Ninety Years and Counting for IL Dealer
Garvey’s Office Products

The Garvey family (from left to right): Kevin Garvey, Bernie Garvey Jr., Sheila Gartland, Ken Garvey, Bernie Garvey Sr. and Dan Garvey.

It was champagne time in Niles, Illinois last month, as Bernie Garvey and his team at Garvey’s Office Products celebrated their 90th year of service to the Chicago-area business community.

The dealership was founded in 1926 as Schiller & Schmidt by two printing sales reps. In 1954, Bernard Garvey, Sr. came on board as a sales rep and 12 years later, he bought the company.

Fast forward to today and Garvey’s is a thriving $40 million business, with some 90 employees operating out of an 85,000 sq. ft. distribution center in Niles and a product mix that covers the full spectrum of office needs from office supplies and furniture to breakroom supplies, document finishing, promotional products and more.

The company today is in the safe hands of the second generation of the Garvey family, with Bernie serving as president; one brother, Ken, running inside sales and larger accounts; two other brothers, Kevin and Dan, in outside sales, and sister, Sheila Gartland, handling marketing and IT.

continued on page 4 >>

Half Full, Half Empty

If you’re in favor of collaboration among our industry’s dealer groups, your glass is very much half full and half empty these days.

On the plus side, last month saw another very successful effort in the industry meetings category, as AOPD, TriMega’s DSC group and DPCG got together with their respective business partners in San Antonio for an event that, despite some issues on the scheduling front, drew an overwhelmingly positive response from just about everyone there.

Going forward, this month sees a series of regional meetings hosted by Independent Stationers and TriMega on their EPIC Business Essentials joint national and regional accounts effort, which also appears to be gaining some healthy momentum of its own.

On the minus side, unfortunately, is the news that the joint purchasing initiative by TriMega’s DSC and DPCG, announced over a year ago under the American Purchasing Alliance umbrella, has stalled, though whether this is just a temporary setback for the program or its definitive end remains to be seen.

Ideally, of course, the dealer groups would hit a home run every time they embark on any kind of collaboration, but it’s simply unrealistic to expect that to happen.

The APA effort is not the first attempt by the groups at working together that fails to meet expectations and it certainly won’t be the last. But so what?

By all means, let’s celebrate success when the groups work together effectively but at the same time, let’s also give them the latitude to fail as any successful business venture will do from time to time and not be too quick to play the “I told you so” card.

The APA news is disappointing but the glass, as that wise philosopher Yogi Berra might have said, is still a lot more half full than half empty.
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The dealership has been enjoying a good year so far, Bernie reports, with furniture sales particularly strong and new business coming from a number of larger accounts that had previously been in the hands of big box competitors.

Our congratulations to the Garvey family and the entire Garvey team. Here’s to the next 90 years!

VIP Pres. Barbara Pilkinton Earns ‘Business Leader of the Year’ Honors from Local Chamber

Congratulations are very much in order for Barbara Pilkinton, president of VIP Office Furniture and Supply in Hinesville, Georgia, who was recently honored by her local chamber as its Business Leader of the Year.

Barbara—and VIP—have both come a long way since she started at the dealership 36 years ago. Back then, her role was to take care of customers and keep the dealership’s retail store clean at a time when an $80 day was cause for celebration.

Over the past 36 years, Barbara moved through the ranks at the dealership before becoming president in 1990.

A deeply religious person, she gives thanks first to God for her achievements and then to the rest of the VIP team.

“With a small business like ours, there are always so many people responsible for your growth and success,” she points out. "It’s been a real team effort in every sense of the word and my role has been to encourage the others on our team to achieve their full potential so that we all benefit.”

That sounds like a pretty good definition of leadership to us and evidently the folks at VIP’s local chamber agree. Congratulations to yet another independent who’s showing just how good small business can be, no matter how tough the completion or challenging the business conditions!
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Innovative Office Solutions Makes State’s ‘100 Best Companies to Work For’ List

Congratulations are in order for Burnsville, Minnesota-based Innovative Office Solutions for making Minnesota Business magazine's 2016 list of “100 Best Companies to Work For” in the state.

The “100 Best” list reflects the result of an anonymous online questionnaire filled out by the employees of each participating company and covers areas such as work environment, employee benefits and overall employee happiness.

Special recognition for HR excellence is nothing particularly new for Innovative. In fact, this year represents the fifth year running the dealership has shown up in the list!

“We couldn’t be more proud,” said Innovative marketing director Vicki Giefer. “Our people are the fuel behind every success we’ve had and this award is a testament to the environment and culture they bring to life every day!”

NE Dealer Eakes Office Solutions Acquires Top Office Products

Eakes Office Solutions last month announced the acquisition of Top Office Products in McCook, about 150 miles west of the company’s Grand Island, Nebraska headquarters.

The deal brings to 12 the number of locations Eakes operates in the state. “Steve Leopold and his staff at TOP have provided a high level of customer care to McCook area customers for decades. With our dedicated people, quality products and great pricing programs, Eakes is excited for the opportunity to continue that relationship into the future,” said Mark Miller, president of Eakes.

In Atlanta, Office Creations Acquires Ivan Allen

Atlanta-area contract furniture dealer Office Creations has acquired Allsteel dealer Ivan Allen, also based in Atlanta.

“We have experienced dramatic growth over the past five years,” commented Office Creations CEO Joy Mitchell. “Allsteel’s credibility and breadth of offerings will allow us to jump to the next level as a regional contract dealer.”

Office Creations will continue to operate its design studio and showroom in Suwanee, Georgia, as well as Ivan Allen’s midtown Atlanta location.

Houston Dealer Tejas Office Products on the Acquisition Trail

In Houston, Stephen Fraga and his team at Tejas Office Products announced last month they have acquired fellow local independent Office Effects in a deal that brings an additional $2 million in volume and promises to strengthen the dealership’s overall footprint and open the door to new opportunities, particularly in the promotional products category.

The company will operate under the Tejas Office Products name and work out of Tejas’s 21,000 square foot distribution center in Houston.

“Office Effects is a perfect partner for us as a dealership,” says Stephen. “They’re a family-run business like ours and they share our culture of customer service excellence and integrity. We’re looking forward to creating new efficiencies and synergies in office products and growing our promotional products business.”

Nine employees will be joining Tejas from Office Effects, including OE president Ellen Elam, who will run the new promotional products division, Stephen reports.

Remarkably, Office Effects is the first acquisition for Tejas since the company was founded by Stephen’s father, Lupe Fraga, in 1962 but don’t be too surprised if there are more to come down the road.

Historically low prices in the oil and gas market have made life challenging for anyone in the Houston market these days but Tejas is very much a growth-oriented company, Stephen says, and looking for additional acquisition opportunities to tap into scale economies and strengthen its one-stop resource value proposition.

Tacoma Dealer Chuckals Hosts Open House to Debut New Furniture Showroom

Al Lynden and his team at Chuckals Office Products in Tacoma rolled out the red carpet last month, as they hosted a special Open House to introduce their brand new office furniture showroom.

Some 75 customers and prospects attended the event, reports Chuckals VP Jon Rossman, and a number of them walked away
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Office furniture is a particularly strong category for Chuckals these days, says Jon, and an important contributor to the double-digit sales growth the dealership has been posting so far this year.

TX Dealer Perry Office Plus Opens New Office Furniture Showroom

In Waco, Texas, Harry Macey and his team at Perry Office Plus held an official ribbon-cutting ceremony to debut its latest furniture showroom.

Local chamber dignitaries and some 50 customers and prospects were on hand to visit the 1,000 sq. ft. space, which showcases products from HON, Allsteel, National Office Furniture, La-Z-Boy, Martin and others.

Furniture sales have been on a healthy upward trend in recent years, reports Harry, and currently account for about 25% of total business and growing.

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In Memoriam:
Hicks Office Equipment Co-Founder
Jerry Hicks

Gerald “Jerry” Francis Hicks, co-founder of Hicks Office Equipment in Hermitage, Pennsylvania, died March 18 following an extended illness. He was 90.

A Navy veteran who served in the Pacific Theater and participated in the liberation of the Philippines during World War II, Jerry started his industry career with National Cash Register (NCR) Corp., where he became a senior sales representative.

In 1958, he became co-founder of what is now Hicks Office Equipment and served as its CEO for 54 years until he retired in 2010.

Survivors include his wife of 69 years, Helen (Crawford); three daughters, Mary Jane and her husband the Rev. Allen Heckman, Judy Clare and her husband Michael and Barbara Wood and her husband Steve; one son, John Hicks (the company’s current president), and five grandchildren, four step-grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

Memorials can be made to Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, 2426 Scrubgrass Road, Grove City, PA 16127.

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Sometimes, success gets measured not so much by how well you grow sales or profits, but instead, by how well you respond when bad things happen to your dealership.

Just ask Alan Bird at Complete Office Supply in Indianapolis. Complete has served the local business community with distinction since Alan’s parents, Tony and Roni Bird, founded the dealership in 1988. But starting in July of last year, a chain of events unrolled that challenged him and his dealership in ways he’d never seen before. In just three short months, head count at Complete went from 16 to 9 and Alan knew only too well that business as usual was simply not sustainable.

“There was no single reason why so many of our people left in such a short time frame,” he recalls. “For one, it was a spouse’s promotion and move to another city; another wanted to see the world so he became a flight attendant; another left because of a divorce issue.”

Regardless of the reasons, the exodus meant Alan needed to do something and fast. Except, he didn’t. Tempting as it might have been to go out and find the nearest warm bodies to start filling the empty chairs, Alan decided to take a different route.

Instead, he started working with the people who had stayed as they absorbed the extra workload to identify what was really essential to the business and what wasn’t, and once all that was clear in his head, he started outsourcing some key areas of the overall operation.

Sales was the first to go, with Patricia Cowan and her RainMaker Sales Support team in St. Louis playing a key role, not just for new business development but also for retaining and growing the value of existing accounts.

That move was followed rapidly by similar outsourcing of CFO duties and bookkeeping, marketing and furniture design, receiving and installation.

Along the way, Alan reached out to suppliers and customers to make sure they knew what was going on and why. “I told our suppliers we were looking for a genuine partner relationship and not just a buyer-seller one going forward and I made a point of keeping our customers in the loop so there would be no unwelcome surprises for them,” he explains. The result, he reports proudly: Complete didn’t lose a single customer as the transition played out.

And while it’s only been a few months since Alan and his team moved to the new model, his dealership is already posting some impressive results. Sales are on track this year to come in at least 22% ahead of 2015 and expenses are down by over 25%. And armed with the information that he’s gained during the transition, Alan is back on the hiring trail and looking to add at least two new faces to the team.

Fighting the challenges Alan Bird has faced over the past year was hardly fun by any means, he freely admits. But the good news is that the dealership has weathered the storm and is moving forward on multiple fronts. And if all that is not a good enough definition of success, we don’t know what is!
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Staples-Depot Update: Federal Judge Holds Preliminary Hearing on FTC Suit

The year-long saga of the Staples-Office Depot merger and the Federal Trade Commission’s efforts to block it finally moved into the courts last month and for anyone looking for signals on how the battle played out, a quick review of the stocks’ performance on Wall Street probably provided all the information they needed.

Office Depot stock moved from $5.66 when the hearing began to $7.56 when it ended two weeks later, while Staples went from $9.57 to $10.88.

The FTC presented close to a dozen witnesses to bolster its case, including W.B. Mason president and CEO Leo Meehan, the CEO of one of Office Depot’s diversity business dealer “partners” and several senior purchasing executives from Fortune 100 companies currently using either Staples or Office Depot as their primary supplier.

The goal: to convince U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan, who will ultimately make the final ruling in the case, that Staples and Office Depot are the only companies capable of serving the large corporate office supplies market and that if the proposed merger goes through, the result would be higher prices and the loss of other benefits of competition.

A vigorous defense

Staples and Office Depot lawyers mounted a vigorous defense against the FTC, charging the agency had based its case on a flawed definition of the market and a highly selective analysis of large corporation buying practices and priorities to “gerrymander the market.” They also called into question the quality of evidence presented by the FTC, quoting one large corporate buyer who described his own testimony as “a work of art mixed with B.S.”

And, they contended, the FTC’s case ignored the growing presence of Amazon in the B2B space and the potential for its Amazon Business venture to emerge as a serious player in the large corporate market in the near future.

For the FTC, the low point of the first week came when Judge Sullivan himself accused the agency of asking Amazon to lie about how much competition it would represent in the large corporate marketplace for a Staples-Office Depot combine.

Fortune magazine reported Amazon said in an affidavit that “the FTC has asked us to insert” a sentence stating it would not be able to make next-day deliveries to large business customers for two years.

In a closed-door hearing, Amazon balked at the FTC request, prompting Judge Sullivan to make public that part of Amazon’s testimony. “The public ought to know that the government wanted Amazon to say some things that weren’t true,” Sullivan said.

Inadmissible evidence

Things hardly got any better for the FTC in the second week, when Judge Sullivan ruled inadmissible a key part of the testimony from the agency’s expert witness, on Amazon’s impact on the large corporate market, because the analysis on which it was based had not been previously shared with the defense.

By the end of the government’s presentation, Staples and Office Depot evidently felt so confident of their position that they decided not to call a single witness in their defense, arguing that the FTC had failed utterly” to prove its case.

Ultimately it will be up to Judge Sullivan to decide if that is indeed the case. On several occasions during the hearing, he urged both sides to consider sitting down to pursue a settlement, suggesting such options as a commitment by Staples to freeze prices on its large customer contracts for a period of time after the merger in addition to the new company divesting physical business assets as called for by the FTC.

If any kind of out of court settlement is arrived at, however, the parties involved will need to move fast. Judge Sullivan’s court is due to resume consideration of the case on April 19.
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Positive Energy in Abundance at Kinetic 2016, First AOPD-TriMega-DPCG Joint Meeting

The dictionary defines “kinetic” as “energy in motion” and fast moving energy was in plentiful supply last month in San Antonio, as members of American Office Products Distributors (AOPD), TriMega’s Dealer Supplier Collaborative (DSC) and the Direct Purchasing Catalog Group (DPCG) gathered there for their first joint meeting, Kinetic 2016.

Representatives from over 80 of the industry’s large independent dealers and their business partners were on hand for an event that featured separate tracks for each organization of dealer-supplier one-on-one interviews.

From the opening session to the last one-on-one interview, the mood at the meeting was particularly upbeat, with most dealers reporting 2016 getting off to a good start. Manufacturers in attendance—whether they came from the hi-tech world or represented the industry’s more traditional, paper-based segments—also indicated healthy growth in sales.

TriMega and AOPD officers set a positive tone for the meeting at the opening session and that tone continued strong throughout the week.

TriMega chairman Lyle Dabbert, president of Brown & Saenger in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, said the outlook for independents today is remarkably bright and he urged them and their business partners to be “opportunity-driven,” as they work together to develop ways to bring new value to their customers and compete successfully and stay relevant in a changing and challenging climate.

In his remarks, AOPD president Frank Fera, director of sales at Bulldog Office Products in Pittsburgh, called for increased cooperation and collaboration within the Independent Dealer Community. He said dealers should find ways to work together to transform the IDC from being the Independent Dealer Community to the Interdependent Dealer Community and that if that happens, it will result in significant market share growth for the channel.

Also at the opening session, a dealer panel offered a range of perspectives on the current state of the industry and the challenges and opportunities facing today’s independents.

“This is the time of the independent dealer,” panelist Kim Crook Vogel told attendees. Crook Vogel, who is general manager of the Strickland Company in Birmingham, Alabama, said key elements of the independent’s value proposition such as service and integrity are important again today and she urged dealers to focus on uncovering their customers’ needs and meeting those needs with service-based solutions.

Panelist Heather Patton, administrator at Capital Office Products in Daytona Beach, highlighted the way independents have broadened their product mix in recent years. “It’s no longer just... continued on page 18 >>

At the opening session, TriMega chairman Lyle Dabbert urged attendees to be “opportunity-driven,” as they work together to develop ways to bring new value to their customers.

The group’s executive director Mark Leazer (second from left) and chairman Frank Fera presented the awards.

AOPD honored Gordie Pepper of Ritter’s Office Outfitters (far left) as its Dealer of the Year and Hannah Stevens of Pentel of America as Business Partner of the Year at the meeting. The group’s executive director Mark Leazer (second from left) and chairman Frank Fera presented the awards.

Former AOPD executive director Bud Mundt (center) received the first “M.C. Bud Mundt Outstanding Achievement Award,” named in recognition of his contributions to the group.
Another tax season of W-2s and 1099s is done. Tax forms are probably the last thing you want to think about now. But, before you file away your tax form orders, give us a call. We’ll pre-book those orders for next year and knock 20% off your 2015 cost. We’ll ship that order next tax season - whenever you say - and we won’t bill you till we ship. No deposit. No pre-pay. Just more profit with 20% off what you paid this year.

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about office supplies any more,” she contended. “It’s jan-san, it’s furniture, it’s toner, it’s copiers, it’s everything!”

She said current turmoil at Office Depot has taken their focus away from growing business and created new opportunities for independents.

Echoing Patton, panelist Bill Jones, president and CEO of The Office City, Redwood City, California, said his company had recently hired a former Office Depot senior sales manager who had told him that as an independent, “You guys are on the verge of the biggest opportunity I’ve seen in my career.”

Jones said he had met over the past six months with seven different Office Depot sales reps about possibly joining his company and found considerable interest among all of them.

Recent efforts by Office Depot to cut costs by expanding sales reps’ territories while cutting their pay means there has never been a better time to start talking with Office Depot reps about job opportunities, Jones contended.

Also at the meeting, both AOPD and TriMega presented several special awards to dealers and business partners in recognition of outstanding support and achievement.

AOPD honored Gordie Pepper of Ritter’s Office Outfitters as its Dealer of the Year and Hannah Stevens of Pentel of America as Business Partner of the Year in recognition of their support for AOPD and the independent dealer community.

In addition, AOPD established a new award, the M.C. Bud Mundt Outstanding Achievement Award and fittingly, the first recipient was former AOPD executive director Bud Mundt, who retired from the industry at the end of last year.

AOPD members also voted on the group’s board of directors for 2016. Members of the new board are:

President: Frank L. Fera, Bulldog Office Products
Chairman: Pat Crowley, Innovative Office Solutions
Vice President: Bill Jones, The Office City
Treasurer: Gordie Pepper, Ritter’s Office Outfitters
Secretary: Joe Breczka, Eaton Office Supply
Director: David Hammontree, A&W Office Supply & Design
Director: Wayne Stillwagon, Miller’s Supplies at Work
Director: Kim Crook Vogel, Strickland Companies

Also at the meeting, TriMega presented several dealer awards recognizing the greatest growth in 2015 versus the previous year.

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- Second: Newtown Office Supply, Newtown, PA
- Third: Pettus Office Products, Little Rock, AR
- Fourth: BuyOnlineNow.com, Rochester, MN

INTEC, TriMega’s Technology Reseller Group, Meets at ITEX Show for Ignite 2016

Also meeting last month were the members of INTEC, TriMega’s group for technology-focused resellers, MPS dealers and imaging supply and equipment specialists.

For the second year in a row, TriMega partnered with the ITEX Conference and Expo for its INTEC Show. The event, entitled Ignite 2016, took place in Fort Lauderdale on the front end of ITEX, which is the largest event in the office equipment and solutions channel representing dealers, resellers, and solution providers across the globe.

“Once again, this year’s INTEC Show, Ignite 2016, proved to be a powerful opportunity for INTEC members, as well as technology-focused TriMega members to network, share best practices and uncover new opportunities to grow their business, and keep abreast of new products and services. And the co-location of the event with the ITEX 2016 Show provided a tremendous value add for our attendees, many of whom stayed on to attend their compelling education sessions, walk their tradeshow – and mix

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and mingle with other industry players,” commented Brian Stevenson, TriMega’s director of technology and managed services.

The Ignite 2016 event also included recognition of key suppliers and top members. These included:

- Top Dealer Growth Award: Stone Computer, Southlake, TX
- INTEC MVP Award: R.E. Business Solutions, Cherry Hill, NJ
- Distributor of the Year: Clover Imaging Group
- People’s Choice Award: Hewlett-Packard Company

“I applaud INTEC and the TriMega organization for creating this remarkable education and networking opportunity for their members,” commented Bob Evans of SYNNEX. “And for us to have dedicated meetings with these leading resellers was very beneficial for us as we look to find new mutual opportunities to expand our business together,” he concluded.

APA Suspends Contract Negotiations Following DSC Resignation

The effort to combine the buying power of two of the industry’s leading dealer groups under the umbrella of the American Purchasing Alliance (APA) appears to have foundered, at least for now, following news that one of the groups has resigned from participation.

According to an announcement last month from the American Office Products Distributors organization (AOPD), which had been serving as facilitator for the proposed “group of groups,” the APA Board of Directors accepted the resignation of TriMega’s Dealer Supplier Collaborative (DSC), leaving the Direct Purchasing Catalog Group (DPCG) as the sole member.

As a result, the announcement indicated, APA is suspending contract negotiations with suppliers until further notice.

The APA initiative was formally announced to the industry in October, 2014, in an effort to bring greater consolidation and collaboration within the Independent Dealer Channel and respond to manufacturer concerns about the proliferation of groups and meetings within the channel.

Last month’s announcement from AOPD of the DSC resignation provided no explanation for that decision and officials at AOPD, DSC and DPCG declined to offer any for on the record attribution.

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Whether there is any chance of the APA effort being revived remains to be seen. For the time being at least, this particular attempt by dealer groups to work together seems to be over.

EDmarket Members Mark 100th Anniversary at 2016 Convention

For anyone in the school supplies business the place to be last month was Las Vegas, where the EDmarket Association hosted its 2016 EDexpo event.

This year’s gathering had a special dimension, as the association celebrated its 100th year of service to education market dealers and their business partners.

In addition to a special anniversary gala celebration, EDexpo featured a tradeshow with some 190 exhibitors, a 10% increase over the prior year, as well as two separate EPIC Business Essentials training sessions for Independent Stationers and Tri-Mega members.

In Las Vegas, the association unveiled a new partnership with the Schoolbondfinder.com online database service.

EDmarket members will have access to special member discounts from the organization, which, as its name suggests, is an online service that tracks K-12 bond-funded capital improvement projects nationwide.

EDmarket members toasted the association’s 100th anniversary at this year’s EDexpo.

EDmarket also introduced a new member benefit for educational product manufacturers looking for an independent, teacher-tested approval method to evaluate product effectiveness.

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Through a partnership with Global Educator Institute (GEI), ED-market members can receive a 20% discount off the cost of the pre-market product testing or on-market testing and endorsement.

Also at the event, attendees voted on the fifth annual Eddy Awards for the best new products at the show. Winners were Bouncy Bands’ Bouncy Bands for Desk and Chairs. (1st place); Primary Concepts’ Hourglass Classroom Timer (2nd place) and Incredibly Interconnected Toys’ ZAZ (3rd place).

Next year’s EDexpo will return to Las Vegas and run March 15-17, 2017. For more information, visit www.edmarket.org.

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**EDspaces Now Accepting Travel Grant Applications**

The EDmarket Association also last month announced it is now accepting applications for travel grants for key decision makers involved in educational facilities at schools, colleges or universities to attend its 2016 EDspaces 2016 Conference & Expo.

The event is scheduled for November 2-4 in Cincinnati and will be co-located with the AIA Committee on Architecture for Education’s Fall Conference.

The Grant Award package includes hotel accommodations for up to three nights at an official EDspaces host hotel and full conference registration.

Grant applications will be evaluated based on the projected number and value of potential building projects. Completed applications are due by May 27. Grant winners will be notified by June 30 and must accept by August 19. Registration for the event itself is due to open the first week of May.

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**TriMega Launches ‘TriMega for Templet’ City of Hope Fundraiser**

As part of its efforts in support of this year’s City of Hope campaign, the TriMega dealer group has launched “TriMega for Templet,” a special initiative in honor of this year’s Spirit of Life award winner, Essendant EVP Joe Templet.

Over the past 30 years, the office products industry has become one of the leading supporters of the City of Hope and its life-saving mission of treatment and research into cancer, diabetes and other life-threatening diseases.

Each year, fundraising efforts culminate at the annual Spirit of Life awards banquet in Chicago in September but meanwhile, there are three ways TriMega members can add their support as part of the “TriMega for Templet” effort:

- **Double the Impact:** Make a one-time donation of $300 (TriMega’s Legions of Hope), $500, $1,000 (TriMega Friends for Hope) or any amount and the donation will be matched by Essendant.
- **Dues for a Difference:** Sign up for a monthly donation that will be added automatically to the TriMega member’s monthly dues. Denominations range from $25 to $500 a month.
- **Crowdsource for a Cure:** Organize your own crowdfunding campaign through sponsoring car washes, Jeans Days, bake sales or similar events.

If you’re a TriMega member and would like to add your support to any of these efforts, contact the group’s Rosemont, Illinois headquarters (PH: 847-699-3330; Internet: www.trimega.org).

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**IS, TriMega to Host EPIC Business Essentials Regional Meetings**

The Independent Stationers and TriMega dealer groups this month are hosting a series of regional meetings for members on their EPIC Business Essentials joint national accounts effort. Dates and locations are as follows:

- Houston: April 5-6
- Atlanta: April 7-8
- Chicago (Schaumburg, IL): April 12-13
- Washington, DC (Dulles Airport area): April 14-15
- Los Angeles: April 19-20

On the program: presentations on the national IPA-TCPN contract and sales opportunities and strategies in the federal government and healthcare markets.
Also, guest speakers from the Fortune Web Marketing online and social media marketing company and an overview of the EPIC Order Point online platform.

There is no cost for IS or TriMega members to attend but space is limited. To register, visit www.epicregionalmeetings.com and click on the Dealer Registration link. The first 30 people that register per city are eligible to receive reimbursement up to $100.

**Dealer Veteran Jodie Ryndak Joins Workplace Furnishings as VP of Dealer Development**

Jodie Ryndak, formerly vice president of business development for Color Art Integrated Interiors in St. Louis, has joined the Workplace Furnishings organization (WPF) as its new vice president of dealer development. WPF president and CEO Greg Nemchick made the announcement.

An office furniture veteran with over 18 years’ industry experience, Ryndak succeeds former WPF VP of dealer development Hope Roadcap, who left WFP earlier this year to become president of WPF member Phillips Office Solutions.

Ryndak holds a degree in Interior Design from Illinois State University and is certified by the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDCQ).

As VP of dealer development for WPF, she will play a key role for the association in helping its members make the most of the various programs and services it offers, most notably, the special pricing and terms the group enjoys with its vendor partners, print and online marketing support and dealer-specific education and training programs, the organization said.

“We’re delighted to welcome Jodie to WPF,” said Nemchick. “She brings an outstanding skill set that covers many key aspects of dealer operations, including leadership, talent development, sales and marketing and employee recruiting and training and we’re confident she will make an immediate and significant contribution to our organization.”

**NC Dealer Hoyle Office Solutions Joins Regency Franchise Group**

Regency Franchise Group announced last month the addition of Arden, North Carolina-based Hoyle Office Solutions to its network.
A woman-owned business, Hoyle specializes in office supplies, office furniture, furniture layout and design, janitorial products, breakroom supplies as well as custom forms and stamps.

“We are in an expansion mode and knew that we needed to partner with Regency to continue to compete in the realms of technology and product offering,” said Hoyle president and CEO Kathy Hoyle. “We are very excited for this new opportunity to service our local and regional clientele.”

S.P. Richards Honors Sacramento Facility as its 2015 Distribution Center of the Year

Wholesaler S.P. Richards last month announced that its Sacramento distribution center was named 2015 SPR Distribution Center of the Year.

The award was presented at the company’s recent National Sales and Operations Meeting and recognizes the S.P. Richards distribution center that achieves the highest combined results in a number of key performance measurements including service levels, order and inventory accuracy, inventory turn, sales and employee productivity.

Sacramento general manager Rick Stelzer accepted the award on behalf of the employees of the distribution center. He commented on the award, “This recognizes the hard work and dedication of the entire Sacramento sales and operations team. Their can-do attitude and the pride they take in serving our customers is phenomenal and I can’t wait to share this honor with them.”

Rick Toppin, S.P. Richards Company president and COO, added, “This year we had several top performing distribution centers, but the Sacramento team truly stood out. Under Rick’s guidance, Sacramento achieved extraordinary results and provided exceptional support for our customers serviced out of their distribution center.”

SYNNEX Announces 2016 Secret Sauce Road Show Series

SYNNEX Corporation last month announced the schedule for its sixth annual Secret Sauce Road Show series. Founded in 2011 with a dozen roadshows, this year’s series has more than doubled its number of events across the country and will train more than 1,000 solution providers representing over 600 individual companies in the year ahead.

Most of the events feature training from a group of sponsoring vendors, while some feature a collaborative or singular vendor focus or a specific technology practice. Pavilion events feature a presentation by SYNNEX, followed by a vendor fair, where vendors can display their products and services.

New this year, custom events by a vendor or group of vendors focus on a particular technology vertical or solution. SYNNEX is also offering Solv events to support its Technology Solutions business units, each of which focuses on a specific technology vertical or practice. All event formats include a networking component following the presentation or vendor fair. Remaining events on the 2016 schedule include the following:

- April 21: Atlanta (Pavilion)
- April 28: Denver, (Presentation)
- May 5: Chicago (Custom – MOBILITYSolv)
- May 12: Boston (Pavilion)
- May 27: Indianapolis (Presentation)
- June 16: Philadelphia (Presentation)
- June 28: San Francisco (Pavilion)
- July 19: Washington, DC (Custom–MOBILITYSolv)
- July 21: San Jose (Presentation)
- August 11: Chicago (Pavilion)
- August 25: Savannah, GA (Presentation)
- August 29: Orange County, CA (Pavilion)
- October 17: Pinehurst, NC (Pavilion)
- October 27: Atlanta (Custom-MOBILITYSolv)
- November 10: Dallas (Pavilion)
- November 17: Cleveland (Presentation)
- December 1: Ft. Lauderdale, FL (Presentation)
- December 8: Boston (Pavilion)

For more information or to register, contact Adam Goldsmith at adamgo@synnex.com or visit www.synnex.com/secretsauce.

ECi and Exactor Establish Technology Cooperation on Sales Tax Software for e-automate

Dealer technology provider ECi Software Solutions announced last month a new integration between its e-automate software and Exactor sales tax software that it said will automate and simplify sales tax compliance for dealers using ECi’s e-automate software.

The Exactor integration will allow e-automate dealerships of all sizes to fully automate the computation, reporting, and remit-continued on page 26 >>

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tance of sales taxes, ECi said. The program features a modular product suite structure that will let dealers select only the modules that fit their business needs and budgets, the company added.

**Fortune Web Marketing's Jennifer Schulman Featured in Local Business Magazine**

Fortune Web Marketing founder and president Jennifer Schulman enjoyed some healthy media exposure of her own last month, when she was featured by midJersey Business, the official magazine of the MIDJersey Chamber of Commerce, as one of six women business owners or CEOs of technology companies in the region.

Schulman told writer Julie Barker how she got her start in the financial services industry after studying telecommunications in college and graduating at the start of the dot-com boom, when employers were looking for young people who knew how to work computers, code websites and who understood how search engines worked.

She paid tribute to two managers, both male, who mentored her but also talked about one boss who offered far less support. “I was put into the wrong hands of a bad boss who was extremely chauvinistic,” she told the magazine and says his treatment spurred her to leave the corporate world.

Presumably, that experience helped shape the advice she’d offer young women today: “Occasionally you will get feedback that’s very hard for you to hear. And it’s mostly because you’re a woman, and especially a younger woman. My advice would be to listen to none of it.”

And as for her own skills and personal qualities? The ability to constantly adapt, her drive and determination and her inclination to nurture and teach are among key qualities she highlighted for the magazine’s readers.

**Configura Hosts Mfr. Partner Meeting**

Configura, makers of the CET Designer space planning solution, held its biannual partner meeting last month.

The event drew more than 50 people from major office furniture manufacturing companies, including Dekko, Haworth, Herman Miller, Inscape, KI, Kimball, Midmark, OFS, Steelcase and Teknion.

At the meeting, Configura chief product officer Nicklas Dagersten shared some of the updates, particularly related to enhanced visualization functionality, which will be included in the May 16 release of CET Designer 7.0.

Also coming with CET Designer 7.0 is the ability to accelerate the rendering process, as well as the release of new and improved accessories symbols—including plants, flowers and kitchenettes—to enhance the realism of renderings, the company said.

**New COO at ES Robbins**

Muscle Shoals, Alabama-based manufacturer ES Robbins has announced the appointment of Edy Robbins Carlton as its new chief operating officer.

“While I approach 50 years of producing innovative products, 200 patents and providing premium customer service, it’s time to transition this rich legacy to the next generation with an even greater opportunity to excel,” said Ed Robbins, the company’s founder.

“It is with deep pride and great excitement that I appoint my daughter, Edy Carlton, to this highly responsible role. Edy has grown with the company in a way that embodies the leadership, drive and family commitment that is needed to propel the company into the next generation.”

**Industry Veteran Tom McCarron Joins Floortex**

Industry veteran Tom McCarron has joined Floortex USA as director of business development, a new position for the company.

“We are delighted to welcome Tom to the Floortex team and see this as an important addition to our U.S. operation,” commented Floortex CEO Steve Bull. “Tom brings valuable additional skills and experience to the existing team and I’m sure he will make a major contribution to our continued success.”

McCarron brings to the company over 30 years of industry experience, including senior sales, sales management and marketing positions with Fellowes, The Highlands Group, Deflecto and, most recently, Harbinger National.

In his new position, he will take over responsibility for the management and development of the U.S. office products channel as well as trade marketing support for Floortex’s e-commerce channel initiatives.

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New Rep Groups for MasterVision

Visual communication products maker MasterVision last month it has partnered with two independent rep group organizations that will represent it with the independent dealer community.

They are the Source Group, LLC, under the leadership of Ron Zuzovsky, who will represent MasterVision in the Mid-Atlantic Region: (NJ, PA, MD, VA and NY Metro) and Professional Sales Associates, under the leadership of Bob Enk, who will represent the company in the West Coast and Rocky Mountain markets.

Industry Veteran Joe Victoriano joins Highlands

Industry veteran Joe Victoriano has joined the Highlands independent rep organization as an account manager covering the Northern California markets.

Victoriano has held various sales and leadership positions in the office products and contract furniture markets for over 30 years.

Highlands senior VP Matt Maller commented, “Joe brings to our company high-level sales experience in the B2B market. Previous positions as director of sales, regional sales manager, and manufacturer rep make him a valuable addition to our West Coast team.”

Mayline Products Featured on Office Spaces, New TV Show

Furniture manufacturer Mayline received some impressive media exposure last month when its products were featured on a new TV show, Office Spaces, that aired on the Lifetime Television channel.

The show, from the creators of Designing Spaces, told the story of the step-by-step transformation of the producers' own office makeover, with the help of e5 workstations and private offices, task chairs, guest seating, meeting and training room furniture from Mayline.

“Partnering with Office Spaces on this project has been a rewarding experience for us,” stated Allan Klotsche, president and CEO of Mayline. “It has given us the opportunity to showcase how our furniture solutions can help companies reinvent their workspaces to embrace and manage change and innovation.”

Neutral Posture Achieves level 2 Sustainability Certification

Furniture manufacturer Neutral Posture last month announced that its current line of system and seating products has been certified as BIFMA level 2 through SCS Global Services.

level is the sustainability standard and third-party certification program for the furniture industry that was created by the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association (BIFMA) to evaluate and communicate the environmental and social impact of furniture products in the built environment.

“Neutral Posture is proud to be recognized by BIFMA as level 2,” commented Neutral Posture’s CEO and co-founder Rebecca Boenigk. “We see this accomplishment as a direct reflection of the hard work of everyone in our company.”

Zebra Pen Joins National Early Childhood Education Campaign

Zebra Pen Corporation announced last month it is partnering with USA Today on an initiative to support early childhood education.

The initiative aims to supply parents, teachers and children with the resources and education to provide children with equal opportunities, so that more of America’s children are prepared to succeed in the 21st century.

Zebra is a participant in the Early Childhood Education campaign insert appearing in USA Today March 25 - 27.

“Zebra Pen proudly supports early learning goals to build a solid educational foundation for our children and our future,” said Ken Newman, director of marketing at Zebra Pen Corporation.

“Zebra offers pens and pencils that make writing fun for beginning learners,” said Newman, “Finding joy and a sense of accomplishment in learning early on builds a strong foundation for life-long achievement in education.”

New Bio-Based Binder from Samsill

Samsill Corporation has announced the release of the first three ring binder with a 25% plant-based plastic cover. The new and improved line of Earth’s Choice ring binders combine the already successful biodegradable polypropylene properties with plant-based polyethylene to offer the perfect balance of beginning of life and end of life sustainability benefits, Samsill said.
Samsill Earth’s Choice binders are available in black and white round ring or D-ring view or black storage binders from half inch to five-inch capacity.

The new Earth’s Choice Bio² binders look and function like a traditional ring binder but are composed of at least 69% bio-based material and a USDA Certified bio-based product, Samsill said. Each binder also uses chipboard made of 100% recycled material and carries a lifetime product guarantee under Samsill's Binders for Life program, the company added.

For more information, visit www.samsill.com.

HON Introduces New Table and Seating Lines

The HON Company has introduced new table and seating lines that it says are designed to support dynamic, active and collaborative modern office spaces.

Arrange tables come in three different height options, seated, counter and café height, and are available in a variety of work surface and base shapes and sizes. They also offer the ability to route technology directly to the tabletop through USB or power grommets, including the option for a new, less intrusive mini power grommet.

Accommodate seating comes in three different heights and offers a broad assortment of widths and material options. The lightweight chairs are easy to rearrange and includes a stackable guest chair.

Arrange and Accommodate can be used separately or in tandem to create a highly productive and inviting environment, no matter where work takes place, HON said.
Our New Earth’s Choice Biobased + Biodegradable binders are here to spot you when you get organized at an earth conscious level.

We are proud to announce we are a USDA Certified Biobased Product!

Stay tuned with us!

@samsill Corp @Samsill /Samsill Corp

100% Recycled Chip Board + 25% Biobased Verified by ASTM D-6866 = 47% Total Recycled Content
44% Post Consumer = Made in USA
Recently, some experts have suggested that the U.S. economy is slowing down. Although it’s too soon to make any predictions, one industry that appears to be growing strong—and has proven its resilience in past recessions—is the safety industry.

We’re talking about the manufacturers, distributors and dealers of such things as protective eye gear, protective clothing, respirators, hard hats, safety suits, aprons, and, of course, gloves. So why should this industry continue to grow if our economy drifts south?

The reason is very simple: concerns about worker safety, more government regulations focused on workforce safety, increases in workers’ compensation claims, and environmental issues do not follow the ups and downs of the economy.

Legislation and regulations from federal and state governments, OSHA, and the Environmental Protection Agency, as well as private industry—all designed to prevent workplace injury and protect the environment—are behind this growth.

The wearing of effective safety gear can play a pivotal role in keeping workers safe, helping employers meet current and future worker safety legislation and regulation and keeping worker’s compensation claims from rising further.

They can also help employers protect their bottom line. Fines, insurance claims, potential lawsuits and legal expenses all cut right into the heart of the bottom line. Ensuring that workers are kept safe on the job helps eliminate these costs.

So Where Are the Dealers?

If the worker safety industry is a growing market and one that is likely to remain immune to economic ups and downs, the big question many have is, why aren’t more distributors and dealers marketing safety gear? The short answer is, more will likely enter the market in the coming years. However, certain obstacles prevent them from doing so now.

For example, we market many of our products for the professional cleaning industry, an estimated $24 billion industry.
While dealers market all kinds of supplies, cleaning solutions and equipment for this very large industry, safety gear tends to play a very small role, amounting to only about $58 million, making it almost an afterthought for some distributors and dealers.

There are varying reasons for this, but among them are the following:

- Many dealers see safety and safety products as an entirely different industry, separate from professional cleaning.
- There definitely can be profits in marketing safety gear but much of it depends on how much the distributor or dealer is willing to actually assert themselves in marketing safety products.
- Many distributors and dealers are not well versed on safety gear, tools, and products and are therefore intimidated by the products.

This last point may actually be the key. Marketing safety gear does require expertise, and as more laws and regulations affecting worker safety are mandated, this expertise will become all the more important.

While marketing safety products is an opportunity available to more distributors and dealers, you can’t just carry these products and hope to succeed. One must partner with a supplier(s) that provide the appropriate training and education, field support, and product depth.

In marketing safety products, the distributor or dealer must be able to advise their customers on which safety products are available, stay updated on safety issues and legislation and probably most importantly, suggest ways to address regulatory compliance, staff reluctance, use and application, and ensure that workers actually wear the protective gear selected by their employers.

Staff Reluctance

Staff reluctance is a serious issue when it comes to the wearing of safety gear. A perfect example of this involves protective eye gear. It would seem that just by telling workers that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports there are more than 2,000 eye injuries in the US workplace each day and that 90% of those eye injuries could have been prevented with protective eye gear would be all that is necessary to get workers to wear protective eye gear.

However, no such luck. No matter what the stats, many workers avoid wearing safety gear, including protective eye gear. They may feel it’s unnecessary, have an “it can’t happen to me” attitude about their work and skills, report the gear is uncomfortable or restricts their movements and therefore take any opportunity to remove it, or—and this can be a surprisingly big reason—feel the protective gear is too unattractive and just don’t want to wear it.

To effectively address staff reluctance, distributors and dealers of safety products often turn to the “Four E’s”: Educate, Enable, Engage, and Enforce. The goal of the first of the Four E’s is to avoid the fourth E. Essentially, it is meant to get workers to participate in their own safety. It also shows staff how important their health and safety are to their employer and the entire company’s business operations.

Now let’s explore the Four E’s in-depth:

Educating typically implies pointing out the potential safety hazards of the work and how the safety gear can help prevent injuries from occurring.

Enabling workers to wear safety gear requires that they be trained on how to wear the gear correctly, for the distributor or dealer, this may also mean that they realize that one size doesn’t fit all workers and that different styles and sizes of safety products may need to be tested to find those that fit and work best for specific workers.

When manufacturers, distributors, dealers, and employers Engage with their workers it typically means giving them more choices on the types of safety gear that are available, listening to their concerns—it’s too bulky, too uncomfortable, “not cool,” “not manly looking”—and working to address these concerns. Recall that the appearance of the safety gear can be essential to compliance.

If all else fails, the employer will have to Enforce the wearing of safety gear. In many situations, the applicable laws and regulations mean employers have no choice. But if the first three E’s are addressed successfully, enforcing the wearing of safety gear will be unnecessary.

The safety industry is growing. And while some dealers have identified the “Cleaning Category” as a high value sales target, the entire dealer community has a unique opportunity to bundle their value proposition and engage current customers with potentially profit rich products from the “Safety Category,” generating greater revenue with every delivery.

Jeffrey Gayer is vice president of product development & marketing for Impact Products, LLC. Impact Products is a leading manufacturer of professional cleaning tools and equipment and also markets a wide-range of safety products and protective gear for workers in a variety of industries, from cleaning and construction, to food service. He can be reached via his company website at www.impact-products.com.
Introducing Protective Eyewear from ProGuard by Impact. Our protective eyewear was developed by listening to the needs and desires of workers that use our tools every day. ProGuard Protective Eyewear is engineered to provide optimal fit, style, and protection to prepare you for whatever challenge you face. Another innovation from the industry leaders at Impact. Over 50 years of experience designing and building tools and accessories to make your job easier, safer, and better.
Healthcare Reform Left Small Businesses Behind

By Paul Miller

Business mogul Donald Trump and Sen. Bernie Sanders have tapped into the anger felt by so many in this country who feel Washington has done nothing to make their lives better. Unfortunately, though, this anger is all too rarely stoked by how poorly small businesses are treated.

Can you point to the last time Congress put our issues front and center? Neither can I. The only time when our elected leaders find us important is right before every election when voters go to the polls. And once Election Day is past, our issues fade from their agenda.

This year will be no different. As you have watched your favorite presidential candidate talk about their agenda or priorities, how many of them have focused on you and other small business owners and operators like you, the engine that everyone agrees creates the jobs in this country?

We’ve had an almost unlimited number of debates thus far on both sides, but how many focused on small businesses? How many candidates have detailed small business plans on their campaign websites?

I personally would love to see the same type of anger from small businesses that I see on the television everyday as we watch the presidential primaries play out. Could you imagine a march on Washington by hundreds of thousands of small businesses?

The same can be said when it comes to healthcare reform. Back in 2009, when the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (commonly referred to as the Affordable Care Act) was being debated, the focus was on making sure insurance was affordable to people who didn’t have it. The focus has never been on us and our businesses.

The Affordable Care Act did create the Small Business Health Options Program (SHOP), which was supposed to provide small businesses with quality healthcare for employers at a competitive price.

However, even the SHOP program has had mixed results. First, implementation was delayed until 2015 and then, even with implementation, the program hasn’t produced the savings small business owners want and need.

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Frey Gaede / City of Hope Golf Outing

The Pete Dye Course at French Lick – Thursday, June 9, 2016

1082 Taggart Lane, West Baden Springs, IN 47469
http://www.frenchlick.com/golf/petedye

Sketched on a napkin and carved into history by Hall-of-Fame architect Pete Dye, this course hosted the Senior PGA Championship in 2015. Senior PGA Champion Colin Montgomerie called it “one of the iconic courses” in America and one that golfers all over the world will want to play. This championship golf course on one of Indiana’s highest elevation points has narrow, immaculate fairways and rugged, intense terrain. The course has gained national acclaim for its 40-mile panoramic views of the southern Indiana countryside, three man-made lakes, “volcano” bunkers and a variety of elevation changes. A robust 8,100 yards from the professional tees punctuate Dye’s signature sting from vista-to-vista.

Questions? Please call Todd Gaede (513) 317-9009 or email todd.gaede@freygaede.com

2016 City of Hope Spirit of Life Honoree

Joe Templet

2016 City of Hope Spirit of Life Honoree

Joe Templet
This purpose of this article, though, isn’t to blame the Affordable Care Act. Instead, it is to try and get small businesses focused on becoming a bigger voice for change.

You don’t have to like or even agree with Donald Trump or Bernie Sanders, but they have gotten the attention of every member of Congress running for re-election.

Small businesses need to take advantage of that by talking about healthcare reform for small businesses. We need to demand that Congress and the next President pay attention to our needs or they will find themselves in the unemployment line.

Together, we can become the largest single voting bloc in this country. We not only have the voters, we have the financial resources to elect a new majority of leaders today.

I’m not talking riots or anarchy. I’m talking about a simple healthcare fix that will help bring our healthcare costs down while still allowing us to provide our employees with the quality healthcare they want and need.

The solution is simple: Association Healthcare Plans (AHPs). This is not a new concept and one NOPA has been advocating for years. If implemented, it would allow our national association to offer our businesses healthcare at a reduced cost by pooling its members together to purchase insurance across state lines.

This is such an easy concept, yet to date it still does not exist for us small business owners. The kicker here is that it does exist for our corporate counterparts.

I know my own business would benefit tremendously from this program. As a small business owner, I continue to be struck that people come out against such a program for small businesses but applaud this type of program for large corporations.

The pooling of employees is already taking place by large corporations who get to buy insurance for their employees across state lines. I continue to ask my elected officials why large corporations get the benefits of lower cost healthcare while I continue to see my premiums skyrocket to a point where, in the future, I may have to ask my employees to pay more of their healthcare costs. By their response or lack of response, you would think I was speaking a new language.

Time to speak up

As healthcare continues to dominate the conversation in Washington, I want to urge all my small business colleagues to speak up.

Begin talking to your members of Congress about providing small businesses the same advantages large corporations have when it comes to healthcare.

It’s time for our members of Congress to understand that we have to become more than a sound bite. They have to understand the economics we face.

We cannot continue to be asked to create all the jobs that keep the economy running while at the same time paying more of the tax burden. We cannot continue to spend more and more resources on onerous regulations. And, we cannot continue to see our healthcare premiums go up every year.

I don’t know about you, but healthcare is the number one item on our expense sheet. At some point, the cost will be so great that we will have to make very tough decisions for our business and our employees.

There’s no reason why small businesses should continue to see their healthcare costs keep rising. It’s time for all of us to stand with NOPA and make our collective voice heard. It’s time to push aggressively for AHPs as a viable solution to help small businesses continue to compete on an increasingly global stage.

If I have learned anything from the Trump and Sanders movements, it’s that we can be heard. We as small business owners need to come together and demand that Congress and the next President focus their attention on our needs.

We need to demand that both sides work to make changes to our current healthcare system so that small businesses can enjoy the same benefits offered to our corporate counterparts.

We have the numbers and the clout if we work together and the mechanism is already in place to do just that through NOPA.

I’m tired of hearing about healthcare repeal and replace. What I’d like all of us as small businesses to push is correct and fix. This is the real answer to the continuing skyrocketing of healthcare premiums. The solution is simple and it will work.

Who’s with me? Who’s for working to bringing about commonsense fixes to a healthcare system that currently only values and supports large corporations at the expense of the millions of small businesses in this country?

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.
Lend Your Support to NOPA for the 2016 Small Business Advocacy Fly-In

Still time to register for this important industry event

The National Office Products Alliance (NOPA) understands the value that its advocacy efforts provide our members and the independent dealer community as a whole. In addition to employing the efforts of a lobbyist on behalf of both NOPA and the Office Furniture Dealers Alliance (OFDA), the alliance remains committed to effecting change by empowering our members!

How do we do this? We make it possible for our members to meet one-on-one with legislative representatives so that they can remind them who employs their district’s constituents.

Not only is this a powerful reminder to lawmakers who may be more entrenched in D.C. politics than in the economy back home, it also serves as a great way for our members to build stronger relationships with those who represent them.

This year’s Fly-In is fast approaching but there is still time for you to get involved!

The event is being held April 12-13, 2016 in Washington, D.C. Not only is the fly-in a wonderful way for you to get to meet your representatives, it also affords you opportunities to network among your peers and to discuss the challenges you’re experiencing and even how they’ve dealt with similar challenges with their business.

By standing before members of Congress and sharing your concerns, you are not only protecting the future of our industry, you are demanding that your representatives hear your concerns on how their actions not only impact economic factors in their districts but the people you employ, the people whose votes determine Congress’s future!

Alongside you, NOPA defends the industry and protects the interests of independent dealers. Please get involved today!

To learn more about the Fly-In, please visit: http://bit.ly/NOPASBAFlyin2016.

Stop Letting Congress Take Advantage of Your Small Business!

Defend the industry and join Independent Dealers from around the nation for the NOPA 2016 Small Business Advocacy Fly-in Apr. 12-13, 2016 in Washington, D.C.

There is still time to register!

Strong Branding Makes You More Competitive

By Michael Chazin
What’s your brand and why should you care? In many ways, an effective branding strategy offers one of the best ways—if not the best way, for independent dealers to stand out in their marketplaces.

“Brand is all about distinguishing yourself,” says Wendy Pike, president of Twist Office Products, Wood Dale, Illinois. Branding is especially important in the current business environment, she continues, because the perception many buyers have of independent dealers is they are small, mom-and-pop businesses unable to compete with national big box players.

“To me brand means everything,” says Jason Merrifield, vice president, Merrifield Office Supply, Enid, Oklahoma. When branding is successful, he continues, “it means customers recognize who you are and feel good things when they see your logo.” National players spend heavily on advertising in part because they can’t be in front of customers all the time. Dealers have the advantage; they can visit customers on a regular basis and they can capitalize on that proximity, Merrifield suggests, when they invest in their brand.

“When you step back and look at us vs. the big boxes, the only thing we don’t do better than those folks, is we don’t have a million-dollar advertising budget,” says Tonya Horn, president of Rogards, Champaign, Illinois.

Horn purchased the business from her father five years ago and realized that nobody had ever spent much time or effort on branding in the 100 years the dealer had been in business. After taking care of other aspects of the operation, Horn embarked on an ambitious re-branding initiative.

Besides the fact that the brand had never been worked on from a marketing standpoint, Horn also wanted to ensure that the dealership’s brand messaging was consistent. “Nobody delivered that message concisely and no two people delivered it in the same way,” she says. “I wanted to get some consistency for our team so they really understood this is who we are and this is what we are about.”

Working with her first-call wholesaler,
Essendant, Horn conducted some initial research—including a customer focus group—that uncovered several characteristics which were the foundation of Rogards’ brand image. Rogards was extremely customer focused and incredibly flexible when it came to meeting customer needs. The firm was committed to the local community, which is an important component of many dealers’ brand process. And sustainability was an additional component.

“We refer to our green message as sustainability because I think that is what people should really shoot for,” says Horn. Sometimes the greenest choice isn’t sustainable for a business. “That is how we approach our product offering and our relationships with customers,” she adds. “We want our customers and us to have a sustainable relationship together.”

Research showed that the Rogards name had established considerable goodwill in the market but a change was suggested. The dealership had been going to market as Rogards Office Plus but now decided to drop the “Office Plus” branding and adding a new tagline, “Your workday connection.”

Before becoming Smart Office Solutions in 2013, Andrews Office Warehouse had been a fixture of the business community in Ann Arbor, Michigan since 1976. But with the warehouse designation there was often confusion about the business. Was it a used office furniture dealer or a consignment location? “We decided that we needed to update our entire brand,” says Brittany Mackenzie, vice president of operations. “We decided to change our name and all of our branding surrounding that name.”

Mackenzie met with the ownership of the company and together they decided to update the look and feel of the logo and brand. “We wanted people to look at our name and our logo and think modern company,” says Mackenzie. “We wanted to dispel the mom-and-pop shop myth, and have people see our name and know what we could do,” she adds. "We chose the name “Smart Office Solutions” to be super clear that we can be a total solution for your office.”

The new name was selected internally but outside graphic design assistance was used to design the logo and develop a color scheme. “We used bright orange because we considered it to be fun and energetic,” says Mackenzie. The logo and brand colors are modern and professional, she says, but if anyone looks around the website they also get to see the fun side of Smart Office with a look at the office dog and office kids.

Joel DeShane, president of The Office Supply Guys, Madison Heights, Michigan explains how his dealership has taken a couple of different passes at its identity since the business began selling office supplies in 1967. Originally it swapped Madison Troy Supplies for Michigan Cor-

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porate Office Plus to get away from what DeShane calls the “local ID” identity. “Then a couple of years ago we rebranded as ‘The Office Supply Guys,’” says DeShane.

“We are trying to appeal to a younger buyer,” he continues. “It’s the Millennials who are buying now, and you have to find a way to appeal to them.” The name and ID represent a more approachable alternative than Staples or Office Depot. “We tried to get away from a corporate sounding name into something that was airier, more friendly and more well-rounded.

“We are not going to have the marketing dollars or that mass appeal that a Staples, a Depot or Max is going to have,” continues DeShane. He says you need something that will stand out and still have appeal. “We thought the name ‘The Office Supply Guys’ said what we do,” he says. “Plus it’s easy to remember and you hear it from customers all the time: ‘Just call the office supply guys.’”

The name change was done entirely internally. “We got opinions from customers and employees asked their family and friends,” says DeShane. The only outside work was on the development of the logo, and that is in the process of being revised.

The challenge for Twist Office Products was a little bit different as Pike and her husband Chip got back into the business about a decade ago and bought up several different dealerships. The pair looked for a name that would unite all of these businesses.

“We enlisted S.P. Richards and Pure Red, the advertising company that worked with them, back in 2007,” says Pike. “We were too small at that time and really couldn’t afford a full rebranding.” They ended up working with a group of students from The University of Notre Dame who were looking for a small business that wanted to rebrand. “We were one of the two companies they picked to work with,” says Pike. The process became a collaboration between the student group and Pure Red. “Our brand stands for fresh, unique and useful,” says Pike. “We wanted something fun and short that would distinguish us from your average office supply dealer. We wanted it to say we offered something useful while not taking ourselves too seriously. Our brand message is that we put a spin on it; we twist things up a notch.”

At Merrifield Office Supply there was a concern that the logo and signature of the company didn’t always appear in the same cursive font at all of the company’s seven locations and on all of the different delivery vehicles. “We wanted to bring everybody together with the same look,” explains Merrifield. “With everybody displaying the same logo and slogan we would be recognized around Oklahoma.”

Merrifield worked with Essendant to come up with a revised Merrifield logo with a stylized “M” encapsulated within a circle. The words “Office Supply” have been dropped and the name in lower case is now tied to the tagline “You’re in good company.” Merrifield appears in purple to appeal to female buyers of office products; below that the words “office products,” “furniture” and “school supplies” appear in green, blue and orange. The tagline appears in larger type below the logo. “The tagline came from being family owned and being located primarily in small towns,” says Merrifield. “It’s a down-to-earth look for the small town image of the company.”

Right after Merrifield announced its new brand identity the company launched a new website. The online branding picks up the same colors which are a big part of the brand look. “The website uses the colors to reflect the different product lines that Merrifield has for sale online,” says Merrifield.

Branding can be especially important when dealers expand their product offerings and take on new categories. “One of the hardest things, particularly for dealers who have been around for a long time, is for customers to recognize us for the new product lines we offer,” says Neville Chaney, president of WJ Office, Boone, North Carolina. “People still tend to look to you for the products you were known for all those many years.”

Like so many other dealers WJ has expanded its product offering to include janitorial and break room products. Chaney has developed different names and uses specialists to establish product lines offered by divisions of the company. Cleaning products are sold under the name

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Eco-Clean, a division of WJ Office, while coffee is sold under the WJava name and has its own logo.

Chaney put up a billboard on one of the main highways to highlight his dealership’s brand messaging. The sign just says WJ Office without a phone number or any product references. “We have a pretty striking color scheme, and when you are on the highway out of Boone you can’t miss it,” says Chaney.

The billboard uses the same black and green color scheme that is used every time the logo is presented. “I wanted something that a passenger in a car could google if they remembered seeing it,” he says. “At 60 miles an hour they aren’t going to remember much more than a couple of words on a billboard, so it is more about brand recognition.”

One of the biggest problems, suggests Chaney, is the limited resources that are available to most dealers. WJ just put out a new brochure for its furniture division, which generates more than 40% of company sales. “You are limited in where you devote resources,” says Chanel. “If you put a lot into furniture something else is going to suffer.”

Supporting a firm’s brand identity is a continuing challenge for dealers with limited marketing budgets. At Twist Office Products incoming callers are greeted with an ebullient female voice who says “We are very excited that you called,” before the call is switched to customer service in Illinois or Minnesota depending on where the call originated.

“Right now we are in the process of sending out thank you notes to each of our customers from me with my business card,” says Pike. The cards say that it is not just Pike but the whole Twist team that appreciates their business. “I think that is something that small and medium-sized businesses don’t often hear from their vendors.”

Twist relies on promotions that it receives from both wholesalers and manufacturers to inform customers of the latest offers. “But we don’t like them to look the same as everyone else,” says Pike. “We take those promotions and put our own twist on them so they look different. You also won’t see the same banners on our website that you will see on everyone else’s. “We don’t fully participate in the automated emails and Facebook posts that go out from the wholesalers and dealer groups,” continues Pike. “We subscribe but then we look at them, get some ideas and put our own spin on the message.” Those are just some of the ways that Pike tries to make an impression with the Twist Office Products brand name. “I think that distinguishes us from the competition,” she says.

A big part of any dealers’ value proposition relates to its brand. At The Office Supply Guys, a lot of brand recognition and its value is tied up in relationships. “Once you can prove yourself to a customer or potential customer,” says DeShane, “then the relationship is there and brand has value.” The hard part, he adds, is getting through the door that first time. “Once we get through the door we generally do a
No matter how an order originates, when it gets sent out for delivery The Office Supply Guys always include marketing pieces with the order. And a treat always gets included as well. “We’ve probably bought more little bags of Famous Amos cookies than anybody. When they get their order there is always a little treat for them,” says DeShane. If you are accustomed to getting a treat with your order it better be there, he adds, and you almost certainly never forget where that order originated. This approach, of making orders memorable is extremely useful when dealing with online orders from customers who don’t always interact directly with your sales team.

At Rogards, customer service employees are available to answer any digital questions through the dealership’s online chat function. “If customers have a question when visiting the website, they can still experience our customer service via chat,” says Horn. “This is especially important as you have more Millennials shopping online.”

On still another level, Horn likes to follow up with online customers to make certain that their identities are known. “We want to make sure we know who the key contact is at that account, and that all their users are set up to make online purchases,” she says. “We also make sure that the order confirmations go to the right person and that statements are in the preferred format.” Even if that customer wishes to continue only ordering online she can be assured that her order is in good hands with Rogards.

At Smart Office Solutions, online sales are growing every year; at the same time orders that come in via phone or fax continue to decline. Still contacts with customers haven’t been cut back. “We continue to do regular account reviews and reach out through email,” says Mackenzie. “We strive to emphasize the convenience of doing business with us on the website because it reduces errors and is easier and more efficient for everybody. But we are careful not to let it affect our personal relationships with clients.”

“That is another aspect of business that all of us struggle with,” suggests Chaney. “The person sees an email from us, and we have to get their attention in a short period of time or otherwise it gets trashed.” Chaney says in a digital environment it’s easy to lose contact with customers. He has enlisted his office products salespeople to reach out to these folks by phone and personal email to make sure they understand how important their business is to WJ Office.

While rebranding gives a dealer a moment in the sun, its impact in the marketplace can be either momentary or make a lasting impression depending on how the dealer handles the change. When Smart Office Solutions rebranded it also made functional improvements to its website, which resulted in a good deal of positive feedback. Since the rebrand, “people who visit our website before they have an opportunity to speak with us have been more likely to fill out our contact form,” says Mackenzie. “Our rebranding has lent a lot to our credibility as a competitor in the modern market.”

The day after Rogards introduced its new logo the local chamber of commerce named the company business of the year. The company received extensive media coverage and rode that unplanned exposure into a customer appreciation event that included vendor displays, opportunities to view the new brand and prizes for attendees.

In the short term the change increased traffic and business at the firm’s retail store and also made for a large increase in sales to offices with fewer than five employees.

More importantly, the whole Rogards team was excited and energized by the change. New sales collateral was developed that incorporated the new color scheme and new language and gave salespeople a renewed passion. Horn can’t say for sure whether it was the branding or the unexpected media coverage that had a bigger impact. “If it had just been the branding alone,” she suggests, “people still would have been pretty excited to go to work and to have real clarity on this is who we are; this is our focus.”

Taking on the task of rebranding is such a big a project that it’s paramount that the principal dedicates time to the effort or chooses a team to work on it that is fully trusted. This is critical, suggests Horn. No matter if the brand and look is being developed internally or externally, if it feels that it might be heading in the wrong direction it is up to the principal to stop it. “You have to figure out what is going wrong because in the end if you have a product delivered that doesn’t feel authentic it is not going to work,” she says. “People are not going to buy in when they realize that the highest level wasn’t invested.”

For dealers faced with an aging identity that might pigeonhole them as a non-competitive mom-and-pop business it is time to work up an alternative name and logo. “You have to do something,” suggests DeShane. “Doing nothing is not an option and if you don’t try and hit the refresh button you will become stale. It will be hard to get new customers, and one by one you will lose your old customers through attrition.”

Having a solid brand for the new age is one of the best defenses in the battle with national competition. “If you do your brand right, whatever that means in your market, and it can be communicated clearly and succinctly,” contends Horn, “that will start to close the gap even without you spending millions of dollars.”
Is there any part of selling that’s more talked about these days—or less understood—than social media? Ever since LinkedIn came on the scene, various trainers, consultants, and other assorted “experts” have been telling salespeople that the magic button that they had always sought—the one that would remove the need for prospecting—had finally arrived. Simply put up your profile on LinkedIn, make some posts and while you’re at it, Tweet a bit and Facebook a lot. Then say, “Come to Papa,” and all the prospects you’d ever need would come to you.

Some salespeople are still waiting for that to happen. Want to know how I know? Because I was one of those salespeople. You see, I’ve been building my national speaking career for about five years now. I read and heard the advice of the top people in my profession and they all said, “It doesn’t matter what you’ve done or where you’ve done it—this is the one place where cold calling doesn’t work. You will not get booked off a cold call.”

Since they were the experts, I believed them. I posted on LinkedIn. I Tweeted. I Facebooked. And I put up videos on YouTube. And I said, “Come to Papa.” And…. well, to be totally honest, I did get a few speaking engagements from word of mouth and my “rebook rate” (the rate at which past clients bring me back) is very high for the industry. Still, I looked at my business last year and realized that I didn’t have as many national-level engagements as I wanted.

So I decided to take matters into my own hands. I would do what didn’t work, at least according to what the experts told me. And I found out something. In the industry of professional speaking, cold calling doesn’t work…..except when it does. And yes, I have booked several well-paying engagements at quality conferences by cold calling.

But, this article isn’t about me or what I’ve been able to do. It’s about YOU and what YOU can do. You see, I discovered something very important about social media in this process. I made cold calls, I set appointments, I had good conversations. And then, do you know what my prospects did?

They went to my social media sites and looked at all of those posts, all those YouTube videos, the testimonials, etc. Social media was their tool for establishing my bona fides. Once they did that, we re-engaged and they booked me to speak.

And here’s what I learned: In today’s world, it’s not enough to just do conventional prospecting and nor is it enough to do social media. You must do both.

Think about the last time you exhibited at a trade show. You had your display and samples, and you had people assigned to the booth just for the purpose of prospecting (new lead generation). Now imagine that you’d done it only one of those two ways.

First, imagine that you’d only put up your display. You didn’t put any people in the booth; perhaps you just put a bowl on the table with a sign saying, “If you’re interested, drop your card into this bowl.” Throughout the show, your booth sat empty with no people in it. How many cards do you think you’d have at the end of the show? Not many, if any at all.

Now, imagine the opposite. Instead of putting up a display you put a simple sign up with your company’s name and had two of your people in the booth. Now how do you think you’d do? My guess is that you’d probably do a little better than by using the display and no people. That’s because your people could engage at-

How to Use Social Media in a Successful Prospecting Effort

By Troy Harrison

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Thus tendees as they came by. But either way, you probably wouldn’t get the same results that you’d get with both a display and your people.

In prospecting, social media is your trade show display. It’s your backdrop, your brand, your samples, and it provides you with the air of legitimacy and bona fides that your display does at the trade show. It’s a way for buyers to check you out and to discover more about you. Nowadays, you’ll find out that many of your potential customers—even ones that you cold call—will check you out on social media. This is a switch in paradigm from how most salespeople are attempting to use social media (unsuccessfully in most cases). When we recognize that social media is not our primary prospecting mechanism, but a supplementary one, it changes our approach to our postings.

Rather than posting with constant calls to action—in an attempt to get a cold re-
Over the years there have been numerous movies highlighting the lives and activities of sales professionals. From “Tommy Boy” on the comedic side to “Death of a Salesman,” there is a wide spectrum of entertainment that explores various facets of “product purveyors.”

However, there is one sales movie that is quoted or emulated more than any other and that’s a great shame because in my humble opinion, it has permanently damaged the notion of sales, both as an honorable profession and as a genuinely meaningful and satisfying career path.

As many of you might have guessed, that movie—and it’s one that I hate—is “Glengarry Glen Ross.” The movie tells the story of a real estate sales team and the manner in which they gain new business. Its mood is dark and its moral hard to determine. That is, until you realize one very important fact that too many sales managers have overlooked: The author wrote it as a satire!

Satire is intended to make fun of its subject by over-dramatizing its faults and making a mockery of the subject it is addressing. Too bad that so many sales managers and other professionals who should know better have used the movie to teach sales, rather than to highlight the brutal excesses that pressure-based sales tactics can cause.

Even if you haven’t seen the movie, you have probably heard its most famous line: “Always Be Closing!” In other words, don’t worry about what the prospect says or needs, push them until you gain the sale.

All of us have been affected to some degree by this slogan but have you ever considered this question: Do you personally want to buy from a “pushy” sales person? My guess is that over 80% of us would say no, and yet ABC is still the basis of most sales training.

Within the past year, I have heard sales trainers tell their pupils not to waste time with the gatekeeper but focus solely on closing the decision-maker. I’ve also heard them advocate making a ridiculous number of cold calls per day with the hope that the rep will sell something to one or two of them.

For those who push this type of approach I have two questions. First, what sort of impression are you leaving with the 40-60 people who won’t buy from your company that day? Are they more or less likely to buy from you in the future if your rep has annoyed them the first time they met?

Secondly, what are we doing to the reps who are taught this methodology? Does this help them build relationships or does it make them afraid to make any cold calls at all?

Every dealer I meet invariably asks me the same question: Where can I find sales professionals who can build relationships and who are willing to cold call? Guess what! If we are trying to find people that can build good relationships, they will do very poorly at cold calling using ABC.

Because those good relationship-based sales professionals are so hard to find, many dealers have moved to a hunter-farmer model, but even for those, the turnover is still extremely high.

May I suggest instead, that you focus your efforts on finding more reps that can start and maintain relationships, rather than continuing to struggle with the hybrid model. Simultaneously, move your sales team towards an ethos that more closely resembles the manner in which you yourself like to be sold.

If every sales call focuses more on listening and understanding—“Always Be Caring” rather than “Always Be Closing”—you will not only find clients will often close themselves but also, you just might learn to demonstrate the kind of sales technique that the author of “Glengarry Glen Ross” was hoping to encourage.

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.
When I was a child I loved helping my grandmother bake cookies. She baked every Saturday morning and each week it was a different delicious kind: peanut butter, snickerdoodle and my favorite—chocolate chip!

We would spend the morning meticulously measuring each ingredient before dumping it all in the large silver mixing bowl. She would let me scoop the spoons full of dough and place them on the baking sheets before popping them into the oven for the longest wait ever! The twelve minutes those cookies took to bake felt like an hour, as I waited eagerly to eat the first warm cookie.

Now that I have your sweet tooth engaged, I want you to think about the most important recipe at your organization: your prospecting “Recipe for Success.”

Oftentimes sales people are hired and expected to sell without a clear sales process or Recipe for Success. That would be similar to asking me back then, an 8-year-old girl, to make cookies without a recipe.

Sure, I knew I needed to dump flour, sugar, butter and chocolate chips into a bowl, but my cookies certainly would not taste like the ones Grandma made if I didn’t have a recipe to follow. Here are some tips to help ensure your sales team is following the right recipe:

1. **Ingredients.**

   Each ingredient in the recipe serves a purpose. If I skip the vanilla, the cookies will not taste the same. In sales, if I skip sending a marketing piece or decide I don’t need to conduct a timely follow-up, then I am changing my Recipe for Success and it will negatively impact my closing ratios. Encourage your team to leverage every carefully selected ingredient to ensure their recipe results in more sales!

2. **Timing.**

   One sure way to ruin cookies is to leave them in the oven too long. This is also true for sales. If I delay my sales process and let weeks go by between prospect contacts, then I am going to have to start all over when I do finally reach them. It’s no fun having to scrape those burned cookies off the cookie sheet and bake a new batch. Make sure your sales people are contacting prospects at the right time, and not allowing time to kill deals.

3. **Reasons.**

   We follow recipes when we bake because someone else went through the trouble of playing with the ingredients and the measurements until they finally got it right. As a sales leader, you probably know what needs to go into your recipe but have you written it down and trained your team to follow it?

By following just these three simple tips, you can create your own Recipe for Success and help set your sales team up with the tools they need to bring on more new accounts and grow their relationships with buying customers.

Make it a great day out there!

If you are interested in learning more about Methods in Motion and the ways we can help you create your company’s Recipe for Success, please visit [www.methodsnmotion.com](http://www.methodsnmotion.com) or call 678-574-6072.
Growing your business can be a daunting task and with all the challenges you face as a dealer—competition, consolidation and the daily operational demands of the business—you may feel like there are simply not enough hours in the day to do it all. Business development isn’t easy, but it’s also not hard—especially if you’re authentic and live the value proposition of the independent dealer: being a local, community-oriented, personalized business resource. Business development is just an extension of those qualities.

Don’t believe me? I’ve got some suggestions for successful business development and you’ll see that the easiest strategy to earn more is by being the best you.

1. **Good First Impressions Build Trust.** I have always worked on the assumption that 20% of the people you meet will immediately love you, 20% won’t like you and the remaining 60% will be initially indifferent. This last group is the most important because you have a chance with them—a chance to win or lose.

   If you make a less-than-perfect first impression, those who will immediately love you will live with it and those who dislike you won’t change their opinion. But the majority who are initially indifferent will never forget it—and they will begin to build a somewhat negative perception of you.

   People decide to buy based on trust first, relationships second and products and services last, so always start with a strong first impression.

2. **Always Be Prepared.** Failure to appropriately prepare is preparing to fail. Before every meeting, do your research. Find out who will be at the meeting. Do they want to be there, or were they forced to attend? What do they expect from you and your company, and what do they already know?

   Some of you reading this will be thinking, “I just talk about the weekend or what’s in the news.” Although this will help build the emotional bank account, it will not help in the sales process. You will not build trust to a sufficient level that will result in a sale.

   If you are well prepared, then your presentation and questions will be relevant, your knowledge will impress, and your understanding of your future customer’s unique needs will build their trust in you.

3. **Reference Sell.** Sales people commonly see case studies and references as merely boxes to check in the selling process. However, when I talk to buyers and end users, they have a completely different perception: They see case studies and references as key steps in the buying process.

   Buyers and end users use case studies and references to validate your message. In short, it’s a reality check on whether or not a promise can be delivered. If a decision maker can’t validate that you will deliver on their requirements, then it may be too risky for them to enter into an agreement with you. Remember that all customers are different, so develop a library of case studies, references and resources to communicate to specific needs.

4. **Take Responsibility for Sales Performance.** You cannot expect your sales team to achieve their goals until you have satisfied three key requirements. First, you need to consider if they have the right tools to do their job to the best of their ability. Second, you need to determine if you’ve trained them to use those tools properly. And, third, ask yourself if they are motivated to want to achieve their targets.

   If the answer is no to any of these, then you need to go back to the drawing board and review these areas to find ways to improve them. All too often, the entire focus is on the final goal (i.e. winning the customer), and little to no attention is paid to short- and medium-term goals.

Luke Chapman is CEO and founder of Business Performance Group USA and president of Global Business Development at Highlands. For more information, visit [www.thebgroupus.com](http://www.thebgroupus.com).
Distribution is Digitized. Now Content is King

By Brett Hall, Director of Partner Development for ComplyRight Distribution Systems

It used to be that there were three television networks... ABC, CBS and NBC. Their shows were distributed, by local affiliates and theirs were the only shows you saw. Now you find hundreds, even thousands, of shows via cable, not to mention Netflix, Amazon, Hulu and others that distribute programming via streaming services online and creating their own content.

And so it is with office products. Two or three wholesalers played the role of the TV networks and local independent dealers were the affiliates. Back then, distribution was king but now distribution has been digitized and content is king.

Big boxes began to upset the wholesaler-to-local-dealer model much like cable TV. Now those big boxes are adding content to their online platforms in a desperate attempt to stave off Amazon, eBay and others. And now Amazon has launched a B2B division by going direct to manufacturers and warehousing the product. No wholesalers or dealers needed.

However the local dealer, like the local network affiliate, has an advantage. They have a local presence and a local following. The trick is to hang on to that and grow it so those customers don’t drift away. How can you do that? By having what your customers need so they don’t go find it somewhere else. The wholesaler/dealer model is insufficient to do this... it simply cannot handle the number of SKUs necessary. You have to find other ways to supplement those SKUs.

Does adding content mean that you’ll add sales? Of course it does. Remember the industrial supply company that delivered janitorial supplies to your customer? Or the coffee service that provided the brewer, the pots and the coffee? Well now you do that. The jan-san and coffee/break room segments delivered sales for you and provided your customer with a more efficient source for those products.

So what is the content I need to add? There are tens of thousands of SKUs your customers may need. One wholesaler states that “We distribute over 30,000 business products to a network of over 7,000 resellers.” That used to sound like a lot. But one of the big boxes just passed one million SKUs on their ecommerce platform. Yeah. They got that.

A modest example... and a shameless plug

One should speak of what they know so I can only speak to the product line I know and sell. It’s a category we refer to as “Compliance Products”. It’s a bit like coffee and jan-san because it’s comprised

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of products your customers need to run their business. And, in many cases, these products are required by law.

You sell some of these now but only a few and that’s due to the content limitations of the wholesaler. Here are a few examples:

**Labor Law Posters** are required for every employer. You sell these but you don’t have CPR and Choking Posters, OSHA recordkeeping and training tools, state-compliant job applications, Form I-9 for Employment Eligibility Verification, background check authorizations and other HR items.

**Healthcare Claim Forms:** A standard item for the wholesaler but they’re missing HIPPA forms and posters, biohazard and radiation warnings and other mandatory products for the healthcare provider.

**Employer Tax Forms:** W-2 and 1099 forms are a staple for dealers but many comment that they aren’t selling as many. Your customers are moving to new electronic alternatives from online providers. We’re leading the industry in these new tax solutions and the dealers that have picked these up have new sales growing exponentially year over year.

Dealers who have added these SKUs are seeing significant new sales. They have reached beyond wholesaler distribution and embraced new content. Because they get it… distribution has been digitized and content is the new king.

We asked the industry’s two major wholesalers to respond to Brett’s column. Here’s what they had to say:

**Jim O’Brien**
**Executive VP—Operations**
**S.P. Richards**

S.P. Richards completely agrees that SKU growth in the appropriate categories is essential to the long-term health of independent dealers.

We are rapidly expanding the content available for dealer websites to include virtually stocked items that are available on a drop-ship or cross-dock basis from manufacturers.

Recognizing that dealer websites will be more relevant with an expanded product offering, we are also exploring content for product that can be sourced through other distribution channels.

The attention that buying groups such as TriMega and Independent Stationers have brought to this issue has been very helpful in pushing the vendor community to move more quickly to find solutions that can work for the independent dealer.

Ultimately, consumer expectations must be met or exceeded and the independent dealer has, and always will be held to a very high standard.

It is with this in mind that we take great precaution to ensure that products can be available within a reasonable time frame and in quantities that the manufacturer or other channel distributors are prepared to ship.

For example, a consumer may want to purchase a less than case quantity but the supplier may not be willing to break a full case. This has the potential to negatively impact a consumer and their opinion of the dealer.

Even if the case can be broken, the content and associated packing information must be built in such a way as to support the sale of both a single unit and a carton.

It is also very important that the various elements of any transaction are as automated as possible to include tracking, advance shipping notifications and updated pricing information.

To date, content and search have been primarily made available and funded from the national wholesalers and their vendor partners. It is critical that any solution be sustainable as this will require an ongoing and increased level of investment.

We are both prepared and excited at the prospects of bringing more selling opportunities and relevancy to the independent dealer community. The collaboration among wholesalers, system providers, buying groups and vendors has never been greater, as we all understand the strategic importance of these initiatives.

**Joe Templet**
**Senior VP, Trade Development**
**Essendant**

We are very cognizant of the impact of Amazon.

Through our current distribution network we currently offer over 130,000 items to our dealer network. Every day we are searching for new items to expand the dealer network selling portfolio.

We offer extended items not stocked or cataloged from our suppliers through a special order process. This expands the offering of each of our suppliers.

I am confident our dealers will remain viable due to their strong relationships, outstanding service and willingness to fully service their customers.

We will continue to monitor the market for new product opportunities either from our current suppliers or through acquisition.

In addition, we have a dedicated team working tirelessly to keep our search and content competitive with all major competitors.

We are aware of the responsibility we have in this arena to keep our dealers relevant.
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