase your sales and make more money.”

**2. Know what motivates your team.** “What gets your salespeople out of bed in the morning?” Peskin asked. “It could be any number of things, from being number one, to making money, achieving a better quality of life, to getting a promotion or any combination of these.” The point is that a good sales manager can’t treat all salespeople the same, and learning what motivates each is the key to helping each team member perform better. Another tactic for managers to use is the stop-start-continue process, where you ask salespeople to tell you “what you should stop doing, what you should start doing and what you should continue doing” to help them be more successful, Peskin said.

**3. Help your salespeople build a rich pipeline.** “Repeat business, additional busi-

ness and new business are the three parts of a full pipeline,” said Peskin. “Show your salespeople how to mine existing clients to increase their spending with your company.”

### 4. Teach your team to stop cold calling.

“One way to never have to cold call again is to have a reason for calling,” said Peskin, who cited a referral as the easiest way to call a prospect. “Another way is to call a restaurant, for example, and say that you can help them with their marketing needs since you have helped other local restaurants increase their business. The key is to talk to a client about how your products and services can help grow their business.”

### Findability Formula: Master Search-Engine Marketing

Education Day sessions at ASI Orlando also focused on growing business through specific marketing tactics. When building a website, one cannot have a *Field-of-Dreams* approach. Just because you build it does not mean “they will come.” Rather, to increase your ability to draw visitors to your site, Heather Lutze of Findability University says you need to have a strategy that requires knowing how search engines work and understanding how your customers search.

Consider the search engine to be a huge online library where all things on the Internet are indexed taking into consideration the site’s title, headline, body, links and images. “Google’s job is to parse everything on your page and put it in the library,” Lutze said.

So, tagging your home page as “home” is a waste of time if you’re looking to climb Google rankings. You should name it specifically how you want clients to find you. “Speak like you want your website to be findable,” she said. “Until you get clear as to what that phrase is, you’re unfindable.”

In order to find what people are actually searching, you can use tools like *spyfu.com* or *adwords.google.com*. There, you want to look which words are often searched and what the competition for those words is. You want words with 500 searches and low competition. And, when you add images to your site, change the file name from what the camera assigned it to something specific. For example, a picture of a custom calendar should be “customcalendar.jpg” instead of “DN2344.jpg.” By finding the right keywords and adding more links and images, you have a better chance of getting people to your site. Because, as Lutze asked, what does it really cost your business to be invisible?



▲ Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, right, was interviewed by ASI president and CEO Tim Andrews about innovation in business.



▲ Marki Lemons-Ryhal teaches the ASI Orlando audience the best steps for succeeding with social media today.



◀ Orlando attendees take in the Harry Potter rides at the ASI Show Gala at Universal Studios.



▲ (Left) Ariel Premium Supply with their award; (Right) The Ariel team reacts upon hearing the company's name called as Supplier of the Year during the 2015 *Counselor* Distributor Choice Awards program.



# Fun Finds

8 products straight from the show floor at ASI Orlando.



2

## 1. PHOTO FINISH

This extendable wireless selfie pole can be used to hold cameras, mobile phones and voice recorders. The pole is made of stainless steel with EVA and extends to over 37 inches to help clients take advantage of the selfie craze. Available from Yorkn Inc. (asi/98754); [www.yorkn.com](http://www.yorkn.com)

## 2. SMART GROWTH

Pocket Gardens include three colorful die-cut seed paper shapes that will grow into an inspiring and satisfying vegetable garden. Tomato, pepper and carrot seeds are available, and each pocket garden pack is custom-printed in four-color on white cardstock paper. Available from Bloomin' Promotions (asi/40646); [www.bloominpromotions.com](http://www.bloominpromotions.com)

## 3. COURSE CORRECTION

The 4EverTee holds golf tees securely in place to reduce breakage and allows players to focus on improving their game instead of chasing tees. A simple, portable product that will delight frustrated golfers everywhere. Available from 4Ever Golf Group, LLC (asi/53472); [www.4verttee.com](http://www.4verttee.com)

## 4. GAME CHANGER

Design this customized travel bingo game to incorporate clients' products or use the traditional game design and simply logo the board. It's a product that ingeniously promotes your customer's brand while offering a fun, distracting challenge. Available from Regal Games (asi/81276); (630) 587-6700



1

## 5. SHINING EXAMPLE

Attach this powerful magnetic LED light to a screwdriver or other small metal tool to illuminate a work area or use with clip assembly and attach to brim of hat. The continuity circuit turns on and off automatically on contact with metal tools. Available from Ads On Magnets (asi/31061); [www.adsonmagnets.com](http://www.adsonmagnets.com)

## 6. CLEAN & EASY

This disposable soap-infused towel is individually packaged dry – consumers just need to add water before using. Available in a variety of sizes and even in versions specifically for shampooing dogs, it's a great product for sports, fitness and veterinarians. Available from Suds N Toss LLC (asi/90026); [www.sudsn toss.com](http://www.sudsn toss.com)

## 7. WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Power People power bank comes in the shape and design of real professionals and is available in custom designs as well. Contains A-grade lithium-ion battery with a capacity of 2600 mAh and is suited to charge most common devices. Available from PSL-USA (asi/75582); [www.pslworld.com](http://www.pslworld.com)

## 8. UDDERLY DELICIOUS

Squeeze more flavor into your milk with this naturally-flavored, sugar-free and zero-calorie milk enhancer. Each bottle has an average of 24 servings that come in your choice of cookies & cream, banana, chocolate or strawberry flavors. From Webb Company (asi/95838); [www.webbcompany.com](http://www.webbcompany.com)



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# INSPIRATIONAL BET

Actor Jeffrey Tambor keynoted the PPAI Expo in Las Vegas in January. Check out his inspirational message, and take a look at some of the hottest products displayed at the show by exhibiting suppliers.

*By Andy Cohen*

Actor and newly-minted Golden Globe Award winner Jeffrey Tambor took the stage in Las Vegas with an unassuming manner and dry wit. His message, though, to the PPAI Expo audience was one of inspiration and motivation to grow their businesses and improve their lives.

“Eighty percent of people have stopped. They’ve stopped creating and have settled for more comfortable lives,” said Tambor, who has starred in television shows such as *Arrested Development* and *Transparent*, for which he received a Golden Globe award just two days before his speech at PPAI Expo. “I’m about discomfort. You owe it to all of us to get on with what you’re good

at. The joy of life is doing your job as best as you possibly can all the time. Half-assed doesn’t cut it.”

Dressed in a white checked, button-down shirt, gray sweater vest and black jeans, Tambor, 70, entertained and motivated the PPAI Expo crowd by weaving his trying personal story into his overarching message of overcoming fear and reaching your full potential. Tambor admitted to being sober for 15 years now after struggling with alcohol addiction for much of his adult life.

“Don’t let fear define you and get in your way,” said Tambor. “Don’t let your negative qualities hold you back. Don’t let it keep you back from being great. Be courageous and be an adventurer. Find out what there is that’s keeping you back. Then you can work

to overcome that.”

Ultimately, Tambor said, the key to success today is being able to stand out. But to him, the only way to really separate yourself from the crowd is to take risks and embrace failure.

“You have to be prepared to be wrong 50% of the time,” he said. “Take risks and operate quickly. Don’t get stuck doing the same thing over and over again. Stop trying to please people and actually start doing things the way you think they’re right. Let risk be your guide. Failure is the gift that keeps on giving. Failure is a part of necessary change. We don’t live to be average. The last thing we want to be is just enough, mediocre, getting by.”





# Hot Products

16 editor's picks from the PPAI Expo



2

## 1. ALWAYS FRESH

Fragrance bands can be customized in message and aroma. Clients can choose the scent they want the band to give off, providing marketing impact to two senses: sight and smell. Available from Ad Bands (asi/34345); [www.ad-bands.com](http://www.ad-bands.com)

## 2. PARTY TIME

Jazz-up any party or corporate outing with these fun beads. The medallion attached to it can be customized in just about any shape, providing a unique marketing message for meeting planners and trade show exhibitors. Available from WowLine (asi/98360); [www.wowline.com](http://www.wowline.com)

## 3. CREATIVE COVER

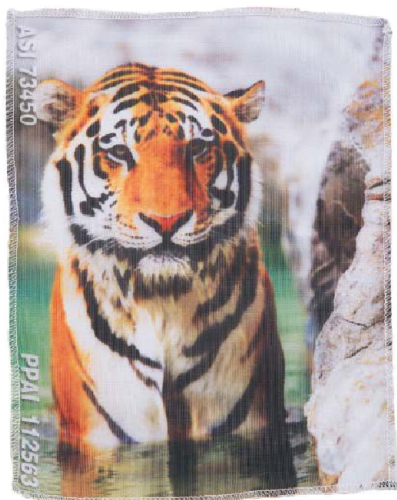
Cover up any table with these items that can be printed all over and in four-color process. Think clients exhibiting at trade shows and job fairs. Available from Nationwide Pennant & Flag Manufacturing (asi/73450); [www.napmfg.com](http://www.napmfg.com)

## 4. POLITICAL STATEMENT

Get creative with a unique space to advertise – public men's rooms. These urinal mats can be custom created or choose from stock options. Available from Purple Giraffe (asi/80086); [www.purpleg.com](http://www.purpleg.com)

## 5. STAY CLEAN ON THE GO

A great giveaway for trade show exhibitors, health-care fairs or school/fundraising events, these packaged towelettes will definitely be appreciated by all who receive them. Available from Better Wipes; [www.betterwipes.com](http://www.betterwipes.com)



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## 6. CLEAR AS DAY

A new space for advertising, the 3-D glasses given out at theaters can be customized. Think of pitching these to movie studios, fast-food brands sold in movie theaters and candy companies. Available from American Paper Optics (asi/35591); [www.3dglasseonline.com](http://www.3dglasseonline.com)

## 7. I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW

Never lose another pair of eye-glasses or sunglasses again with this clever item. Connect this to a shirt by a magnet on the back and slip glasses through the metal enclosure, and imprint the front with any message or logo. Available from Montco (asi/72110); [www.montcousa.com](http://www.montcousa.com)

## 8. COOL RELIEF

Attendees at outdoor summer events, concerts or golf tournaments would love to receive a Chill Skinz towel. Once wet and iced, the towel remains cold for hours, providing outdoor relief for athletes and spectators alike. Available from Chill Skinz Inc. (asi/44817); [www.chillskinz.com](http://www.chillskinz.com)



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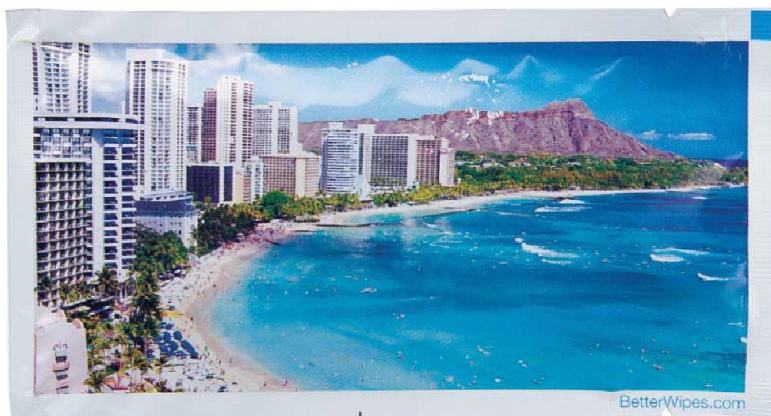
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### 1. NO MORE SLICE

The perfect add-on for upcoming golf tournaments, the Trust Tee is a plastic tee that can help users minimize slicing their first shot of every hole into the water. Available from Trust-Tee Golf (asi/92289); [www.trust-tee.com](http://www.trust-tee.com)

### 2. UNTANGLED

Never get computer wires and power cords tangled again with the Cord Grip. A perfect houseware item that would appeal to real estate agents or insurance companies. Available from EMT (asi/52263); [www.emteasy.com](http://www.emteasy.com)

### 3. GET PHYSICAL

GoBands are wristbands that can have multiple items (whistles, sunscreen, keys, alert buttons) attached to them. Great giveaway for senior living facilities, health-care companies and insurance firms. Available from Lewtan (asi/67230); [www.lewtan123.com](http://www.lewtan123.com)

### 4. DON'T WASTE ANY

This new silicone wine bottle topper ensures that open bottles of wine won't spill at all when laid on their side. Clever gift with purchase for wine stores and supermarkets. Available from Capabunga; [www.capabunga.com](http://www.capabunga.com)

### 5. STAND UP STRAIGHT

This small item is the height of function in today's mobile world. Simply plug it into the audio jack of any mobile device, and the product turns into a stand to watch videos, read articles or share presentations. Available from Twintech Industry Inc. (asi/92357); [www.usbline.com](http://www.usbline.com)

### 6. SPORT SCIENCE

Little League and school sports teams would love to hand out imprinted eyeball stickers to their players. It's the perfect fundraising item for teams or as a gift with uniform purchase. Available from EyeBlack.com (asi/53428); [www.eyebblack.com](http://www.eyebblack.com)

### 7. PREDICTION LID

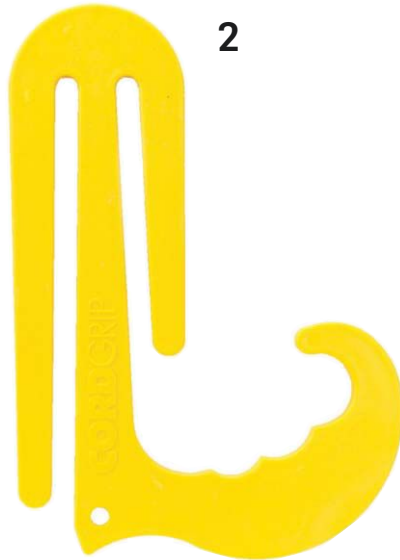
Supplier UnionWear held a giveaway at its PPAL booth – get scanned and you can have a hat imprinted with your 2016 Presidential candidate of choice on it. The runaway winner? Hillary Clinton. Only time will tell. Available from UnionWear (asi/73775); [www.unionwear.com](http://www.unionwear.com)

### 8. FAMOUS FACE

Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning – and his hand fans – will be speaking at July's ASI Show Chicago. Jazz up any of your clients' events with customized hand fans. Available from Lion Circle (asi/67620); [www.lioncircle.com](http://www.lioncircle.com)



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# Social

Appointments & Promotions • Quotables • Workplace

## Profile High Honors

New Jersey native John Lynch left the U.S. for Poland in 1991 to help rebuild after Communism fell. He never left. Almost 25 years later, he has received Poland's highest civilian award for his efforts.

By Sara Lavenduski

As a young, idealistic business school graduate, full of energy, looking for adventure, John Lynch made one decision that drastically altered his life's course.

A native of New Jersey and a graduate of the MBA program at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, Lynch is the founder, president and Keeper of the Faith at LYNKA, a promotional apparel company located in Krakow, Poland, that offers garments, caps and bags and in-house decoration. But in 1991, freshly graduated from Wharton, he decided to give of his time and hard-earned expertise to the emerging market in Poland.

Two years before, on June 4, 1989, Poland held its first democratic elections since the country had become a Soviet satellite state toward the end of World War II. "Poland really initiated the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe," says Lynch. "The elections took place in June 1989, the Berlin Wall fell in August, Communism ended in Czechoslovakia before the end of the year. I was one of the first Americans in Poland after

the Wall fell, as part of the MBA Enterprise Corps, and I decided to stay permanently to help the Polish people. I came over to witness history, and for an adventure. I never imagined that Communism would fall in my lifetime. So when it did, I went over to help rebuild."

In 1992, Lynch founded LYNKA in Krakow as a traditional distributorship specializing in apparel. Though Poland certainly wasn't thought of as a crossroads of enterprise back then, says Lynch, its location has served his company well as a European business. "While Poland is considered part of Eastern Europe, it actually borders Germany to the east," he says. "Geographically, it's more Central Europe, so it's convenient for servicing the entire continent."

But when Lynch first founded LYNKA, infrastructure was either in its infant stages or completely absent. Phone lines barely existed, to say nothing of delivery services. New employees worked together to build office furniture from scratch. Lynch also had to learn a culture and a language far different from



**John Lynch**, founder and president of LYNKA, receives the Gold Cross of Merit from Polish Secretary of State Olgierd Dziekonski at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw.

his native English. But even as he mastered the language, experienced employees were hard to come by. When he decided to offer screen-printing, for example, he had to instruct new employees from the ground up since there weren't any trained printers in the area.

"It was an economy absolutely devastated by Communism," he says. "There were no staple items in stores. People were still queuing every day for groceries. There were no Western companies here yet, and only the most basic supplies were available. But we saw an opportunity to offer promotional products to new companies looking to mar-

ket themselves."

In the years since his arrival, Lynch also founded the American Chamber of Commerce in Krakow in 1994, and has attracted numerous American investors to Poland to further stimulate the economy, among other achievements on behalf of the Polish people.

Almost 25 years after Lynch first arrived in Poland, he has received national recognition from Bronislaw Komorowski, the president of Poland, for his entrepreneurial efforts. Nominated on behalf of the Polish-American business community through U.S. Ambassador to Poland Stephen Mull, and the American Chamber of Commerce in Krakow, Lynch was one of nine nominees who were recently honored with the president's Gold Cross of Merit, the highest award for both Polish civilians and non-Poles.

"Very few people would have left the comforts of the Philly-Jersey area in 1991 to go to a place that was very dark to help rebuild," Lynch says. "So this award is really a nice feather in my cap."



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# Appointments & Promotions

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

Compiled by Sara Lavenduski

► **All-In-One** (asi/34256) appointed Chelsea McKillip to the company's sales team.

► **Alpi International** (asi/34415) hired Steve Klein as director of sales.

► **The Book Company** (asi/41010) announced that Todd Turquand of Top Shelf Marketing Group Inc. will represent the company in Southern California.

► **Dard Products** (asi/48500) hired Sam Schapiro as sales manager.

► **Geiger** (asi/202900) promoted Jo-an Lantz to chief operations officer for the Geiger Group.

► **HALO Branded Solutions** (asi/356000) promoted Dawn Olds to senior vice president of operations.

► **Heritage Sportswear** (asi/60582) promoted Jeff Meena to vice president of finance.

► **iClick** (asi/62124) hired James Fedewa as relationship manager and promoted TJ Vail to inside sales manager.

► **Idproductsource** (asi/62088) promoted Mary Huff to the position of graphic design supervisor.

► **Illini** (asi/62190) hired Joe Keely of Select Lines Marketing to represent the company in IA, KS, NE and MO.

► **InnerWorkings, Inc.** (asi/168860) named Ryan Spohn as interim CFO.

► **Jetline** (asi/63344) hired Megan Zizzo as national account representative.

► **Logomark** (asi/67866) promoted Brian Padian to senior vice president of sales; Sasha Pirrie to vice president-Western Division; and Scott Edidin to vice president-Eastern Division.

► **NewClients** (asi/282470) hired Allison Sisson and Khalil Hamzeh as senior account managers. Sisson will be based in Raleigh, NC, and Khalil Hamzeh in Dallas, TX.

► **St. Croix Promotions** (asi/316309) announced the following promotions: Terrilynn Twaddle to vice president of operations, Dan Livengood to vice president of the promotional division, and Stephanie Ayhan to creative director for all of St. Croix Promotions and Retail.

► **SnugZ USA** (asi/88060) hired Steve Rone, Kathy DiFrancesco and Sydra Newell as regional sales managers.

► **Starline Industries** (asi/89213) welcomed Dennis Cranston as vice president of sales for Western Canada.

► **Storm Creek** (asi/89879) hired Brooks Bradford to its national team of sales representatives.

► **Stormtech Performance Apparel** (asi/89869) welcomed Chris Turner as national sales manager for Canada.

► **The Vernon Company** (asi/351700) promoted Mark Gammon, formerly central region manager, to the position of business development manager.



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# Best Places to Work

## Credential Express

Niceness matters for new hires at this South Carolina supplier firm.



At **Credential Express** (asi/47204), personality counts – a lot. The supplier, based in Greenwood, SC, hires people based on it. “We believe in interviewing for niceness as much as qualifications,” says Chief Operating Officer Karl Ziegler (right), here with Travis Brewington, the company’s marketing manager whose father owns the company. “We can train people to do certain jobs.” As a result, employees join the company and rarely leave. As an example, one woman, a customer service rep, started working at Credential nearly 20 years ago when the firm she was working at burned down. Two other employees have had spouses join the firm. And, few employees are actually in the original roles they were hired for. One woman started as an intern and now works for the sales department; another went from IT into customer service. “We look out for one another,” says Brewington.

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