Hiring Right
Seventy Years and Counting for WI Dealer Rhyme

Congratulations are in order for Mike Steinhoff and his team at Portage, Wisconsin-based Rhyme, who this year are celebrating their dealership’s 70th year of service to the local business community.

While the dealership’s roots go all the way back to 1886—when Rhyme Drug opened for business, offering stationery products from the very beginning—the company really got started in a big way in the office market in 1945, when William “Punk” Rhyme spun off Rhyme Supply Company and started selling and servicing business machines with his son Frank and another partner when they returned from fighting in World War II.

While the dealership today still carries office supplies and furniture, most of its business is in the office equipment space. The company is one of the top ten Sharp dealers in the country and also has a strong IT services business.

Mike himself came on the scene in 1999, when he bought the company and become president. Since then, it has been on a healthy growth curve. Today, Rhyme operates out of nine locations (eight in Wisconsin and one in Illinois) and is some 70 employees strong and growing.

Congratulations to the entire Rhyme team and here’s to the next 70 years!

MS Dealer S&L Office Supplies Earns ‘Business of the Year’ Honors from Local Chamber

In Waveland, Mississippi, just outside of Gulfport, Chris Cochran and his team at S&L Office Supplies were icing up the champagne after their local chamber of commerce named them 2015 Business of the Year.

S&L has been around for a while—the dealership opened in 1996 and was run by the mother and daughter team of Susan and Laura for over 15 years.

Chris came on the scene in April 2012, when he bought the company after moving to the Gulf Coast from Birmingham, Alabama, where he had enjoyed a successful career in commercial printing.

Life at S&L of late has been hard-charging, to say the least with the dealership posting annual sales gains around 45% each year.

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For more than 30 years, the City of Hope has served as the single most important cause in our industry, with a message that reaches out to even the fiercest competitors and redirects their passion, innovation and energy towards something a whole lot bigger than any of us: the best treatment for people suffering from terrible, life-threatening diseases and research into possible cures.

Later this year, Hewlett-Packard’s Steve Sakumoto will be honored as the 2015 Spirit of Life honoree at a gala banquet in Chicago that will provide a fitting finale to this year’s “Hope Matters” campaign.

Steve himself is a cancer survivor, so this year’s effort has a very personal dimension for him. But there’s no one in our industry—or in the entire country, for that matter—who doesn’t have more than enough reasons to support the City of Hope and the work they do. And even if you can’t attend this year’s gala dinner, there are plenty of other ways to support this amazing effort.

You can become a member of the Legions of Hope, a personal giving program supported by independent dealers and others in the industry. When you do and if you’re among the first 50 memberships, your contribution will be matched dollar-for-dollar by former Viking Office Products president Irwin Helford.

Or you can join Friends for Hope as another way to express your own personal commitment to the organization and trigger a similar matching contribution from Fellowes chairman Jamie Fellowes. And through the Office Products for Hope fundraiser, spearheaded by PSA’s Bob Enk, you can make an online donation of as little as $10. And all donations of any size are being matched up to $50,000 by Office Depot.

You can also take advantage of the many marketing partnerships in support of City of Hope offered by industry manufacturers, wholesalers, reps and dealer groups or organize your own company fundraising events such as sponsored car washes, cookouts or casual Fridays. And if all that’s not enough, there are more than a few opportunities to swing a golf club somewhere this summer in support of the program.

If you haven’t yet decided how you’re going to help this year, now’s the time. The folks at City of Hope are battling against far tougher competition than any of us will ever face in our businesses. They need and deserve as much help as we can give them.
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Julianna Marttila, J2 Office Products
All that growth, however, hasn’t stopped Chris from active community involvement. In addition to his Chamber activities, Chris launched his own charity, Carts for Kids, which collects empty ink and toner cartridges for recycling and donates 100% of the proceeds to local non-profits that help children in need.

Carts for Kids is still getting off the ground but, Chris reports, initial response has been very strong. When we talked to him, he was getting ready to cut his first check from the effort—for $1,500—and enjoying the unexpected benefit of seeing a lot of new faces and increased traffic at his retail store from customers and prospects bringing in their empties!

TX Dealer Pencil Cup Office Products Named Family-Owned Business of the Year

In El Paso, Texas, Carlos and Teresa Gandara and their team at Pencil Cup Office Products were celebrating recently, after their local Small Business Administration office named them El Paso’s Family Owned Business of the Year.

Pencil Cup has been serving the El Paso market since 2001 with that unique blend of value and superior customer service that makes independents so special. Along the way, they have been generous supporters of the local community, providing leadership and support for a broad range of worthy causes, including the city’s Buy Local advocacy organization, Homegrown El Paso, where Terri is an active and enthusiastic board member.

In addition to Carlos and Terri, other family members include Carlos Gandara, Jr. and Christina Gandara, key players on the sales team, and grandson Kiki, who calls himself the dealership’s succession plan and takes care of shredding for the company. And let’s not forget Piper, the Pencil Cup Customer Service Dog, who keeps everyone on track!

Our congratulations to the entire Pencil Cup team for showing once again that no matter how tough the competition, there’s still plenty of room for well-run, family-owned and operated businesses!

IN Dealer RJE Business Interiors Honored by Local United Way

In Indianapolis, Denny Sponsel and his team at Knoll dealer RJE Business Interiors had something special to celebrate last month, after the United Way of Central Indiana honored the dealership with a 2015 Spirit United award.

RJE was one of just three companies so honored and it was made even more special by the fact that this year’s award made the company the first ever to earn the award twice (the first one came in 2009).

RJE has also earned United Way’s “Company that Cares” honor every year since that award was established 15 years ago.

CO Dealer EON Office Earns ‘Best Printer’ Honors

Congratulations are in order for Elena Sirropolaidis and her team at EON Office in Denver who earned special recognition last month from ColoradoBiz magazine.

EON was voted Best Printer by the magazine’s readers in a special “Best of Colorado-Readers’ Choice” poll.

Voters were asked to vote for the companies they’d trust to take care of their colleagues and friends and were required to vote in at least 10 categories. And while they were allowed to vote for their own company once, they were also required to vote for at least two other companies in that category.

Printing, of course, is just one element of EON’s offerings. The dealership also provides office supplies, furniture and related services, cleaning and breakroom products, office coffee services, point of sale supplies, promotional products and managed print services.

Director at MI Steelcase Dealer Custer Named to State Contractors’ Board

When it comes to community involvement, few people do it better than today’s independents. Case in point: Brad Laack-

continued on page 6 >>
Local businesses and communities thrive when they support each other. It’s how the paper industry currently supports over 377,000 manufacturing jobs in North America alone. To help local businesses and communities in your area grow, ask for paper products made in North America. To learn more, visit PAPERbecause.com.
man, director of interior construction services at Grand Rapids-based Steelcase dealer Custer.

As leader of Custer’s architectural products division, Brad isn’t exactly sitting around waiting for the phone to ring but, he says, he’s always had a spirit of service so when the state came calling recently with an invitation to serve, he answered the call.

As a result, Brad is now a member of the Michigan’s Residential Builders’ and Maintenance and Alteration Contractors’ Board, where he will be assisting the state’s Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs with licensing and regulating the construction, alteration or improvement of residential structures.

Brad himself has no residential construction background and, he says, that was one reason for his appointment. He not only brings valuable commercial construction experience but no conflicts of interest on the residential front.

His involvement on the state’s contractor’s board is just the latest entry in a lengthy and very impressive list of community service activities.

A U.S. Navy veteran with nine years of service, Brad currently volunteers as a local DECA judge, helps with fundraising for the Veterans-oriented Fold of Honor Foundation and is a board member at Wedgwood Christian Services, a local nonprofit serving victims of child abuse and sex trafficking and other children in need.

“Bradley brings valuable experience to this board and I am confident he will effectively serve this role,” Michigan Governor Rick Snyder said of his appointment. We don’t think he’s going to be disappointed!

CA Independent Gorilla Stationers on the Acquisition Trail Again

These are busy times for Rosemary Czopek and her team at Gorilla Stationers in Huntington Beach, California.

Last month, we reported on Gorilla’s acquisition of e-tailer GZMOE.com. Now comes word that Rosemary has added another dealership to her shopping cart, Van Nuys, California-based Ink4Allus.com.

The deal strengthens Gorilla’s position as an ink and toner resource and adds some 3,500 new prospects for its supplies and other office product offerings.

“Gorilla Stationers is so thrilled to continue our growth with companies that match our vision and philosophy,” commented Rosemary, who indicated she expects
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these two deals should double sales at the company by the end of the year.

Not bad for a company that started out less than three years ago and, says Rosemary, they’re not finished yet. “We have a really solid team in place at Gorilla with the energy and expertise to keep us moving forward and we’re very much looking for more acquisitions to grow our top line revenue.”

**Re-Brand for OH Dealer Friends Business Source**

In Findlay, Ohio this month, Ken Schroeder and his team at the dealership formerly known as Friends Business Source are celebrating a comprehensive re-branding, new name—FriendsOffice—and smart new look for their dealership.

Ken and his team are also consolidating their other brands, including I Need School Supplies and FBS Corporate Solutions, under the FriendsOffice name.

“Market surveys and diligent research indicate customers and business communities tend to be confused about who we are, due to our diverse brands which serve a wide array of vertical markets,” explained Betsy Hughes, VP of sales and marketing. “The fact is, we provide everything for any workplace. We feel FriendsOffice embodies this and can serve us in any market.”

The dealership plans to alter its DBA and trademark its new name and logo by next January and before then it will be changing personnel apparel and delivery vehicles to match the new company name and logo.

“Our 25th anniversary is approaching in 2016 and we have aligned who we are with what we can do,” explained Ken. “Our local communities may not realize that we serve just as well nationally. We’re one of four national contract holders who can supply the Premier Healthcare contract, we have over 110 employees across Ohio, we have 57,000 square feet of warehousing space in Ohio and Pennsylvania plus 61 distribution centers across the U.S. and we have consolidated revenues of $33 million. We’re a big player with local heart.”

After starting out fairly slow this year, business has been pretty positive for the dealership of late, Ken reports. “The weather was blamed for it a lot earlier this year, but honestly, I think businesses had a good 2014 and had to cut back to pay their tax burdens for 2014 by April of 2015. Since May, it has picked up a lot, and I expect the year to finish strong,” he forecast, with janitorial, breakroom and office furniture driving most of the dealership’s growth.

**New Name and More for TX Dealer Longhorn Office Products**

In Austin, Texas, it’s been goodbye Longhorn Office Products and hello Worksmart after Mike and Marcia Winkler and their team at the dealership formerly known as Longhorn implemented a comprehensive re-branding effort earlier this year.

Mike and Marcia started their dealership in 1999. “We had no capital and no debt,” Mike proclaims proudly.

Since then, they have grown the business, picking up two other companies along the way. But after 16 years and more than just a few minor changes in the industry, the couple felt it was time, not just for a new look but for a total re-positioning of the dealership.

“People heard Longhorn Office Products and they thought office products was all we did,” Mike explains. “Like many dealers today, we’re a true one-stop shop with a product mix that includes maintenance and breakroom, technology and furniture as well as office products and our new name conveys far more effectively what we do and how we do it.”

Evidently, Worksmart customers agree. Business so far this year is up 20%, due in no small part to increased purchases from existing customers who now see the dealership as a resource for far more than just office products.

**MN Dealer Innovative Office Solutions on a Roll for a Good Cause**

Innovative graphic designer Ben James gets ready to unload some of the 10,000 plus rolls the dealership collected for their fifth annual toilet paper drive.

In Burnsville, Minnesota, Jennifer Smith and her team at Innovative Office Solutions were quite literally on a roll last month, as they once again partnered with the local St. Paul Saints baseball team for their fifth annual Toilet Paper Drive.

While it sounds funky, there’s some serious thinking behind the drive. “Toiletries are one of the most needed items at food

*continued on page 10*
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banks but one of the last items people think of donating,” explains Innovative’s Jason Player. “A drive such as this brings not only awareness to a shortage area but helps to meet that demand.”

Jason’s not kidding! This year’s drive brought in just over 10,000 rolls of toilet paper for a local food bank, as the Innovative team collected toilet paper donations from customers, manufacturers—with an especially generous assist from Georgia Pacific, other business partners and employees throughout the month of June.

And while the cause was a serious one, that didn’t prevent participants from having more than their fair share of fun during the drive’s grand finale at the Saints’ ballpark.

Competition was fierce during the toilet paper toss held in conjunction with the drive at the stadium and while it may not yet be an Olympics-level sport, it garnered plenty of attention and a lot of laughs!

**FM Office Products CEO Fabricio Morales Hits the Road to Help Missing Children**

In Rochester, New York, FM Office Products CEO Fabricio Morales was riding high recently, when he took part in the city’s 15th Annual Ride for Missing Children.

Fabricio was one of over 250 participants in a 100 mile bike ride to help raise awareness and funds for missing and exploited children.

During a day that started at 6:30 am and finished around 5 pm, the cyclists made stops at four different schools and drove by 20 more along the route.

Like most independents, Fabricio and his team are active supporters of numerous worthy causes and local non-profits but this one is special for him.

A relative of his was abused as a child and while Fabricio didn’t learn about it himself until later, when he did it sparked a fierce personal desire to do something about it. This year’s ride was his ninth and he has also served as past president of the organization’s board.

“This is an amazing event for a great cause,” he says. “Even though the riders are plenty sore afterwards, we all welcome the opportunity to make a difference.”

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In a career spanning some 37 years, Randy Devine has seen it all when it comes to the independent dealer’s fortunes—the good, the bad and the ugly! Today, as sales director, supplies and promo, for Coralville, Iowa-based Tallgrass Business Resources, he says dealer prospects are better than they’ve been in a long while.

A combination of factors—greater awareness among customers of the value of supporting locally owned and operated businesses, big box missteps and a greater willingness among dealers to embrace change—has resulted in what he describes as “a tremendous time for the independent channel.”

Recent years at Tallgrass have provided plenty of evidence to justify that claim. The company itself is less than five years old and in many ways, its story represents dealer change management at its best.

Tallgrass came about through the merger of two long-established independents, Frohwein/Matthews Office Plus and Pioneer Workspace Solutions. “The two dealerships were less than 25 miles apart and the owners had been talking about joining forces for a while before the stars finally aligned in 2011 and it actually happened,” Randy recalls.

While both dealerships were family owned with deep roots in the community, they were also very different organizations and there was no guarantee that bringing them together would be a trouble-free undertaking with immediate benefits.

“One of the consultants we worked with on the deal told us to expect a 20% drop in sales in the first year,” Randy remembers. As it turned out, volume in that first post-merger year was essentially unchanged from the previous year, a win that Randy attributes as much to personalities and attitudes as to actual execution.

“We all went into the process with the idea of taking the best from each dealership and using it to build a stronger organization that would allow us to grow sales and eliminate as much duplication of services and functions as possible,” he explains. “We also went in recognizing the need to embrace change and not be satisfied with anything other than continuous growth and improvement.”

That approach led to some significant new hires—most notably a dedicated marketing person to coordinate brand building and a promotional products sales specialist to spearhead efforts in what has become a major new growth category for the dealership.

It also resulted in a much more goal-oriented business. “Each of our sales team now has monthly sales goals and they’re required to conduct a given number of account reviews every month as well,” Randy explains. Those changes and others like them have put Tallgrass on an encouraging growth curve. Sales in 2014 were up 11% and, says Randy, the dealership looks set for more of the same this year.

But in keeping with the new “accept nothing but improvement” mindset, those numbers, while welcome, are seen as little more than a step in the right direction.

“One of the consultants we worked with on the deal told us to expect a 20% drop in sales in the first year,” Randy recalls.

“Even after four years, we’re still tweaking the business post-merger and we will probably keep tweaking it for a good long while,” says Randy. “And we will continue to embrace change. If you’re a dealer and you’re not willing to do that, somebody is already writing your epitaph,” he says bluntly.
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S.P. Richards Lights It Up in Las Vegas at 2015 ABC

1. Professional of the Year John Givens (center) with OPI’s Steve Hilleard (left) and TriMega’s Michael Morris.

2. Jim Hebert, 2015 Industry Achievement award winner (seated), with OPI’s Steve Hilleard, John Burgess of S.P. Richards and Jim’s son Matthew.

3. S.P. Richards’ Jim O’Brien told dealers at the ABC that if facilities and breakroom products are not yet 15-20% of their business, they’re well behind the curve.

4. For the fifth year, superior product design and innovation were recognized by the North American Office Products Awards. Here are the winners.

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Inspiring keynotes on how to find opportunity in the middle of chaos and the nature of true leadership and urgent calls to dealers to broaden their product mix and embrace an increasingly digital world were among the highlights at S.P. Richards 2015 Advantage Business Conference in Las Vegas last month.

This year’s ABC drew some 3,000 attendees for three full days of education, networking and a tradeshow featuring over 200 exhibitors and a product mix that went far beyond the traditional office supplies and office furniture boundaries.

As senior VP of marketing Jim O’Brien told attendees at the first day’s general session, “If facilities and breakroom solutions products are not yet at least 15-20% of your business, you’re well behind the curve.”

While O’Brien didn’t downplay the challenges facing today’s independents, he offered an optimistic assessment of the dealer’s ability to take those challenges and convert them into new growth opportunities. “Be prepared for anything” he urged.

O’Brien said dealers should make sure they are positioned to hire and sell to millennials, pointing out that generation will represent 75% of the workforce by 2025. He stressed that for millennials, it’s an increasingly digital world and that means dealers need to have a strong presence online and on social medial platforms and embrace big data and put it to their advantage.

With that in mind, he announced a new partnership between S.P. Richards and ECI Software Solutions by which they will integrate SPR’s MyAnalyst program with ECI’s Acsellerate sales intelligence solution.

The new combined platform will marry the MarketLink, BidPro and MyReports components of MyAnalyst with Acsellerate’s CRM, Profitability Manager and Business Review modules.

Jeremy Gutsche, keynote speaker for the opening day session, offered attendees a compelling roadmap to find new opportunities. “Always be insatiable for new ideas and willing to destroy what worked in the past,” he urged.

Also at the conference, the second general session’s keynote speaker, Simon Sinek, offered attendees a powerful perspective on the true nature of business leadership.

“The role of a leader is not to come up with all the great ideas,” Sinek contended. “Instead, it’s to create an environment in which great ideas can happen and you do that by creating an organization where people feel safe and where they follow you, not because they have to or because they want to, but because they believe in you and the values you represent.”
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Also at the conference:

- A full-day of workshops and presentations on key industry topics
- A Gala Dinner featuring the Under the Streetlamp vocal group
- A special pre-conference education and networking event for S.P. Richards’ YES peer group of young industry executives
- A special program track for S.P. Richards’ Lorell Diamond office furniture dealers

For the fifth year in a row, a special awards program, co-sponsored by S.P. Richards and OPI magazine, recognized two outstanding industry professionals and highlighted new product innovation in several key categories.

Honored as Professional of the Year was John Givens, CEO of Source Office & Technology in Denver, while Office Partners founder Jim Hebert was presented with the 2015 Industry Achievement award.

Earning new product honors were:

- Core Office Products: 3M for its Post-It Dry Erase Surface
- Technology: Paris Corp. for its Weego Jump Starter Battery+
- Cleaning & Breakroom: Newell Rubbermaid for its Executive Quick Cart
- Furniture: Mayline for its Keep Modular Wall System

Also, ITW Pro Brands’ Sertun Rechargeable Sanitizer Indicator Towels earned Innovation of the Year honors while OPI readers and ABC attendees voted this year’s People’s Choice award to 3M for its Post-It Dry Erase Surface.

Next year’s ABC will take place July 20-24 in Washington, D.C.

Staples-Depot Update: Shareholders Say Yes; Sysco Ruling Signals Courts May Have Reservations

While over 99% of Office Depot shareholders voted last month in favor of the company’s proposed merger with Staples, their enthusiasm may not necessarily be shared by government regulators or the antitrust courts if a court ruling on a similar merger deal, also issued last month, offers any indication.

Sysco Corp.’s proposed merger with U.S. Foods has been seen very much as a bellwether of how the courts might view the Staples-Depot deal and last month the U.S. District Court in the District of Columbia effectively blocked the Sysco-U.S. Foods merger by granting approval to a request for a preliminary injunction filed by the Federal Trade Commission.

In that case, the FTC argued the merger would create a dominant company in the foodservice market and that customers would lose the benefit of competition between the companies without being able to turn to other suppliers. Following the ruling, Sysco announced it was abandoning its merger effort.

The judge’s ruling in favor of the FTC makes it easier for the agency to make a similar case again, a former FTC attorney told Crain’s Chicago Business. If the agency decides to challenge the Staples-Depot deal, it will probably do so using a market definition based on national customers, as it did with Sysco, she said.

The ruling also emboldens the agency, another antitrust lawyer told Crain’s. The same group at the FTC that brought the Sysco case is also investigating the Staples deal, Crain’s reported.

News of the court ruling sent Staples stock down by 5% in the two days following the announcement while Depot’s shares dropped by 3%.

ITC Imposes Countervailing Duties on Asian Copy Paper Producers

The International Trade Commission (ITC) announced last month it is imposing countervailing duties of more than 130% in certain cases on uncoated cut size paper producers in Asia, including two of the world’s largest paper companies, Asia Pulp & Paper and Asia Pacific Resources International.

The Commission’s preliminary ruling, based on an analysis of 2014 business, calls for countervailing duties ranging from 5.82% to 126.42% for producers in China and 43.19% to 131.12% for their counterparts in Indonesia.

The Commission’s investigation came in response to a complaint filed by four domestic paper manufacturers and the United Steelworkers union. Companies filing the complaint include Domtar, Packaging Corp. of America, Finch Paper and P.H. Glatfelter Co.

The duties announced last month represent only the first phase of the Commission’s investigation. The Commission has yet to announce a decision on possible antidumping duties. That aspect of the investigation not only covers mills in China and Indonesia but also in Australia, Brazil and Portugal.

The Commission’s anti-dumping determination is currently scheduled to be issued no later than November 2, unless postponed, the agency indicated. The Commission said it will also issue its final countervailing duties determination at that time.

Industry sources indicated the Commission’s ruling could lead to COGS increases in the 8-10% range, with the strong possibility of more to come later in the year.

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BSA to Honor John Motley with Legend of the Industry Award

The Business Solutions Association (BSA) will honor John L. Motley, retired president of John Motley Associates (JMA), with its 2015 Legend of the Industry Award at its 2015 Industry Forum later this year.

Motley began his industry career in 1973 with Dennison Manufacturing Company. After a brief stint in the Cincinnati area, he relocated to Washington, D.C. in the spring of 1974 to cover Virginia and the D.C. metropolitan area.

In 1974, he finished third in the country in sales increases for Dennison, only to finish first out of 120 sales force representatives two years later.

In 1976, Motley became a manufacturer’s representative for Beck Rumbaugh Associates with sales responsibility for the Mid-Atlantic states and the D.C.

In January 1980, John Motley Associates was formed when Tenex Corp. offered Motley its sponsorship for the new group. Since its founding 35 years ago, JMA has experienced phenomenal growth with steady increases year over year. Today, Motley devotes his time to maintaining key relationships with dealers as well as manufacturers.

Motley and his family have been longtime supporters of the National Cathedral Church in Washington, D.C.; City of Hope, and Fight for Children, an organization most known for its yearly event, “Fight Night.”

Motley currently resides in Northern Virginia with his wife, Debbie, and their four children: John, Elizabeth, Caroline and Kate.

Motley will be honored at the Legend of the Industry Luncheon on October 1 during the 2015 BSA Forum. The event will take place September 30-October 1 at the Loews Atlanta hotel.

Contact BSA headquarters (410-931-8100; www.businesssolutionsassociation.com).
Batteries are a vital, but often unseen, part of every workplace. Whether powering wireless keyboards or other office devices, batteries keep workplaces productive. Office supply dealers know this, but it’s been difficult for dealers to gain deeper insights into the professional battery market—until now.

Duracell Professional, the B2B division of Duracell, recently released the 2015 Battery Market Insights Report. The first of its kind from Duracell, the report contains data from more than 400 interviews with both professional end users and distributors in the office channel and others. The insights give dealers an unprecedented view into the $256 million away-from-home battery market and help them better understand their customer’s mindset. Here are a few highlights:

Customers want quality. The survey found that the most important factors customers consider when selecting a battery are quality, performance, and value. It also shows that Duracell is the leading battery brand in the away-from-home market. Since 2012, the brand’s market share has increased from 48% to 56%. Duracell batteries also scored higher than the competition on 9 out of 11 factors for battery selection, including battery life, quality and reputation.

How can dealers grow their sales? The report also includes recommendations from professional end users about how distributors can better serve them.

End users report that distributors have a great understanding of their business needs, are credible, and provide personalized service. However, end users also report a lack of proactive communication from distributors. They recommend distributors improve the frequency of their communication and offer better quality information to help guide their purchases. With more than one-third of end users reporting that they rely on their distributor for battery information, this is an opportunity for proactive dealers to expand their share of battery sales.

The battery market is changing. Despite the growth of devices with integrated batteries, alkaline batteries remain a key element in the workplace. Devices that traditionally were the primary use for batteries—flashlights and communications equipment—are being supplanted by wireless devices such as computer mice and keyboards.

Customers prefer branded batteries. While battery usage has evolved, professional end users continue to prefer branded batteries over private label, which is perceived as offering worse performance compared to branded batteries like Duracell. End users, particularly those who use expensive, high-tech devices, perceive significant performance advantages from branded batteries.

We are deeply committed to empowering dealers with knowledge and insights about their customers. We encourage you to mine the wealth of data in this report, which was produced in collaboration with Kline & Co., to capture a greater share of this evolving market.

To download a free copy, visit www.duracellpro.com/sell.

Paul Schacht is national sales manager for Duracell Professional, the business-to-business division of Duracell.
IS and TriMega Are Gearing Up to Go Big and Do Good at EPIC 2015

Later this year, October 6-8 to be precise, members of Independent Stationers and TriMega will be heading to Las Vegas for their third annual EPIC convention and tradeshow.

Both groups are promising to go big in Vegas, with a program offering plenty of opportunities to learn, network with fellow dealers and catch up on the latest offerings from vendors across an increasingly broad product spectrum.

But they’re also going to be providing attendees with plenty of opportunities to do good, with a range of activities before, during and after the big event.

The good deeds get underway on Tuesday afternoon, October 6, with “Pack for Kids,” a special event hosted by TriMega’s Next Committee of future industry leaders. With close to 60% of the children in Las Vegas’ Clark County School District enrolled in free and reduced-price meal programs, there’s a constant need for volunteer support.

EPIC attendees can do their part to make those kids’ lives a little easier by spending an afternoon at a local food bank where they’ll be helping to pack food items in the organization’s community kitchen. Transportation will be provided, and the event, which is open to all attendees regardless of group affiliation or industry role, runs from 12pm – 4pm.

Once EPIC gets underway in earnest, the opportunities for good deeds continue, particularly for exhibitors. Once again, they will be able to donate post-trade-show products to the Kids in Need Foundation, a national charity that provides free school supplies nationally to students most in need.

EPIC exhibitors have proudly contributed over $100,000 in product donations in previous years and the two groups are looking to continue that impressive track record at this year’s show.

Finally, after the show closes, attendees can take their support of City of Hope and the fight against cancer to new heights by participating in the Hike for Hope.

Scheduled for Friday, October 9 and hosted by TriMega EVP of marketing Michael Morris, the event offers a perfect way to cap off EPIC with a trip out to a spectacular natural retreat just minutes away from the Las Vegas strip at the Red Rock Canyon.

Three different routes are on offer—easy, moderate and advanced—and transportation is provided. All that’s required is a minimum $200 fundraising commitment to City of Hope.

Participants can also choose to do some fundraising of their own around the event through a special Crowdrise Fundraising website EPIC organizers will be setting up.

Looking for more information on how to do good while going big at EPIC? Click here.

ECi Launches Annual Everyday Hero Contest to Recognize Dealer Good Deeds

Dealer technology provider ECi Software Solutions has announced a new contest aimed at recognizing dealers using its technology who provide particularly outstanding support for a local charity or similar worthy cause.

ECi’s Annual Everyday Hero contest will award three prizes, including a grand prize of a $5,000 donation to a charity of the winner’s choice, to be presented at the company’s annual user conference, Connect 2015, at Disney’s Coronado Springs Resort later this year.

ECi is currently seeking nominations for the contest that meet the following criteria:

- Must be an ECi customer.
- Have a cause or charity that they or their business support, or a program/event that they sponsor or host that benefits the community (One-time events are eligible, nominees do not need to sponsor an ongoing program, ECi said).

“We are so excited about the Everyday Hero contest,” said Traci Johnson, SVP of global corporate marketing. “It has been a dream of ECi’s to create a program that would celebrate our customers and help support their local communities. On a daily basis we hear inspiring stories of how our customers supported someone else and through this contest we will be able to recognize those efforts.”

“Our customers are such a vital part of their communities,” added Ron Books, ECi president and CEO. “And really, being a part of the community is the ultimate expression of the entrepreneurial spirit. It’s about making your business a part of your life, and using your business to create change not only for yourself, but for those around you as well. I am truly humbled by the work they are doing.”

The deadline for nominations is 5:00 pm Central Time, August 1. Nominations will be reviewed by an independent panel of judges consisting of ECi employees and partners. Bigger is not necessarily better; it’s the spirit of service that will determine the winner, ECi said.

For more information and a nomination form, visit their website.
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BMI Joins Dynamics NAV User Group as Premium Partner

Dealer technology provider Business Management International (BMI Software) has become a Premium Partner member of the Dynamics NAV User Group (NAVUG).

NAVUG is an independent group of Microsoft Dynamics NAV software users, partners, industry experts and representatives of Microsoft Corp.

NAVUG is recognized by Microsoft as the official user group for its Dynamics NAV business software. BMI’s participation in NAVUG demonstrates its commitment to the Microsoft Dynamics NAV community and provides the organization with new ways to share its expertise, the company said.

“All of us at BMI are thrilled to join NAVUG,” said BMI president Larry Schiff. “We’re excited to share our 28 years of software development (20 years with NAV) and installation expertise with other Dynamics NAV partners and help today’s businesses thrive by realizing the full array of benefits Dynamics NAV provides.”

“Our Premium Partner members are an integral part of the NAVUG community. They bring innovative solutions, strategies and expertise to the group, which is of immense value to our members,” said Mark Rhodes, NAVUG program director. “NAVUG will work hand in hand with BMI to increase the value of the community by offering Dynamics NAV users many useful benefits. We’re pleased to welcome BMI and we look forward to their contributions to NAVUG.”

Taylor Corp. Buys Standard Register for $307 Million

Taylor Corp., parent company of Cosco, Navitor, ComplyRight Distribution Services and other brands, last month announced it has acquired the assets of forms manufacturer Standard Register for more than $307 million.

Standard Register filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection last March and immediately announced its sale to Silver Point Capital, a Connecticut-based hedge fund that already had an ownership stake in the company, for $275 million.

Taylor Corp.’s acquisition of the company was approved by a U.S. bankruptcy judge after a bankruptcy auction in which Taylor negotiated a deal with the previous top bidder for the company, which had 2013 revenue of $719 million.

“While Standard Register has encountered financial challenges, I have no doubt its best days are ahead,” said Deb Taylor, Taylor Corp.’s CEO. “Together we’ll have the scale and talent we need to pursue new market opportunities through a broader range of technology offerings, products and services.”

Taylor Corp. said the deal is expected to close in 45 to 60 days.

Mayline Recognized by Indeal Dealer Group for ‘Best Overall Value,’ Adds New VP of Strategic Marketing

Sheboygan, Wisconsin-based Mayline was recently recognized by the Indeal office furniture dealer group with a special “Best Overall Value” award. The award was presented at last month’s NeoCon 2015 show in Chicago.

“We are extremely honored to be recognized for this award,” said Allan Klotsche, president and CEO of Mayline. “Our mission is to provide a complete range of mid-market office furniture solutions that meet our customers’ design, quality and style criteria. This differentiates us from other office furniture manufacturers and I believe this award supports our mission.”

Separately, Mayline announced the addition to its management team of Amy Kiefer as vice president of strategic marketing.

Kiefer joins Mayline after 25 years in a number of senior leadership positions, most recently at KI (Krueger International). For the past five years, she was KI’s vice president of education markets, overseeing both the higher education and K-12 business units.

New Filing Products from C-Line

C-Line Products has introduced two new filing products designed to let end users organize documents and information with style and color. Both items also feature write-on technology that makes it possible to label contents with pencil, ball point pen or permanent marker to quickly identify information.

C-Line’s Write-on Poly File Jackets are sealed on three sides with a 1” expansion that holds up to 200 letter-sized documents. The jackets are available in a 10-pack which retails for $12.99 or a 25-count box which retails for $35.95. Assorted colors include amber orange, lime green, charcoal gray, raspberry red and steel blue.
Navitor Announces Additions to Online Spot Color Offering

Navitor last month announced the addition of new products to the company’s online spot printed offering of business envelopes, mailing envelopes and short run Post-it Notes. These products join the spot color letterhead, stationery envelopes, and business cards that are already available through Navitor.com.

Navitor said it will also be offering special introductory pricing for the company’s entire online selection of spot color print products, allowing buyers to save 15%. This offer is exclusively for Navitor resellers and will be available through July 31.

Visit [www.navitor.com](http://www.navitor.com) for more information.

The Highlands Group Canada Acquires Assets of Multi Mark Agents, LTD

The Highlands Group Canada announced last month it is acquiring the assets of Multi Mark Agents, LTD, a 40 year old sales agency located in Newmarket, Ontario.

Multi-Mark founder and president Bob Pickard stated, “After 40 great years of building our rep agency it is now time for me to retire to allow my wife, Mary, and I to move into the next phase of our lives.”

Effective June 1, the Multi Mark field sales team will report directly to Brendan Lane, president and general manager of The Highlands Group Canada. “We saw this as a great opportunity to strengthen the commercial side of our business as we quickly expand The Highlands Group model into the Canadian market,” said Lane.
For anyone in the office furniture business, Chicago was a good place to be last month, as once again the industry clans gathered at the Merchandise Mart for the annual NeoCon tradeshow.

This year it was very much a sit-stand world, as a broad range of manufacturers touted the benefits of height adjustability, both for user health and industry profitability.

Not surprisingly, technology, flexibility and collaborative workspaces were once again front and center in many showrooms. Also of note: a continuing shift in design trends to more residential type styling and away from a more distinctively “office” look and feel.

With more than 450 exhibitors at the show, it’s impossible to present any kind of broad overview but here are some of the new products on display at the Mart last month.

Steelcase’s Brody WorkLounge is designed to create a cocoon-like space that blocks visual distractions and provides privacy and an enhanced sense of psychological security for workers and students in open environments. Brody won a gold award in the Education Solutions category of the Best of NeoCon contest.

Orla lounge seating from Haworth featured a padded shape with subtle curves and soft edges to emphasize comfort.

The Metaform Portfolio from Herman Miller uses modular blocks and functional accessories intended to enable users to tailor the workplace to their unique needs and adjust surroundings as those needs evolve. Metaform blocks weigh less than 20 pounds each but still have structural rigidity so that they can be easily arranged and rearranged by the average worker.
Global introduced the Foli sit-to-stand height adjustable table that featured almost 20 inches of vertical motion.

The LINK Hex whiteboard from Ghent garnered a Silver Best of NeoCon award in the Accessories category. LINK Hex features a premium dry-erase powder coat and is designed to offer a modern take on a traditional product segment.

Mayline introduced several enhancements to its TechWorks IT and backroom line, including custom paint treatments, shared organizer frame applications, new monitor arms, shorter depth shelving, fabric/tack panels and double-sided whiteboards.

Safco highlighted a new line of breakroom cabinets featuring 3/4” thermal fused melamine laminate with a 1” High Pressure Laminate countertop with 2mm PVC edgeband and easy assembly with cam-lock fasteners.

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Bretford's new TechGuard line of Charging Lockers is designed to provide a solution for storing, securing, and charging individual laptops, tablets, and phones. Available in 1-, 5-, or 10-bay configurations, each bay is equipped to hold a 15.5-inch laptop, 10-inch tablet, and a phone with the ability to charge them all at once.

Magnuson expanded its outside seating with the addition of OM BASIC. Sculpted from a single block of solid rotational-molded polyethylene and easily portable, the line comes in six different colors and is 100% recyclable.

Home furnishings manufacturer West Elm launched the West Elm Workspace line of office furniture created in collaboration with Inscape. The line is intended to bring a residential aesthetic to the office and features four distinct collections in mid-century, industrial, contemporary and modern styles. West Elm won an Editors’ Choice award in the Best of NeoCon contest.

MooreCo premiered a new line of modular soft seating designed to be reconfigurable and customizable. Initial offerings will include Momentum Textiles’ fabric options with a COM program available upon approval.
HON's new Soothe collection for healthcare environments includes a patient recliner, benches, guest chairs, tables and high-back patient chairs as well as bariatric seating.

WorkStyles from Tuohy is an adaptable case good system with integrated lounge compatibility for individual and group work. The collection won the Best of NeoCon “Best of Competition” award.

The Sylvi modular lounge collection from izzy+ is designed to look and feel like you’re working at home while still providing an enclosed sense of privacy. Sylvi’s metal frame hosts hidden USB and power plug-ins while an under-cushion channel helps connect embedded tables, magazine rack and coat hook accessories.

Flash Furniture introduced an additional nine colors to one of its multi-paddle ergonomic chairs. All ten versions are available to dealers for as low as $95 each with Flash’s free freight program.
NOPA Urges Members to Speak Out Against Legalized Price-Fixing

Recently, the General Services Administration (GSA) proposed new pricing data requirements that the National Office Products Alliance (NOPA) believes are little more than legalized government price-fixing. Such a requirement would pose serious dangers to office products dealers, and for that reason, NOPA is asking members to speak out against this proposal.

In March, GSA published a proposed regulation to create an immediate government-wide transactional data reporting requirement for non-Federal Supply Schedule (FSS) contracts. The following month, the agency hosted an industry day to hear reaction to the proposal from the business community.

Based on the input NOPA has received from businesses of all sizes, the association is concerned about the impacts these rules will have and the role contracting officers are now being required to play in deciding what is a “fair price” provided by a supplier.

The association believes competition should be an important driver in price and not a contracting officer's decision, given the limited knowledge these officers possess of the factors that determine pricing of various goods and services in the government marketplace.

In light of this, NOPA is asking its members to urge the gov-

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Invest in NOPA - The Association That Works to Protect Your Industry

NOPA is hard at work defending your industry and protecting the long-term success of office product dealers!

Whether its the association's advocacy efforts or its commitment to strengthening industry standards, NOPA looks out for you!

To learn more about NOPA, visit: www.iopfda.org or call (410) 931-8100
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ermment to require GSA halt the implementation of these rules until Congress has had time to review them in greater detail and look at the direct impacts they will have on businesses and the government.

While NOPA applauds GSA's efforts to streamline the procurement process, these proposed rules seem to go beyond that and may cause real harm to our members.

One area of concern for the association is the sharing of this data. During its forum in April, GSA noted that vendors' information and pricing will be shared with GSA, contract officers and possibly, other entities the agency deems appropriate.

NOPA wonders how the administration plans to keep a vendor's data confidential when it is being passed around to such a large, open-ended group. GSA said during the forum that it has policies in place that would allow them to quickly identify any person who shares a vendor's data with a competitor. While such a plan is all well and good, once the information is released and shared, it cannot be pulled back.

This may not seem like a big issue for GSA, but it is for the industry. NOPA has to ask: Why does GSA need to go to such lengths to grab a vendor's data? Shouldn't the administration be in a position to collect what agencies are spending on goods and services today? Why is GSA requiring industry to share sensitive data that will likely make its way to the public domain and with no recourse for the vendor?

The association is asking members to request that GSA slow down this process and spend more time talking to and working with industry representatives on these new requirements. GSA should not be in the position of dictating prices of goods and services.

To express your concerns over GSA's proposed changes, please visit: www.votervoice.net/IOPFDA/campaigns/41006/respond to submit your comments to the government. The association thanks you for your efforts to protect the future of the industry!

Register Today for the BSA 2015 Annual Forum

The Forum will be held Wednesday, Sept. 30 - Thursday, Oct. 1, 2015 in Atlanta at the Loews Atlanta!

Register before Jul. 31, 2015 to take advantage of Early Bird Registration rates!

Will the 2016 race for the White House bring us fresh new faces and new ideas or will we go back in time with old names and faces dominating the campaign? We are still over a year away from deciding who will become the next President but many of those wanting to claim that mantle are already declaring their intentions.

First, Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) announced he was running. From the first day Sen. Cruz took the oath of office, he has been the leading voice of the far right conservative wing of the Republican Party.

Sen. Cruz was the first Tea Party candidate elected to the U.S. Senate and he came to Washington with a take-no-prisoners attitude. It has long been a foregone conclusion the Senator would make a run for the White House but there are many questions he will have to answer as he seeks his party’s nomination.

Can he be a viable national candidate? Can he actually win the Republican nomination or will his campaign do little more than push the party so far right that it once again becomes almost impossible for a Republican to win?

Currently, there are three sitting U.S. Senators also running: Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY), Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC).

Sen. Paul brings a Libertarian tilt to his candidacy that resonated early but that has seemed to be fading of late. He has not come across well in TV interviews and his official announcement didn’t get the buzz you would expect when announcing you’re running for President.

Sen. Paul has to establish himself as more than just a younger version of his father’s failed candidacy. As a fundraiser, it is not clear he will be able to bring in the money he will need for what is expected to be a very expensive primary battle. There are also doubts about his ability to present a vision that will resonate with the party’s conservative wing.

Then there is Sen. Marco Rubio, who is branding his candidacy as the face of the future. Sen. Rubio is a fresh face, he has the ability to raise money and he has been willing to take a stand on issues—like immigration—that are not popular with the Tea Party wing.

But Sen. Rubio also has had some stumbles. His effort to lead the charge on immigration reform backfired and at times, he has looked like a candidate in need of more experience. Some critics have described him as the Republican version of Barack Obama, another ambitious young politician who ran for the White House with just a year and a half of experience in the Senate on his resume.

Still sitting on the sidelines as of this writing but expected to announce soon are Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie.
Gov. Walker became a conservative favorite after he won a state recall election that was seen as evidence of his ability to take on tough issues and successfully fight Big Labor, not only in his own state, but on the national stage, too.

Gov. Christie faces some tough questions that he will need to answer early on if he is going to be seen as a viable leading candidate.

First, we will see if the nation is ready for a blunt spoken candidate who is more than willing to tell voters what he really thinks. We will also see how his recent troubles in New Jersey will play nationally and whether or not he has the ability to raise the kind of money a candidate needs to be competitive. Finally, we will have to see if his moderate views will keep conservatives from taking him seriously.

These are the new, fresh faces of the Republican Party and they are all out trying to convince voters they are the next generation of leaders with a vision to lead the country.

Key to those efforts will be a message directed at former Governor Jeb Bush, also now officially in the race, that he is nothing more than a candidate of the party’s tired and unsuccessful past.

Gov. Bush has been a prodigious fundraiser and already has banked somewhere in the region of $500 million for his campaign. But he is viewed by many in the Republican Party as too moderate and it will be interesting to see how far to the right he has to move in order to appease hard core conservatives in early primary states like Iowa and South Carolina.

And then there is the rest of the Republican field: Governors John Kasich and Bobby Jindal, former Governors Rick Perry and George Pataki, former Senator Rick Santorum, Ben Carson, Donald Trump and Carly Fiorina.

On the Democratic side the choice is an easy one—Hillary Clinton. Right now, the odds makers have appointed Hillary the favorite to win the White House. Their only problem: We still have over a year to go before people head to the polls and a lot can happen.

Questions are already being raised about her candidacy and she will also have to convince voters they can actually trust her. She will have to make the case that she should be judged on her actions today and not on what she or her husband did in the past. That will be a lot easier said than done.

The one other candidate yet to announce on the Republican side—who I personally view as a real wild card—is Ohio Governor John Kasich.

Gov. Kasich can point to a long and successful track record, both as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives and chairman of the House Budget Committee and as governor of his state.

Like Gov. Walker, he has taken on Big Labor and won. He bucked the traditional Republican Party line by accepting Medicaid expansion for his state and he has also been willing to talk about the need for real immigration reform. In addition, he has been spoken openly and honestly about gay marriage.

These are all issues that have angered the far right wing of the party, but he has people listening. The biggest questions he faces involve his ability to raise the money necessary to go the distance and put together the kind of organization he will need to be competitive in early primary states.

On the plus side, he comes from a state you need to win if you want to be the next President and he has now won there statewide twice.

So much for the field as it stands today. What about the most likely election scenario?

Unless there is a major shift in the universe, Hillary Clinton will be the Democratic nominee and that means at least half of the ticket will be seen as the past trying to take us into the future.

The positives for Hillary are her ability to raise money, her husband’s popularity in key states and the fact that so many women want to see a woman in the White House.

If we do end up with a Bush-Clinton match-up, it will not only go down as our most negative race in history, but it will also keep people home on Election Day. I think Bush will see the same people stay home who kept Mitt Romney out of the White House and the same will happen to Clinton, though to a lesser degree.

If neither candidate stumbles, I believe you will see a huge turnout from women (and I’m betting some Republican women will vote for her just because they too want to see the first woman President) and you will see an uptick in African American votes.

Republicans will need to find a way to rally hard core supporters and get them out and pulling the lever for Bush. The message should be easy: Do you want another scandal-ridden Clinton White House or do you want to finally, after eight long years, get a Republican in the White House again, even if his name is Bush?

Only time will tell how this all plays out, but one thing is clear: The cost of this race will be north of $4 billion. If only I was in the media business! So as you prepare for 2016, I can only tell you to buckle up and get ready for what will surely be another very bumpy political ride.

As NOPA’s director of legislative and regulatory affairs, Paul Miller is the association’s government advocacy representative on Capitol Hill. Miller represents NOPA and dealer interests before the U.S. Government and key states; insisting on a level playing field in contracting for independents and protecting office products dealers’ business against misguided government proposals. For more information, visit www.iopfda.org/?page=Advocacy.
Finding and hiring good people, particularly in these days of low unemployment, is probably about as hard as it’s ever been. And making matters even worse, the independent office products dealer channel is frequently invisible to potential new hires – particularly those just entering the work force.

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Independents may lack the name recognition of their big box competition, but they offer benefits that the larger retailers can’t. Employees often work directly with the owner, they don’t get caught up in corporate politics and they learn relationship-building skills that create loyal customers.

So how does an independent communicate their advantages and attract the best employees? We spoke to six dealers across the country that said they’re changing their practices to compete in today’s market. Here are their winning strategies and best advice for finding and hiring the right talent:

### Current Employees Are Your Best Resource

Kevin Fries, human resources manager for Eakes Office Solutions in Grand Island, Nebraska, says his company has been able to find good employees, but he had to change his methods of recruiting.

Eakes Office Solutions offers employees a $500 bonus if they refer a candidate who is hired to work full time. “It’s been our number-one way of finding great people,” Fries says.

Fries also leverages online sites and social media, posting available jobs on the company’s Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn pages.

“When someone who is following us sees our job opening, they’re more likely to be interested or tell somebody they know who is looking for a job,” Fries says.

If you want to reach Millennials, Fries says it’s crucial to be online. “The younger generation is online and that’s why we hit that market as heavy as we do,” he says.

Former big box employees are also of interest to Fries. He says he always scours that market looking for people but at the end of the day, it’s more about the person than their industry knowledge.

“It’s great to have big box knowledge,” he says. “But our company operates differently.”

After Fries narrows down the candidates, he asks them to take assessments, depending on the position.

“The tests provide us with information about personality and behavior,” he says. “We’re looking for the right individual and the right aptitude. We always seek employees who are very goal and work focused. We like to have fun and work hard doing it. We look for honesty, integrity and community involvement.”

Once Eakes makes a hire, Fries puts the new employee through a 90-day training program.

“We have a new hire checklist each person goes through,” he says. “It’s an opportunity to go over everything they need to learn in black and white. They learn everything from how to run the phone system to the fine details of their job. Then they’re ready to go.”

“Unemployment is very low in Nebraska and we’ve struggled in the past to find good people out of there,” he says. “You can’t just throw ads in a newspaper and expect to have candidates line up. We’ve found good success in building a network of candidates through our employees.”

### Customers Are a Great Resource

Best Office Solutions in Waynesboro, Georgia, has not only built great relationships with customers, they’ve received some great leads from them on new employees.

“Everybody says good people are hard to find, but we have been blessed to have found some fantastic people,” says Sandi Shields, co-owner and president. “Because we’re in a rural market, our hiring practices are a bit different than others. We have used Facebook but customer referrals have been one of our best methods.”

Shields says one of her most recent hires came from a customer who knew she was looking for somebody: “We had interviewed several candidates and just didn’t find a good fit,” she says. “A customer recommended someone, and they ended up being the perfect person.”

Shields says the only change her company has made to recruiting is adding Facebook to the equation.

“My business partner put out a call on Facebook and we have received some good applicants,” she says. “It kind of gets the ball rolling and helps with word of mouth. It also tells our customers that we’re hiring.”

Best Office Solutions is also hiring Millennials, but Shields says being an independent dealer in a rural market has hampered the visibility of her business.

“We don’t get people from Atlanta applying,” she says. “We specifically had Millennials in mind during our last hiring because they’re so fast, smart and motivated. We had heard a lot of negative things about Millennials from other offices, but we’re finding those stereotypes not to be true for us.”

Shields is also looking for former big box employees. “We’re keeping our eyes
Krista Moore’s Top Ten Hiring Tips

We asked industry consultant Krista Moore of K. Coaching for her top ten tips for hiring right. Here’s what she came up with:

1. Establish company core values and ensure all new hires are aligned.
2. Create behavioral interview questions around specific core competencies that you are looking for. Example: Prospecting Skills: “Tell me about how you brought in your last new account through prospecting. What is your biggest sales success story?”
3. Throw in a few unexpected questions to see how they respond. Example: “How would your previous boss describe you?” “What would they say we should be aware of?”
4. Consider a stay pay incentive: For high potential younger new reps that you want to ensure continue working for you after you invest in their training in development. A lump sum bonus received after X years of service.
5. Never hire from a pool of one.
6. ALWAYS use an assessment tool to validate and confirm your hiring decisions, and use it after hiring as a development tool.
7. Reconfirm the hiring decision after two weeks with the new hire. Offer to pay them the remainder of the month, if they feel it is not a good fit and want to leave. (Ultimately, they won’t be successful if they are questioning their decision or you are not sure. They won’t be worth the further investment).
8. Use a scoreboard of competencies and conduct round robin interviews
9. Have the final two present on a subject of their choice to your leadership team, to help with the final decision.
10. Never hire someone that you can’t fire.

“open,” she says. “At a recent conference we attended, we looked for former Office Depot reps who had become frustrated because of the mergers, but we haven’t found them yet! We’re not actively trying to find them but we’re keeping our eyes open to that element.”

When it comes down to screening candidates, Shields rarely uses pre-hire testing. “If it were to come down to three fantastic candidates then we might proceed, but usually it’s clear cut,” she says.

“Once they come on board, we do some personality testing. We want to make sure we’re using every employee to his or her fullest potential. We don’t believe in putting a square peg into a round hole. We want to know what employees most want to do.”

While Shields admits it’s not a foolproof method, her best advice when hiring is to go with your gut.

“We trust the facts and the education,” she says. “We also hire based on core values. At the end of the day, we want everybody to get along. It’s not reality to think everyone will become best friends but we do want people to like to come to work.”

Make Retention Part of Your Hiring Process

To attract the best employees, it can be helpful to create a program that fulfills an employee’s long-term needs, suggests Betsy Hughes, vice president of sales and marketing for FriendsOffice in Findlay, Ohio.

“We have an aging sales force and we’re working on our succession planning,” she says. “Talking with different dealers, I’ve learned the large majority don’t have a formal training program. Their process is to work with the owner for three days and then they’re off on their own.

When you look at individuals that you want to recruit into this business, we’ve learned that Millennials don’t like to operate like that. As independent dealers, we’re going to have to change what we’re doing to recruit the best sales people; we’re going to have to develop a program that attracts them and makes them want to stay.”

To find good people, Hughes uses recruiting sites like ZipRecruiter, which sends your job post to more than 100 sites, including LinkedIn and Facebook. The site also lets employers search for candidates based on skill set keywords.

To learn how to retain employees, Hughes has worked with universities and their placement offices to discover the best strategies.
“We spend all that time to train but we need to do a better job to retain,” she says. “Some of the individuals coming out of college have a degree in sales—an actual degree in sales! They want challenging positions that let them use their minds and let them be heard and have a voice. They’re looking for guidance and support to do well. They’re looking for a mentor. That’s what we’re gearing up for.”

Millennials want companies that develop a career path for them upfront, says Hughes. “They want to grow and be challenged,” she says. “We’re working on defining a structured process. That’s what they’re looking for. If you look like you’re disorganized, candidates pick up on that right away. If you get the structure in place, you’ll attract the right individuals.”

Hughes says hiring recent college graduates provides an opportunity to start with someone fresh, especially since Friends hasn’t had good luck recruiting reps from big box stores.

“They are used to selling on name recognition,” she says. “They’re not given real sales skills. It’s tougher for an independent dealer because we don’t have their resources for advertising. We rely on people who can position us as a player, tell our story and promote the independent dealer. Educating the consumer is the best approach to selling. We want sales reps who are excited to talk about our industry.”

Get Out and Network

When Bill Zimmerman, owner of Office Outfitters in Waupaca, Wisconsin, looks at resumes, he likes to see candidates who have stayed at a job for at least five years. Since the average Millennial stays at a company three years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, this is becoming a big challenge.

“There is a real shortage of skilled people with a good work ethic and a good track record,” he says. “I see plenty of people around with all kinds of skills but they work at a company just one or two years. It raises suspicions when they don’t stay in one place for five years. There’s often a reason why they don’t last.”

Over the past five years, Zimmerman says he’s finding that it takes longer to find the right candidate. “You have to look harder,” he says.

Office Outfitters recently filled a position in its printing department, and Zimmerman says he started by reaching out to people in his business network, such as his vendors, customers, associations and local chambers of commerce.

“Referrals that come through networking have the person’s credibility on the line and that carries weight in itself,” he says. “I always start there and give it some time before advertising on LinkedIn, Indeed, and Craigslist. When I advertise, I may get a lot more applications, but a lot of them are not as qualified as the people who have been referred.”

Zimmerman says he looks for people who prefer to work at a small company. This is also a challenge because the younger generation often goes for name recognition.

“Those who have experience in a large company see the downside and would prefer to work in a less political environment with the opportunity to work directly with the owner,” he says.

Once Zimmerman identifies six qualified candidates, he follows a process for interviewing and hiring. First, he conducts phone interviews to narrow things down to two or three candidates. Then, he meets with each person one on one, and if that goes well, he conducts a group interview with the people in his company who would be working directly with the new hire.

“Group interviews are great because I get feedback from our team about which candidate they prefer,” he says.

Zimmerman checks references, does a background check and finally has the candidate take a personality test.

“Some of most important things we’re looking for are work ethic, a solid team player approach and emotional maturity,” says Zimmerman, who has found the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis to be a helpful tool.

“It tells me a lot about personality and if the person would be compatible with the rest of the team. The biggest problem is getting people who are good team players and enjoy working together.”

Always Be Recruiting

Ryan Puccinelli, president of IQ Total Source in Phoenix, says finding good people may be hard, but it’s certainly not impossible.

“One of the things we’ve learned is too often people spot hire,” he says. “They need somebody and they do a sprint-to-hire program. We’re consistently recruiting and looking, whether we’re bringing somebody on board or not.”

Puccinelli says recruiting can be difficult for the independent dealer: “A big part of that is that we’re not a very sexy industry,” he laments. “Our company recently

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rebranded and we’re taking a different approach to who we are and what we do. We tell potential candidates that it doesn’t matter if you’re selling medical supplies or office products, it’s about the environment and business.”

IQ Total Source has found luck working with recruiters, and Puccinelli likes Recruiting.com. “We have consistent job posts out there,” he says. “We also are working through local job boards. It’s more than just posting an ad and hoping people call. We search candidate databases and actively make calls. We don’t wait for them to come to us. We’ve changed our approach and made it more of a proactive method. It’s allowed us to get much better candidates.”

Puccinelli says his ideal employee is someone who has been out of college for two to five years and has sales experience. New hires are put through an in-depth training program.

“It’s a hand-holding relationship,” he says. “We don’t throw people against the wall to see who sticks. Our idea is to bring on fewer people but make sure they are good people that we can provide time and energy to train up as much as needed. Training is extremely important for us.”

IQ Total Source has also substantially increased its compensation package for salespeople. “Many people in our industry are trying to get A players for D pay,” Puccinelli says. “In order to compete in the marketplace for candidates we need to be able to put together an aggressive plan that’s in line with medical sales companies. A $30,000 base or commission-only plan doesn’t resonate with anybody under the age of 50. We’re offering something much higher—something that is unheard of in our industry. But it allows us to get much better people.”

Instead, Clayton also employs staffing companies, headhunters and recruiters to help find qualified people. She also reaches out to colleges when she’s looking for a recent graduate. “Placement offices have the internal means to reach out to students and alumni,” she says.

Once she identifies a potential candidate, Clayton screens people over the phone to see how well they communicate. If they make it through the phone screening, Clayton invites them to come in for a face-to-face interview. If she wants to take it a step further, she administers an assessment.

“It gives us a feel for their personality—how they tackle problems, what motivates them, how they interact with people and how they prefer to learn from a training perspective,” she says. “A resume doesn’t tell you a whole lot; anyone creative can write a good resume.”

Once she makes a hire, Clayton says the new employee is on-boarded with HR and given binders of information about the company and culture. While she says the company doesn’t have a formal training process, employees follow a routine to get acclimated.

“It can be a challenge for new people to know whom to call for IT and for purchasing office supplies,” she says. “We provide that information at their fingertips. We train them by putting an agenda together based on their position, and for the first couple weeks they sit with a mentor. From then on, it’s up to the manager to make sure they’re exposed to training and development.”

Passive Job Seekers Make Great Candidates

Putting job postings on social media has proven to be a good method of finding qualified candidates, says Melanie Clayton, vice president of HR and administration for Storey Kenworthy in Des Moines.

“Facebook and Twitter are becoming good ways to get out the word,” she says. “The best candidates are the ones who are already employed. They’re the passive jobseekers. When they see a job coming up on their social media feed, it could pique their interest.”

Clayton says over the past two years, Storey Kenworthy has stopped posting on job boards. “We’re not seeing job boards working at all anymore,” she says. “Some of the people who are unemployed and are searching those boards may not be employable. They’re sending resumes for jobs they aren’t qualified for.”
Join us in Chicago at City of Hope’s National Business Products Industry 2015 Spirit of Life® Gala honoring Steve Sakamoto for his philanthropic achievements and his commitment to helping City of Hope transform the future of health.

To register, learn more or for general donations, visit cityofhope.org/nbpi or contact Monique De Vaughn at 866-905-HOPE.
Today’s workforce comprises Millennials, Generation X, Baby Boomers and a small number of Traditionals. Millennials (once referred to as Generation Y) are generally defined as those in the workforce ages 18 to 35 or 38; Generation X, ages 35 or 38 to 50, and Baby Boomers, ages 50 to 69. Those older than 69 still in the workforce, typically referred to as Traditionals, were born before 1945.

Last month, I mentioned the difficulties most dealers continue to experience in their workforce when it comes to getting different generations to work more effectively together, particularly the millennials working with the older generations.

A better understanding of each of the generational groups, particularly millennials, can help dealer principals and their key managers improve teamwork, trust and mutual respect among their workforce.

**Millennials**

I emphasize millennials because millennials are increasingly becoming the dominant generation in the workforce. This year, millennials will surpass the number of baby boomers and within the next three years they will comprise 46% of the workforce.

As with all groups, millennials share some common characteristics, but all too often they’ve been stereotyped as the “Me” generation, a group that, while talented and Internet savvy, are self-centered, outspoken (questioning and challenging everything), idealistic and difficult to manage. They want opportunity and money but think nothing of quitting a job, the stereotype would maintain.

I personally feel millennials have gotten a bad rap. I have four
They have pride and want to be appreciated for who they are and what they do. They want to collaborate. They want feedback. They are open to change. They want meaning and purpose. They want to make a difference, no matter what their job.

I was struck last year on a visit to a large hospital with which I work. In the hospital’s maze of corridors, I became totally lost when trying to get to my location. A staff member, a millennial, probably in his early 30s, asked if I needed help finding my way. I sure did. He told me where I wanted to go was at the other end of the hospital and that he’d take me there.

As we walked a long way though corridors including a back stairway, I asked him what he thought about the hospital. His reply: “I am very proud of this hospital, what it does and how it treats us. I’m happy to be a part of it. I may be only a janitor, but let me tell you, cleanliness is important here. I want to be a part of this company and would never consider being anywhere else.” That spoke volumes to me.

I mention that experience because I firmly believe that you, a dealer, can make a difference to millennials at any level within your organization and that they can make a positive difference to you and your organization.

**Generation X**

Many in Generation X have lost their optimism and have become more skeptical. Some have become bitter. They have experienced recessions, many (particularly with large corporations) have been laid off, not necessarily because their job was eliminated but rather because the organization decided it could find someone else at a significantly lower salary. Others have faced changing job contracts such as employment at will. Some have been offered (or forced into) early retirement, yes, even in their 40s. They can view millennials as a threat.

This generation is entering what they would hope to be their peak earning years yet many have lost confidence. You, as a dealer owner, can do a lot to correct that. If they can view your company as a friendly environment where their experience can work in collaboration with the talents of the millennials, they can be provided the reassurance that many of them need to remain productive and fulfilled.

**Baby Boomers and Traditionals**

Baby boomers are entering the age of retirement, many retiring early. Some are no longer able to work long hours. They—and the Traditionals—are finding it more difficult to change and keep pace, particularly in technology.

Yet both these groups are your most experienced. Both undoubtedly remain the most loyal and easiest group to manage. As with other generations, your dealer opportunity is to understand their needs and provide ways that enable them to more easily interact and be effective working with their fellow workers.

As I’ve discussed in both columns, the challenges of today’s workforce are significant. Yet the opportunities will be even greater if you are personally willing to invest time and effort to address these very human interactive workforce issues.

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Bill Kuhn, principal of William E. Kuhn & Associates, is a noted industry consultant who has been writing about the office products and office furniture industries for over 35 years.

Contact Bill by phone: 303-322-8233, or e-mail: BillKuhn1@cs.com.
“Troy, how do I create a sense of urgency in the customer’s mind so that my proposal doesn’t just sit on his desk?” It’s one of the most common questions I get and one of the most frustrating for any salesperson (including me).

You’ve made your proposal, the deal is good, the buyer likes you and then the whole process stalls. Isn’t that painful?

This is when the salesperson (you) tries to go back and create some urgency on the part of the buyer. “Let’s get this guy excited so he moves and makes a decision!”

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The trouble is that your buyer has already made a decision, and that decision is that your proposal does not warrant action now (if it ever does). It’s too late. And all the fancy-schmancy “objection resolution” techniques in the world won’t help.

The place to address time frame and urgency issues is in the questioning phase of selling—which should happen BEFORE you present and propose.

Always remember, 80% of your chance to win or lose the sale happens when you’re asking questions. If you don’t get to know and understand the buyer’s needs—and effectively prioritize those needs—all the great presentation, objection resolution and closing techniques in the world aren’t going to save the sale.

First, we have to ask questions designed to discover if it really does benefit the prospect to act sooner. If it really doesn’t (and it won’t sometimes) we have to be honest with ourselves and the customer in recognizing that fact.

We’re always in love with the benefits of doing business with us and we always think that sooner is better when it comes to buying (and selling). But does the prospect feel that way? Is there a genuine advantage to acting sooner?

Second, we have to understand the time value of inaction. Again this happens through questions. For instance, does your prospect have a goal to reach and is whatever you’re selling a key touch point for reaching it? Is something going on right now that is costing money each day it continues, and can what you’re selling reverse that?

Or perhaps, is the problem your prospect is confronting one that is significant? For example, does he receive complaints from employees on a regular basis and can you or your dealership fix these problems?

Third, are there any inherent barriers to implementing your solution? Do departments need to be reorganized, facilities renovated or moved, or new staff hired before your solution can be implemented and fully taken advantage of?

This is the time to be realistic. If your prospect genuinely can’t use—or can’t maximize the use of—your product or service quite yet (and the issue isn’t simply a stalling tactic), you can be of the highest value to your prospect by helping him stage or plan the sale and implementation.

Finally, we have to understand overall corporate priorities. Even if there is a sense of urgency within a given department, there might be other priorities in the company that they want to take care of first.

For instance—and I’ll use myself for an example—maybe I’m selling a sales training program but the client is revamping their production plant for more capacity so they can handle elevated sales.

Our “stuff” only is important within the context of the overall picture of needs. Failing to understand the overall context of a sale is one of the greatest weaknesses of salespeople. It’s hard to recognize that our “stuff” lives within the scope of our customers’ companies.

The key is to get the customer to articulate the consequences of not acting or the benefits of acting sooner, not you. If you’re telling them, it won’t work; if they’re telling you, you have a shot. Remember, contentions only become fact in the sales process when the customer either states them or agrees that your contentions are statements of fact.

Here is the equation for a sale to happen:

Need articulated by customer + Solution articulated by salesperson AND AGREED TO by customer + TIMING.

A good friend and client of mine refers to this as “their window being open.” In this analogy, the customer can have needs and you can have the perfect solution — but if their window (timing) isn’t open, you’re simply throwing rocks at a window. Yep, sometimes you can break the window, but have you ever seen a window owner be delighted that it was broken?

Notice that nowhere have I spoken of “creating urgency” on the part of the buyer. That’s because you really can’t. Sure, you can use tired old tactics like the old “If you buy today, it’s at this price, but not if you buy next week,” but today’s customer sees through that. What you can do is discover, channel, and accentuate urgency that already exists.

And even if you do all that, the sale still sometimes won’t happen. Why? Because we sell to human beings. That said, this method gives you the best shot. Hope that helps!

Troy Harrison is the author of “Sell Like You Mean It!”, “The Pocket Sales Manager,” and a Speaker, Consultant, and Sales Navigator who helps companies build more profitable and productive sales forces. For information on booking speaking/training engagements, consulting, or to sign up for his weekly E-zine, call 913-645-3603, e-mail Troy@TroyHarrison.com, or visit www.TroyHarrison.com.
Recently, I had reason to examine the financials of Staples and Office Depot from 2014 in order to assist an independent dealer with their client. The dealer in question is tired of giving awesome service, while suffering on the bottom line because some of their largest customers yield a very low margin. Can you relate?

My research into the big box P&Ls and some recent experiences have strengthened a belief that I had been forming for the past year: Right now could well be the best time to be an independent “office solutions” dealer in more than 30 years!

According to its annual report, Office Depot lost $519 million or 2.2% of sales last year, while Staples made $134.5 million or .6% of sales. Together they sold approximately $39 billion worth of “stuff.”

I have heard the argument that the industry needs both entities to be making money in order to be healthy and I agree, sort of, as long as the way they make money is by raising some of their ridiculously low contracts.

Staples and Depot have driven down the price of office products, furniture and now jan san to the point where many customers—and, yes, sales reps—have come to believe that everything should cost nothing.

Let me give you just one example of this mindset. As many of you know I work in a consulting capacity as the national sales manager for AOPD, which is the third largest regional and national account entity behind Staples and Depot.

Recently, I received a call from the head of purchasing at a Fortune 50 company who was extremely eager to see if we would want to bid for their business.

I asked him the goal of the bid and he stated that they only want to buy 100 items including all pens, paper and toner. I then asked why they were going to bid and he said that though he uses one of the big boxes, he wanted to see if he could save money.

I actually had to hold back my laughter as I told him that we have no interest in a race to the bottom and that I doubted that the folks in Boston would either. I added that they might want to stay with their current deal, because I would bet almost anything that the new pricing would be higher.

That story demonstrates that there are still many large customers that play—and who will fail at—the price game, so let’s talk about the other opportunities that are presenting themselves.

In the last six months, AOPD has been invited to present our value proposition more often than any time in recent history. Some of the prospects want lower prices but many others contact us primarily be-

Welcome to the Best of Times!

By Tom Buxton

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cause they want to work with local companies that actually provide some service.

Ah, there's that word “service.” Everyone uses it, but with the cost cutting going on at the large retailers, many businesses perceive that it is becoming a lost art. Such activities as accurate billing and easy returns or even speaking to the same “live body” twice have become a challenge for many customers, both large and small.

Consequently, AOPD and its dealers are gaining a significant amount of new business that is coming from companies who are seeking more consistent service.

Businesses, cities, counties, chambers of commerce and even state and local government buyers are reevaluating their assumptions as to why they chose some of our large competitors as “partners.”

This is especially prevalent now, because our competitors—especially as they move toward a possible merger—are no longer providing such ridiculously low pricing and are cutting services wherever possible. (By the way, I am with the minority that believes that the merger between Office Depot and Staples will not occur. More on that another day.)

So, how does all this news about sales opportunities and AOPD, which you may or may not belong to, affect your business? The following are a few suggestions as to the steps your business can take to gain some of the billions of dollars that our large competitors have put at risk in recent months:

• Become reacquainted with some of the larger businesses that you might have lost in the past. Even Fortune 100 companies are looking for a way to be served better by their vendors and if our experience offers any indication, they don’t view the big box value proposition as part of the answer.

• Think of your company as an entity that delivers anything that businesses need, not just office supplies and furniture. In other words, become a “solutions” company.

• Evaluate becoming involved in one of the groups within the independent dealer channel that has expertise in regional and national accounts.

• Attend the national dealer meetings put on by your wholesaler and dealer group and view them as an opportunity to plot a new course for your own business. Be ready to change your offering, because your wholesale and buying group partners are doing their best to change theirs.

• Introduce products like Acsellerate’s CX Intelligence to large prospects (If you aren’t an ECi house, check with your technology provider to see if they offer something similar). Even the most hardened purchasing professionals will be impressed when you tell them how they can track their purchases online by department on a daily basis. We can differentiate ourselves from our competition with this kind of functionality, because the big guys don’t seem to want their customers to have all the data.

Whatever else you do, don’t follow the crowd in believing that independents are nearly dead or that you can’t compete in this marketplace. We are in the best position to thrive of any time since 1985 when the big box concept first came into being. Live it!

Tom Buxton, founder and CEO of the InterBizGroup consulting organization, works with independent office products dealers to help increase sales and profitability. For more information, visit www.interbizgroup.com.

Fear over technology eliminating sales jobs is nothing new. It happened following the advent of both the phone and Internet but fortunately, the salesperson didn't die then. According to a multitude of recent studies, the sales industry is actually entering a period of expansion, with the U.S. Department of Labor projecting employment of sales managers will increase by 8% percent through 2022.

The 2015 CareerBuilder.com U.S. Job Forecast Study ranks sales jobs as the number one job employers are currently looking to fill, ranking 10% higher than technical positions. This is a significant increase from even last year when sales also ranked number one.

As the CEO of a B2B sales recruiting company, I have seen first-hand the growth in the B2B sales industry. There are six reasons why I believe technology will not represent the death of the B2B salesperson:

1) **Studies show B2B buyers want salespeople involved earlier.** New research from the Information Technology Services Marketing Association (ITSMA), shows that 70% of B2B buyers want to engage with salespeople early in the sales process.

2) **Marketing disintermediation.** Ultimately, when large amounts of money are involved in B2B purchases, buyers want to deal directly with a human being to develop a relationship, perhaps negotiate and acquire certain assurances.

3) **Buyers increasingly expect customized solutions.** In the age of solution sales, buyers expect solutions to be customized for their unique requirements. Since buyers are more informed about their needs, they expect an informed seller who can add value beyond that supplied by online marketing materials. A salesperson is needed to accommodate a more complex buying environment.

4) **Outbound sales are needed to drive new business.** While digital marketing departments are equipped to handle inbound inquiries, to really drive revenue a company needs aggressive and effective outbound sales teams to achieve growth. Outbound salespeople are the critical drivers of new business opportunities.

5) **High cost of sales automation and digital marketing.** Senior executives who are determined to replace their sales division in order to save money should understand that the cost of leveraging sales automation and digital marketing technology is actually very high. It requires many core competencies and a willingness to invest big dollars, along with a high degree of risk.

6) **Technology is enhancing relationships, not replacing them.** Through social media and big data, the amount of information we have about our clients has never been greater. As a result, selling is more scientific and structured today than ever before. The top percentile of salespeople are technologically savvy and inclined to use every tool and piece of data available to them to win business. The ability to know more about the purchasing habits of consumers gives sales teams unprecedented ability to foster strong relationships.

There is no denying that digital marketing and e-commerce are dramatically changing the way we do business. However, those businesses that adapt and incorporate new technology comprehensively across their organization to complement their sales teams will beat out their competitors.

Eliot Burdett is co-founder and CEO of the Peak Sales Recruiting B2B sales recruiting company.
As a salesperson, one of the most exciting moments is finally earning an order from a brand new customer. After weeks (or even months) of pursuing a prospect, he or she has placed an order and you are feeling the thrill of victory.

So what's next? If you don’t have a clearly defined process for the next several contacts with this new customer, you run the risk of creating a one-hit-wonder and it’s far too difficult to replace those new customers each month. Here are some tips to help you gain repeat orders:

1. Always make a phone call within 24-hours of the first delivery.
   Wait until early the morning after the delivery is made. This ensures your decision maker has actually received the order and you can make sure they are completely satisfied.

2. Gain a commitment for future orders. You have worked hard to earn this first order but that work is only the tip of the iceberg. Be sure to ask your contact if they are willing to work with you on their next three or four orders. This sets the tone that you are ready to keep working for them. You are building a relationship.

   Example scripting: “You really can’t experience all that we have to offer with just one order. What I’d like to do is work with you on your next three or four orders so you can try more of our products and services and be in a better position to make a decision on us being a good fit long-term. Based on what you saw on your first order, can you see yourself placing your next three to four orders with me?”

3. Make contact with a new account every two weeks during the first 90 days. Yes, this customer is set up to order online, but after just one time, ordering from you has not become a habit. You must continue to reach out to your new account, telling your company story and conveying all the great things you have to offer.

4. You must call with value. If you are calling every two weeks only to check in on how their supplies are looking, then you will start to get screened or sent to voicemail. Be sure each time you communicate with your new account you have a clear and valuable reason. For example:
   • Give recommendations on switching to more economical house brands for products they are already buying.
   • Inform about vendor rebates. They cost your dealership nothing!
   • Help them figure out how to save time and money by consolidating the number of vendors they use for the products you sell.
   • Visit their website. Gain an understanding of what the company does and find out how many of their total number of employees use office supplies.
   • Be specific when asking for a re-order. “I noticed the last time you ordered (x product) was back in May. How many do you like to keep in stock at all times?”

5. Don’t get too comfortable with communicating exclusively by email. Live conversations help build the solid relationships that help create loyalty and differentiate you from the other guys.

To create a long-time customer you must prove your service and yourself by delivering value with each contact. Follow these tips and set the expectation that you are looking for a great customer relationship. You have no desire for the one and done.

Marisa Pensa is president and Jessica Stokes director of inside sales at Methods in Motion, a sales training company whose focus is to help sales teams implement and sustain measurable improvements in the most critical aspects of sales. For more information, visit www.methodsnmotion.com.