MARCH 2019

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INDEPENDENT DEALER
The official publication of NOPA
As the ink dries on the Essendant purchase, company president Harry Dochelli and his team are now charged with explaining to their customers how things are going to pan out.

They were joined in this effort by Staples CEO Sandy Douglas at the wholesaler’s CORE Live event in Denver last month (page 10), while senior executives were out in force at the AOPD meeting two weeks later (page 12).

Their message was clear: Trust us and we will deliver some quick wins in the short term and lower cost of goods with improved service and business tools going forward. The general reaction from the customer side is that they will wait and see what is delivered and how long that might take—although their patience is unlikely to last too long.

While the wholesaler’s future direction and strategies formed the main talking point at the two shows, the other hot topic was the fact that it looks likely this will be the last year for both meetings. As our news story on page 11 points out, the Business Solutions Association (BSA) has confirmed that the long-discussed combined industry week event will take place next year, replacing up to nine separate events. Exactly where and when it will take place will be announced soon, but happen it will—a welcome and, perhaps, inevitable development.

As budgets tighten and consolidation continues at all levels, a unified meeting makes perfect sense. This is, however, a massive undertaking and a great deal of praise is due to all at BSA and elsewhere who have given their time and energy to bring it this far. There is still a way to go and we will bring you more news as we have it, but here at INDEPENDENT DEALER, we urge you all to support the effort and help bring it to the success our industry deserves.

70 years of growth for HSC Office Products

It was 70 years ago that HSC Office Products in Aiea, Hawaii, opened for business. The year was 1949 and back then, Shizuto “Lefty” Sakata and his wife, Haru, primarily sold business and accounting forms.

The company, known at that time as Hawaii Stationery, was a two-person operation and many days Haru would take a city bus to make deliveries. In the late 50s adding machines were added to a product mix that focused primarily on meeting the needs of accountants and bookkeepers. During the 1960s, Lefty’s son, Wilbert, became involved and later stepped in to run the operation when Lefty passed away.

It was Wilbert who diversified business at HSC and brought it more in line with what were considered the main office supply offerings. “He was actually instrumental in diversifying the business and turning it into more of an office supply dealership,” says general manager Frank Tsukano.

Current president Stacy Sakata started working at the company during the 60s. He worked every job in the company. “He would pull and pack orders and deliver them to customers in his VW bug,” recalls Frank.

Stacy took over the reins of the business from Wilbert in the late 80s and that was when growth intensified. “Stacy was instrumental in evolving our company so it would grow,” Frank adds. “Our diversification and growth stemmed from Stacy forming relationships with buying groups and manufacturers’ reps.”

When Stacy took over the business there were just six employees. Today, HSC employs more than 45 hardworking industry professionals.
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**Winner’s Circle CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2**

Around the time of its 50th anniversary in 1999, the dealership’s name was brought up to date and changed to HSC Office Products. “We changed it so that people would better understand what we did,” says Frank. It was also around that same time that Frank, a cousin, was brought into the business and he has been given increasingly more responsibility ever since.

In the last 20 years, there have been numerous changes, including an increasing use of technology, an expanded sales effort and the creation of a marketing department. “Now we print our own marketing materials and plan events centered around marketing the business,” says Frank.

Today, the dealership offers a one-stop product mix that includes breakroom and janitorial products, school supplies and technology items in addition to traditional office supplies and office furniture.

Unsurprisingly, given its location, HSC is a stocking dealer with close to 25,000 SKUs in inventory. A large inventory is required as restocking, when all products come from the mainland, can take anywhere from a few days up to a few weeks to arrive. Close to 90 percent of products are purchased direct. Additionally, HSC does contract fulfillment orders for many mainland independent dealers. They also supply local resellers, such as CVS and 7-11, with office supplies to retail.

**Michigan dealer DBI acquires Choice Office Products**

DBI, Lansing, Michigan has purchased Choice Office Products of Saginaw, Michigan. Choice has annual sales in office supplies and furniture of approximately $3 million, and the acquisition opens up new markets for DBI in eastern Michigan.

“Choice was more of a mid-market furniture dealer,” said Steve Klaver, chief operating officer and owner at DBI. “We will be able to leverage our furniture expertise to help build that market. Being a contract furniture dealer, we offer greater furniture resources and bring a professional design offering to their customers.”

For the time being, DBI has branded the new acquisition as DBI Choice. “We will keep that name for the remainder of the year, then transition to just DBI,” said Steve.

Choice Office Products was owned by Greg Ballard. Ballard was a third-generation dealer in the Saginaw area, having worked for a company his grandfather started. That company was sold to U.S. Office Products and 16 years ago he started Choice.

DBI will maintain all Choice employees including Ballard, as well as facilities in Saginaw and Flint. “They are a valuable team and we welcome their experience to our DBI family,” Steve added.

**Virginia’s The Supply Room names new CEO**

Lauren Jones, the previous executive vice president of communications, who joined The Supply Room in 2015, replaced Barber at the start of March.

To ensure a smooth transition, Barber will remain with the company as an advisor until her retirement. Barber, who has been president and CEO of the dealership since 2007, plans to retire in June. She joined the company in 1986 and held several leadership positions in purchasing and customer service before occupying her current position. During her tenure, she led the company through a period of sustained growth as well as a series of mergers and acquisitions.

“I’m proud of the company’s unwavering integrity and dedicated employees. We are fortunate to have maintained the family atmosphere of a small company while steadily growing over the years,” Patricia said.

“Pat will leave a considerable legacy, and we’re grateful for her leadership over the years,” said Yancey Jones Jr., COO. “Lauren’s appointment and this transition are exciting milestones in a succession plan that the board of directors has been working on for the past three years.”
While doing R&D, our chemists created a proprietary, salt-leached rubber. This breakthrough led to the world’s first ever pre-inked stamp, the Xstamper®. With continued innovation, the Xstamper was adapted to laser manufacturing to produce the sharpest-detailed impression imaginable. Each Xstamper is hand-crafted and tested by experienced stamp makers. The Xstamper truly is the king of rubber stamps.

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Ohio dealer Friends Office runs contest to distribute new catalogs

Not every customer is excited to receive a new wholesaler catalog, particularly in these increasingly digital days. That’s why Friends Office, Findlay, Ohio, has developed a contest to make getting a new catalog more fun and exciting. Entries were generated during January and winners were drawn the first week of February.

“We’ve done this contest for the past five years,” said Arie Wolfert, creative director. “Initially the goal was to help reduce the total carbon footprint and become environmentally responsible. We try to recycle whatever we can and are a certified green company.”

The other goal that developed is to get new catalogs in customers’ hands in a fun and action-inducing way. “Customers send in their old catalogs with their name, email, and company written on the front and then we do a drawing for prizes,” said Arie.

“Our customers really seem to enjoy the contest” he added. “Each year we get more and more catalogs back.”

Charlotte dealer supports City of Hope in honor of former employee

Forms & Supply Inc., Charlotte, North Carolina, paid tribute to a former employee who lost her battle with cancer in November of 2017. Earlier this year employees at the dealership supported the Kathy Morton Cancer Walk and raised close to $1,800 to support life-saving research by the City of Hope.

“Kathy worked here for almost 22 years before she was diagnosed with glioblastoma,” said Kim Leazer, vice president sales. Kathy worked in customer service, eventually became customer service manager and was known throughout the company. “She was the cheerleader for the company. Everybody knew Kathy and everybody loved her,” added Kim.

When Kathy became ill and could no longer drive, FSI employees filled in a sign-up sheet to see who would pick Kathy up and bring her to the office. “She would sit in the break room in the morning and talk to people, and someone would take her home at lunchtime,” said Kim. Other employees maintained her garden.

“She was so completely devoted to this company and the employees loved and respected her because she loved them,” said Kim. “She was amazing.”

Georgia dealer McGarity’s named ‘Best in Office Furniture’ by reader poll

Local recognition can help spur sales. That’s why McGarity’s Business Products, Gainesville, Georgia, was delighted to be named “Best of Hall in Office Furniture & Design” in the local newspaper’s most recent Readers’ Choice Poll.

“This year 2,230 different businesses were nominated and they ended up with 229 winners,” reports marketing manager Cami McGarity. “This was the first year we were nominated and were pleased to have won,” she says. McGarity’s received a Readers Choice Award logo and plans to use it to promote business in the coming year.

The dealership’s Facebook post celebrating this win thanked its sales and design team who always work hard to make sure that each office they create is a winner. The reader survey gets more popular every year; more than 172,000 votes were cast this year.
Missouri dealer Office Source Launches IT service division

Office Source, Fenton, Missouri, has created a new division which offers IT services for small and mid-size businesses. Kraig Simmons, owner of Office Source, partnered with his long time IT service provider Tek4, Inc., owned by Karl Grable, to launch the new business—Tek Source.

The division is the natural evolution of a service the market needs, claimed Karl. Tek Source will support clients and assist with copiers and printers, which in many cases are now networked. It also assists with office network services.

Tek Source offers a hybrid approach to managed services, which only bills for the amount of time needed to resolve an issue. Additional offerings cover computer and network equipment for a monthly fee or, for businesses only requiring assistance from time to time, a pay-as-you-go alternative is also available.

The new division was given a soft launch right after the first of the year. To start, the service will be offered to all customers by the existing sales staff. Karl has already instructed the team on suggested sales topics. “If they can get that meeting, I can have the conversation with the client,” he added.
The Office Shop – Aitkin, Minnesota

While still in business school Scott Johnson took a job with a seller of office products so he could work in his hometown of Aitkin, Minnesota. That job lasted a couple of years but when the seller filed for bankruptcy, Scott decided to open his own dealership in Aitkin. He called it The Office Shop.

Later that year, Scott’s wife Jodie joined the business and the dealership has been growing successfully ever since in this north central Minnesota community.

In 1995 The Office Shop opened a second location in Brainerd-Baxter about 30 miles away. That location was a former grocery store which enabled faster growth. The store is fitted with warehouse shelving and items are picked to fill commercial orders—80 percent of the business comes from commercial sales.

The Brainerd store also offers space to display office furniture. The only available warehouse space is filled with copy paper—The Office Shop goes through a truckload every month.

The market area takes in a 60-mile radius around both towns. Retail comprises a small part of the business, as many commercial customers will walk in and pick up supplies as needed. Both stores also include business centers where customers can get print jobs completed or use a computer. There is no charge for using the computer but a fee is collected for prints, scans and emails.

The Office Shop pursued its locally owned position in the community long before local ownership was a popular marketing ploy. “We’re local people,” says Jodie. “We grew up here, we live here and we have family here.” She says that she and Scott were brought up with the values and sense of small-town America.

“IT’s not always about price,” she says. “It’s about how well I am being served and the relationships that we build. That’s really what has made us successful.” The fact that customers know their delivery drivers and that the store can easily generate returns or solve problems contributes to the strength of the relationships that have been established, she points out.

Community involvement also contributes to the success that The Office Shop enjoys. “Scott and I have always volunteered and given back to the community,” says Jodie. After their son Zachary was diagnosed with leukemia more than 20 years ago, the Zachary Johnson Kids with Cancer Fund was created, which offers grants to area families with a dependent child who has any form of cancer. Empty toner and ink cartridges are collected to raise funds, and over the years more than $90,000 has been donated to assist these families.

Janitorial supplies along with furniture sales make up for declines in office supplies. The dealership is also a Canon copier dealer. With such a diverse product mix, it seems there’s almost always one category that is busy.

Another key contributor to success is membership in the Independent Suppliers Group. “Our cost of goods is closer to the big boxes,” says Scott. “That levels the playing field a lot.”

The Office Shop established a niche for furniture sales and offers different options for customers looking to refurnish.

New furniture is always a good choice but for businesses wanting to stretch their budget there’s also a selection of used furniture clients can pick from. For buyers looking for still better pricing, when available, there are scratched and dented items picked up from the wholesaler.

“Competition has changed,” says Scott. Fewer independent dealers are around to compete for sales these days, although independents located in major metro areas have started to go after more sales in north central Minnesota. “We’ve had to step up our game,” says Scott. “Business isn’t getting any easier. We have to work harder and smarter.”
GROWING THE CATEGORY WHILE ERASING THE COMPETITION.

Driven by ever increasing consumer demand, the innovative and mistake-free FriXion line now includes a variety of vibrant options and colors in gel ink, highlighter and marker pens! FriXion pens by Pilot have quickly become America’s #1 selling brand of erasable pens, growing an average of >30% in each of the last five years."


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Douglas and Dochelli aim to allay dealer fears at CORE Q&A

“I want everyone in this room to know that all of us at Staples are, and I am personally, deeply committed to making, not only a good future together, but making history together.”

With these words Staples CEO Sandy Douglas (above right) ended the hotly anticipated Q&A session on the first morning of Essendant’s CORE Live event in Denver last month.

Trust was a key theme throughout the opening session, which began with Essendant president Harry Dochelli (above left) taking to the stage to run through the current state of play. He stressed that it was still early days and that the two companies had a lot to learn about each other, as legal restrictions had meant that only a limited amount of due diligence was possible before Federal Trade Commission (FTC) approval had been granted.

Dochelli said the deal would bring four key benefits to his customers: an enhanced supply chain, lower cost of goods, e-commerce innovation and new product categories and solutions.

He claimed supply chain advantages included the ability to leverage Staples’ import capabilities, potentially leading to a 30% cut in import lead times for all customers, and assistance with last mile deliveries from non-branded Staples trucks.

He disclosed some independents had enquired about using excess capacity on their delivery trucks to help with Staples’ with its last mile deliveries, as a means of creating extra revenue.

A number of concerns that had circulated in the dealer community while the deal was pending were addressed directly. There was reassurance that established Essendant brands—such as Universal, GEN and Alera—would continue to be available as “they mean something in the marketplace”.

Dochelli also said Essendant’s Vertical Markets Group (VMG) was not under threat, suggesting the eight years of double-digit growth experienced by the VMG was something that could now be improved upon.

Improvements were also promised in the marketing and digital services offered by the wholesaler, with the prospect of enhanced video content for e-commerce sites bolstered by increased access to product ratings and reviews from the Staples website.

“Come with us to the future of our industry,” implored Dochelli at the end of his presentation. “A future where you excel… where we power your possibilities. Together we will move forward—better, stronger—and accomplish more than ever before.”

During the opening session, Douglas likened the relationship between Essendant and Staples to that of two cars on the same NASCAR team—sharing development resources and capabilities, and although competing against each other on the track, ultimately celebrating the success of the team as a whole.

“We are trying to leverage our scale so that we can buy better, so that we can curate better, so that we can develop systems together—whether they be front-end selling systems or back-end distribution systems,” he said. “And yes, we may occasionally be coming down the home stretch, just two cars fighting it out to win, but what a great thing it would be if our team was always in the winner’s circle.”

People naturally had questions after Douglas and Dochelli spoke. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the first concerned the proposed firewall between Staples and Essendant.

It was explained that the firewall is “a set of digital, physical and policy practices”, installed in the two companies to ensure that people are allowed to see the information that they need, but only the information that they need, as laid out by the FTC.

Personnel are segregated and sensitive digital systems are not integrated; an attorney accompanies Douglas when...
he visits the Essendant office, to ensure no accidental breaches of the firewall take place.

The combination of Essendant and Staples, Douglas and Dochelli contended, offered a new way of doing business, taking two companies that had been struggling and combining their strengths to increase profits for both.

“We think there is a gigantic, transformational growth business in the people-assisted, digitally-oriented, customer-obsessed, office solution/janitorial products/business services space,” said Douglas. “We think there is a vibrant business out there for what we all can do. Wouldn’t it be cool to be a part of the team that assembled a unique combination of companies and went from worst to first and became the business story of ten years from now, that empowered family businesses all across this country to thrive and ultimately prosper?”

In addition to the Q&A session, the opening session included a video presentation by Staples chief merchandising officer Peter Scala, in which he assured attendees that there were no plans to disband the Essendant merchandising team. Indeed, products would be aligned to improve the Essendant portfolio brand and further investment would drive growth, Scala suggested.

The following morning saw Kevin Casey, senior director of marketing, present some of the findings from Essendant’s extensive research into the B2B customer base and how it has categorized key segments of buyers according to their purchasing priorities. This fascinating research was also covered in more detail in one of the seminars that comprised the comprehensive educational program also on offer at CORE.

The event was rounded off with the trade show, giving suppliers a chance to meet the wholesaler’s customers.

Whether or not Essendant dealers had all their fears regarding Essendant’s change of ownership allayed, the general feeling was that it is now a question of waiting to see what will happen. If the “quick wins” that were promised do materialize, it will go a long way to building the trust that was requested. Whether it will be enough to set a course to make history is, of course, quite another matter.

BSA confirms industry week event

Following a meeting of Business Solutions Association (BSA) members at the recent Essendant CORE Live, BSA president Barry Lane (pictured) has confirmed to INDEPENDENT DEALER that the much talked about combined industry week event will indeed take place in 2020.

The name, date and location of the event will be confirmed towards the end of this month, but it is likely to take place in Q3 or early Q4. Sub-committees have been established to co-ordinate planning with regards to finance, location, marketing, membership, the meeting program, education and the trade show.

The show is intended to replace up to nine events in the current industry calendar with the aim of reducing costs, eliminating redundancies and optimizing available resources.

Depot International now offering remanufactured, certified reconditioned and new OEM printers

Depot International has expanded its product offering to include remanufactured, certified reconditioned and new OEM printers. Depot International’s remanufactured printers are fully restored with any broken or defective parts replaced. Units are tested to ensure they are in their original condition and performance. The remanufactured units come with a one-year DPI warranty.

The company’s certified reconditioned printers are reconditioned using the same basic guidelines as the manufacturer uses when testing new units. All printers are guaranteed to be restored to their original working condition and performance and come with a one-year DPI warranty.

For more information, visit: https://www.depotintl.com/new-printers.
AOPD celebrates IDC resilience and growing sales

This month, the AOPD national and regional accounts dealer network held its annual meeting and despite all the uncertainty surrounding the future direction of the dealer’s wholesaler partners, the mood was distinctly upbeat.

In his opening address to the assembled dealers and business partners, outgoing AOPD president Bill Jones paid tribute to longstanding members of the independent dealer channel against the backdrop of big box competitors and other disruptive influences.

He pointed out that the birth of the big box threat lay in the mid-80s, while a number of dealers in the room had histories that stretched back over a century.

He also highlighted a number of successes for AOPD, including a seven percent growth in yearly sales overall and a $30 million growth in the public sector NCPA program. He forecast that in the forthcoming year the organization would continue to thrive and grow.

Perhaps understandably, given the current situation, the group chose to dispense with a traditional keynote speaker for its opening session and instead offered presentations by the heads of the two major industry wholesalers.

Following his presentation at Essendant’s CORE event (see page 10), Dochelli once again ran through the projected advantages of his company’s partnership with Staples, reiterating that although the two companies shared ownership and resources, they would still robustly compete for business.

Toppin focused on three key words he said described SPR right now: stable, investing and growing—citing unstinting support for the IDC and highlighting the building of a new, large distribution center in Atlanta as a statement of intent.

GSA to update Congress on e-commerce effort

Later this month, the General Services Administration is due to submit a report to Congress on its federal e-commerce marketplace initiative amid concerns among suppliers to the government market that the agency will favor an Amazon Business-type model and potentially shut out other e-commerce solutions.

Those concerns emerged after an Industry Day event GSA held in December. In an update on the GSA website, deputy assistant commissioner Laura Stanton has at least demonstrated that her agency is listening to these concerns.

Stanton outlined five key themes that had emerged following a request for information (RFI) that was issued in early December and from feedback received from the Industry Day.

One of these themes was competition, where Stanton wrote that the message received by the GSA was: “GSA should not limit the proof of concept to just the e-marketplace model and should ensure competition across the various models, with both portal providers and suppliers.”

Stanton also revealed that there were “diverging views” between portal providers and suppliers on the question of data protection. Current statutory language prohibits portal providers from using third-party sales and customer data for their own commercial benefit, something that will not fit well with the current practices of some e-commerce marketplaces.

“As I look across all the feedback received, the truly dynamic and complex nature of the e-commerce landscape is evident,” Stanton added. “The insights and recommendations shared are critical to the development of this program.”

(For more information on NOPA’s response to the GSA’s RFI, see our NOPA news on page 16.)
ISG and TriMega launch EpiContent with SPR and Etilize

Independent Suppliers Group (ISG) and TriMega have launched a new combined e-content solution, EpiContent, in collaboration with wholesaler S.P. Richards and online product content firm GfK Etilize.

EpiContent will allow dealers easy access to the online content for potentially the entire range of products from the manufacturer partners of both dealer groups, regardless of national wholesaler support, the two groups said.

Independent dealers will have access to thousands of additional SKUs via two methods – via a request from a dealer’s software provider that can be added to the current S.P. Richards search/content feed or downloaded directly from Etilize for a fee.

ISG CEO Mike Gentile and TriMega president Mike Maggio said: “What we considered a key initiative five years ago, content that includes a manufacturer’s comprehensive product offering regardless of distribution channel, is even more crucial today, and we are excited to announce it is finally here.

“[It’s] an option that enables all of our manufacturer partners the ability to provide best-in-class content for dealers’ websites regardless of whether the product is stocked at a national wholesaler. With the help of S.P. Richards and GfK Etilize, and the patience of our supplier partners, we believe we have a solution that works for all stakeholders in our channel.”

S.P. Richards VP of e-commerce and marketing services Paul Gatens added: “SPR and GfK Etilize have spent the past 12 years building out a powerful content and search network to benefit the independent dealer channel. Working together with the buying groups to allow all manufacturers the opportunity to expand their content offering to include both direct sourced and wholesale supported items is the right thing for the channel. Working together in this fashion helps to achieve our mutual goal to keep dealers healthy and independent.”

Etilize is planning two webinars for manufacturers in the coming weeks to further explain the process and how to get started.

Katun Corporation has introduced new toners for use in Konica Minolta and Kyocera applications under its Katun Performance brand.

The Katun Performance color toner set for use in Konica Minolta C458-series machines provides excellent color reproduction, the company said.

New color toner is also available from Katun for the Kyocera Taskalfa and 3252ci and equivalent PLDs, while new monochrome toner has been introduced for use in Kyocera Mita ECOSYS P 3055 DN devices.

For more information, visit www.katun.com.

ECi bundles Acsellerate CRM with Red Falcon, TeamDesign, Britannia, DDMS and DDMSPLUS solutions

Dealer technology provider ECi Software Solutions last month announced that its entire suite of distribution-focused software solutions will now include one license of its Acsellerate CRM software.

Existing Red Falcon, TeamDesign and Britannia dealers can immediately take advantage of the new CRM bundle with a one single user license included as a part of their system moving forward, the company said. Starting in April, DDMS and DDMSPLUS customers will also get a single user license of Acsellerate CRM.

An integrated sales intelligence and CRM solution, Acsellerate puts business-critical information at the customer’s fingertips, ECi said. It addresses needs around reporting simplicity, triggered alerts, organizational Key Performance Indicators alignment, profitability and customer relationship management, the company added.

Acsellerate has also recently enhanced its product offering with a mobile version and new CRM dashboards, ECi said.

“We continually look for ways to innovate and increase the value of our products; the addition of a license for Acsellerate will seamlessly enhance the user experience and provide a new level of business insight,” said Brian Bowerfind, ECi Distribution Division president. “The reporting tools offered through Acsellerate will allow our customers to see their sales processes and make changes to more efficiently run and grow their businesses.”

For more information, email info@ecisolutions.com, visit www.ECiSolutions.com or call (800) 959-3367.
S.P. Richards launches managed print services solutions

Industry wholesaler S.P. Richards has announced the launch of PrintSmart, a managed print services (MPS) program for independent dealers.

PrintSmart offers a turnkey solution, enabling dealers to launch and manage successful MPS programs to address the growing needs within their customer base.

“PrintSmart allows the independent dealer to provide customers with a comprehensive solution to control their printer environments, including proactive management, maintenance and predictive resupplying,” said Jim Schebler, director of technology products and services at S.P. Richards. “Businesses are realizing that uncontrolled printing can be a huge drain, both financially from consumables, space and energy consumption, and from an IT resource standpoint.”

S.P. Richards’ MPS program offers dealers two levels of involvement, PrintSmart and PrintSmart Lite. The first is a full-service program that allows dealers to focus on sales while the comprehensive MPS controls customers’ print environments through detailed assessments, fleet monitoring of print activity, automated supply replenishment triggered through device usage patterns, break-fix solutions with on-site repair and maintenance, automated monthly reporting and simplified billing.

PrintSmart Lite provides a simplified, streamlined auto toner-replenishment system. Communication is automated through the entire process of ordering, shipping and delivery, eliminating rush orders, ordering errors and the need for supply inventory.

Both versions include a comprehensive, flexible online training program to help sales teams learn to sell and implement MPS contracts effectively.

PrintSmart can help dealers stay competitive as the marketplace continues to shift from a transactional product model to one in which services offer real value to the customer and profitable growth opportunities for the dealer, the wholesaler said.

The NAOPA 2019 open for entries.

Entries and nominations are now open for the North American Office Products Awards (NAOPA).

The NAOPA were launched in 2010 by Office Products International (OPI) magazine in association with S.P. Richards Company.

Now in their tenth year, the awards aim to find the best products and leading dealers in the industry.

There is no charge to enter the awards and you don’t have to be an S.P. Richards vendor or dealer – you just need to operate in North America to qualify.

There will be six awards presented at the NAOPA 2019:

- Best Business Product of the Year
- Product Innovation of the Year
- People’s Choice
- Young Executive of the Year
- Professional of the Year
- Industry Achievement

There is a simple online entry process to complete at www.opi.net/naopa2019. The deadline for entries is April 12, 2019 and the winners will be announced at the S.P. Richards’ Advantage Business Conference taking place from August 7-10 in San Diego.

“I really encourage everyone to enter or nominate for NAOPA 2019,” said OPI director Janet Bell. “For vendors this a unique opportunity to raise the profile of their products. For the dealers it is a chance to recognize the significant players in the sector.”

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Clover partners with the Jillian Fund charity

Clover Imaging Group (CIG) has partnered with the Jillian Fund to provide financial support to parents with children who are suffering life-threatening illnesses requiring critical care.

CIG’s new cartridge collection program is aimed at raising money for the fund. Dealers who sign up for the cartridge collection program will receive 100% value on all empties collected and CIG will donate 25% of all collections to the Jillian Fund on behalf of the dealer.

“One of the most gratifying aspects of our business is that it has afforded us the opportunity to give back to communities in need and causes that inspire us,” said Clover chairman Jim Cerkleski. “Thanks to our partnership with the Jillian Fund and our exciting new cartridge collection program, we’ll be able to provide vital financial support to those who need it most.”

The Jillian Fund recognizes the importance of parental support and believes that children facing life-threatening illnesses should never face them alone.

Each day, thousands of critically ill children face long hospital stays without a parent by their side because the parent is financially unable to leave work.

The Jillian Fund is dedicated to uniting families in need during their most critical times and providing academic financial support to young women who demonstrate Jillian’s legacy of living by example and conquering fear with faith.

To date, the Jillian Fund has raised more than $1.6 million for more than 150 families. For more information on Clover’s Jillian Fund program click here

Thelma Ferrara joins Highlands as territory sales manager

Thelma Ferrara (below) has joined the Highlands rep organization as its new territory sales manager in the South Florida market.

Ferrara comes to Highlands with an extensive background in distribution and manufacturing, including five years as a strategic account manager with jan/san manufacturer Reckitt Benckiser.

“We are thrilled to have Thelma on our team,” said June Schmidt, vice president field sales, northeast and south regions. “Her experience and background are perfect for the role. Plus, having worked with a Highlands client in the past will allow for a seamless integration into the team and very quickly she will play a key role in supporting our clients and partners.”

In Memoriam: Harold Gellis, Raynor Group VP

Harold Gellis, vice president of the Raynor Group office seating company, died unexpectedly February 28. He was 71.

Gellis was part of the Raynor organization from its beginning in 1979. “Over the course of the past 40 years, he contributed in so many ways to our successes as a company and endeared himself to all who had the great fortune to both meet and know him,” the company said.

Survivors include his wife of 50 years, Gloria; children Jonathan and Alisa Gellis, Jessica and Jonathan Landa, Benjamin and Giela Gellis and Allison and Elchanan Ogorek, and fourteen grandchildren.
In early 2018 Congress passed legislation requiring the federal government/GSA to begin working on an e-commerce solution to improve the efficiency and buying experience of the federal government and make it more like the experience of commercial shoppers.

GSA was directed to create a phased-in implementation plan and schedule to develop, evaluate and implement the new online market places (now called “e-commerce portals”) over the better part of three years.

At this time GSA is about halfway through the process and the purpose of this article is to bring independent dealers up to speed on where things stand.

GSA intends to use a mix of portal providers based on research conducted in Phase II.

**E-commerce model:** Product vendors that leverage an online platform to sell their own proprietary products. The vendor is responsible for fulfillment of product orders, including invoicing and delivery.

**E-marketplace model:** Online marketplaces connect buyers with a portal provider’s proprietary products, third party vendors or both. Portal providers and third-party vendors are generally more responsible for fulfilling orders for their respective products with some exceptions where the portal provider may complete order fulfillment for additional fees.

**E-procurement model:** E-procurement is a software-as-service model that is managed by the buying organization and often has workflows connecting the internal procurement organizations to financial systems. The portal provider does not sell products in this model.

Near the end of December GSA put out a Request for Information (RFI) on their proposed next steps in the implementation of the program. IOPFDA responded to this request and expressed serious concerns about the proof of concept that opens a marketplace with minimal boundaries, a much higher micro-purchase threshold and no consequences to companies that misuse and take advantage of the situation for short term gain.

There is also concern around market disruption to existing suppliers who have supported GSA, mandatory source requirements (AbilityOne) and supply chain integrity (TAA) for many years. ([Click here to read IOPFDA’s full response](#)).

IOPFDA, in partnership with EPIC Business Essentials, has met with...
GSA/OMB’s Implementation team on three occasions. We have explained in detail the resource and service proposition that independent dealers across the country currently provide their federal customers on a daily basis: next day delivery, highly competitive pricing, supply chain integrity and full compliance with AbilityOne, the Trade Agreements Act (TAA) and all other federal acquisition regulations. And all this is offered in conjunction with a robust and fully scalable, e-commerce platform that does not expose Independent dealers to the risk third-party providers currently have when selling on a competitor/Amazon’s platform.

GSA will be reporting their response to this RFI at the end of the month and revealing their plan for a proof of concept for the third and final stage in the process.

GSA has stated its intent that the Proof of Concept will only include the e-marketplace model and not the other two models identified in their research (e-commerce and e-procurement). IOPFDA and EPIC believe strongly that their model meets the requirements for inclusion in the Proof of Concept and have a fourth meeting scheduled with GSA in early April for further discussions.

GSA has also disclosed that the Proof of Concept would be directed to select agencies but will not restrict other agencies from participation. This is also a major issue for independent dealers. This approach, if adopted, would allow Amazon, with all its resources, to promote the POC to all federal agencies at the expense of all existing government resellers without competition. With such a head start it’s not very likely that other platforms, allowed to participate at a later date, will ever catch up.

All this makes participation in the association’s annual Small Business Advocacy Fly In, March 26-27 in Washington, D.C., more critical this year than ever before.

Dealers from across the country will have the opportunity to meet with their elected officials, as well as members of the House Small Business Committee and the Committee on Armed Services that have jurisdiction over this issue.

We will be working hard to ensure these committees monitor GSA’s efforts and use their influence to make certain that our dealers and other small businesses across the country don’t get bilked by bad policy. The Fly-In represents a once-a-year opportunity to educate Congress on the dealer community and what we bring to the table and we would love to have you join us! If you have questions or would like more information, contact the association’s president, Mike Tucker (Email: mike@iopfda.org; PH: (410) 931-8100).

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- Our NAPA Auto Parts agent, Jack Calabrese, is currently in negotiations with United Health Care. He was recently advised that no decision will be made until sometime in April due to all the state lawsuits (18) that have been filed with regards to these AHP programs. Unfortunately, we don’t have any firm dates or times for the launch of our program. However UHC is still working with us, at this point, and that’s a good thing. Contact us if you have any questions.

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Technology can be the great equalizer, setting dealers up to be competitive against all comers. Our annual dealer technology survey looks at how independents are using business automation, digital marketing and social media and other technology resources to help level the playing field.

By Michael Chazin
There was a time, not all that long ago, when dealers regularly developed their own ordering and warehouse systems and even their own webstore. "We were doing our own web development and it was like we were reinventing the wheel every time," says John Leighton, president of Office Basics in Philadelphia. He recognized that the pace of change was steadily increasing and he could no longer achieve the best results independently.

In 2013, Leighton went looking for an e-commerce solution that would readily integrate with his homegrown backend system. He chose the web engine from BMI which connected with his existing warehouse and ordering systems. As a result, between 2013 and 2015 Office Basics ran three systems—one for financial management, another for warehouse and order management, and a third e-commerce system.

The website that BMI developed for Office Basics hit just the right combination of visual appeal and purchasing controls, says Leighton. "BMI understood the requirements of a true B2B sales and procurement process," he contends. The website mirrored many of the controls that Office Basics had already established from pricing and item availability to restricted categories and approvals.

What a customer sees when they visit the website is determined by their login. A one-office business could see the latest round of banners and promotions; whereas a corporate customer might not want its employees to see such offers. After those corporate customers log in those promos wouldn’t be available. "With just the click of a mouse the site strips away all that stuff and takes on a corporate feel," says Leighton.

In 2015 Office Basics replaced its entire ERP system with software from BMI. The strength of the BMI product can be seen in its financial controls and inventory management system. Leighton is especially impressed with the capabilities of the inventory management module.

"Basically it manages all of our order flow, inventory and purchasing processes," says Leighton.

The new ERP system makes inventory management super-efficient, he adds, and promotes the application of electronic data interchange (EDI) with a growing roster of customers.

"It used to be only large institutions that could incorporate this activity because it made sense with massive purchasing," Leighton says. Those ordering solutions have started to move downstream and he now has mid-sized customers spending roughly $50,000 a year who have also started to use EDI.

He says it is not a large part of his business but it is growing. "Seventy percent of our business is online and probably upwards of 15 percent flows through procurement in this way," he says. Relatively speaking it is a small number of customers but they are all large, with bigger spends.

The transition to the BMI system was not entirely trouble-free. Office Basics had literally built its previous system from scratch; as a result employees running the system were intimately familiar with all of its workings. "It was quite a change for our people and we had to change some of our business processes to work the system," he says.

That was when BMI really proved its worth. "They are experienced in our industry and understand it beyond basic functionality," says Leighton. With that knowledge they were better able to assist Office Basics personnel in learning new system requirements.

Investments in technology are critical for independents according to Jeff Lurcook, president of Office Value, Meridian, Idaho. "If you intend to compete with the big boxes and the Amazons of this world, your technology and your online experience have to be cutting edge or you’re going to get left behind," he says.

"So many dealers who have been in business for a long time think that all they have to do is set up a webstore and orders will come pouring in," says Lurcook. "They can’t figure out why their online sales aren’t growing." At Office Value, technology is a priority that includes just about everything from search engine optimization and social media to internal technology resources such as DDMS and Acsellerate.
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Lurcook has used Acsellerate for more than a decade and views it as an important component of his dealership’s success. It is one of the first programs he logs into each day and it stays open all day long. Additionally his sales staff, operations manager and buyer have access to the program. “It basically is our source of data,” he says.

The data that Acsellerate makes available sets Office Value apart from its competitors, contends Lurcook. “Nothing we sell on the product side is unique and nobody wants to play the price game,” he says. Instead, prospects are approached with the dual proposition of service and technology. The software enables a range of analytical reports which provide critical data.

Acsellerate software provides a seemingly unlimited array of analytics, including detailed usage reports, summary usage reports, usage reports by ship-to or department, invoice registers, sales by contract and much more. “We bring a lot of value to our customers when we provide them with data they’re trying to capture by collecting invoices and plotting spreadsheets,” he says. Lurcook tells them they don’t have to do that; he can produce reports for them in a matter of minutes.

Many Office Value customers maintain satellite locations and for budgeting purposes they require usage reports by ship-to location or department. One Office Value customer has close to 600 locations nationwide; before doing business with Office Value one person at headquarters tracked all those purchases.

Lurcook told this customer it didn’t need to do that and asked how they wanted the report to look. “It was a detailed usage report by ship-to location,” he says. Now the customer gets almost 600 reports quarterly. “They don’t need anyone in-house dealing with that data because it literally takes me two or three minutes and the report is ready for them.”

Lurcook maintains that with the right amount of help the software isn’t too difficult to master. “We get weekly emails with current classes, their video library is extensive and if you need to call and talk to a live body the support is great,” he says. He has become proficient with the software by working with it almost daily and says he almost never gets stumped.

Technology is something that every independent can get behind. “More millennials are decision makers today,” he says. “If your company isn’t techno-savvy and cutting edge, they don’t give you a second look.”

Porter’s started its automation journey with Britannia but switched to DDMS about twenty years ago, when it looked to attain greater purchasing functionality. Since then, the system has evolved in almost every area but for Porter’s the purchasing capabilities are the most appreciated. “Our biggest time saver is that we set up automatic purchasing,” says Porter.

Day to day purchasing activities are completely automated. “The standard 95 percent of items flow through S. P. Richards without any issue and we don’t even have to look at those,” says Porter. At the end of the day purchasing people review any exceptions.

The software also automates the distribution and delivery of products. “Packages are scanned as they go onto our trucks so we have an accurate count of how many packages are on the truck for each customer,” explains Porter. Then each package is scanned as it comes off the truck to make certain that the correct number of packages goes to each customer. “It has greatly increased our accuracy and efficiency,” says Porter.

The website experience that DDMS has created for Porter’s customers is state-of-the-art and offers an enhanced online shopping experience, he says. The website uses S.P.’s search engine but Porter’s has some control of item rankings. In some categories, but not every category, Porter’s can set which item goes in the number one position.

One of the best website features is the control that can be given to procurement agents, especially for larger companies. Users can be set up where they can place orders, but the order will not go through until it is approved by someone higher in the organization.
"If they have several users this gives the procurement department more control,” says Porter. Additionally, if a single person places orders for numerous shipping locations or departments, items can be keyed to specific locations, so that when the order gets delivered, all items go to the correct place.

“We use ECi’s web design service and that keeps our shopping site updated and fresh,” says Porter. He has put that technology to work for his dealership and has activated many of the available features to make the site as user-friendly as possible. An independent study of e-commerce efforts by office supply distributors by Apruve, Inc. last year listed Porter’s website among the ten most effective.

Over time more routines have become automated. “EDI has always been available for purchasing from the wholesalers,” says Porter, “but it wasn’t available for the buying groups until more recently.” As a member of TriMega’s technology committee, Porter worked on that implementation. Now orders for stocking product for Porter’s get transmitted digitally to TriMega, a confirmation is received and payment gets transmitted back electronically.

“The benefit that I see is that we are able to scale up our business without adding additional labor costs,” says Porter. “That was another reason why we moved to DDMS.”

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Evolution: Evolved webstore is easy to customize

Advance Office & Janitorial Supply in Las Vegas, selected Evolution software years ago when it moved to separate its webstore from its backend. When a new platform was introduced last fall, Advance Office was one of the first dealers to sign up for the new version, EvolutionX.

The gaming industry is a strong customer group at Advance, including gaming machine suppliers and the IT companies that service them. All these companies had strict security requirements; even transactional emails had to be secured in a certain way. “They needed to know that the data and passwords were fully encrypted,” says owner Lisa Crowson. She worked directly throughout this process with the programmer based in Ireland to implement the security requirements. “That he was available and took the time to listen to our needs was a big deal for us,” she says.

One of the strongest features of the new website developed through EvolutionX is that every aspect of its appearance can be easily customized.

This has enabled Advance Office to improve its merchandising and branding. “We have a logo lady and we’re able to brand her throughout the site in multiple places,” says Crowson. In one place she is dressed smartly as a modern office worker, in another as a Vegas showgirl; she was a witch for Halloween and a Santa for Christmas.

Customer landing pages also can be customized. “A lot of websites can do customer-specific landing pages but ours even determine which products customers can see,” says Crowson. “We can easily add branded items that the customer sees but no one else does.” Landing pages include the customer’s logo so when they see that logo they know they are on the proper, secure ordering site.

“They love that; it’s like having their own avatar,” she says. “It’s fresh and it’s timely,” says Crowson. It is not just a static site that customers visit to place an order but the site evolves. “Right now there is a springtime banner up as Spring arrives early in Vegas.” At a minimum themes are changed every month. “We even have specials that rotate every week,” she adds. “That’s a way to get customers to come back.”

The system also provides labels for every customer which enables Advance Office to categorize them by size and by industry. These tags can then be used to categorize customers for product promotions based on their size, industry and past buying habits.

The transition to the updated version of the software could not have gone smoother, reports Crowson. “They have tutorials on their site that you can get right into and, within two or three minutes, you can learn how to do something,” she says.

Technology is the one element that could be the salvation of many independents, suggests Crowson, as the only way to keep up with customers’ demands is through automation. “Every day we are expected to do more and we have to do it faster and better than we ever did before,” she says.
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Use this checklist to help evaluate solutions that best fit your business needs.

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Fortune Web Marketing:
Digital media reaches consumers in myriad ways

Virginia-based Guernsey, Inc. has worked with Fortune Web Marketing for quite some time, but that work has intensified in the last five years. "I started focusing on the digital consumer," says Savannah Guernsey, vice president, marketing and merchandising. The marketplace has evolved and today the customer has become "the consumer." One of the best ways to reach this new consumer is with digital media and that’s where Fortune Web Marketing comes in.

Much of the success possible through the use of digital media arises from its ability, in myriad forms, to link back to an online presence and shopping site. The dealership had acquired a pure furniture sales and design company and needed a new website to showcase that capability. The corporate site was also in need of a facelift.

Beginning almost three years ago Guernsey worked with Fortune Web Marketing to develop new websites for the dealership. A new transactional site for office supplies and related products launched in 2017. The site for Interiors by Guernsey launched in 2016 after nearly a year in development. The look and feel of the interiors site provided a solid marketplace differentiation for Guernsey. Guernsey credits the work of Fortune’s West Coast design team for pulling off a truly superior effort.

Three websites are now online: a corporate site for Guernsey, Inc; a transactional site to sell office supplies and associated products; and the website for Interiors by Guernsey, which has a completely different look and feel.

The old way of getting new customers was to knock on doors and ask if the business needed office supplies. "It was a hit or miss strategy," she says. You might hit a customer just after they have an argument with a supplier and slip right in, but more likely the client wasn’t ready to buy yet and may not be for months.

Guernsey works with Fortune on search engine optimization (SEO) to find prospects online and feed them Guernsey messages. “The big difference is you’re there when you are needed," says Guernsey. “You are getting found, rather than going and finding, and I consider that to be a much more effective system.”

The latest round of SEO efforts have started to pay dividends. There has been a chat function on the e-commerce site for some time, but it was recently added to the corporate site. “That is where we really do all of our lead generation," she said. Prospects come to the corporate site through SEO efforts. “We engage with them there,” said Guernsey. “SEO is a matter of being where your customers are when they need you.”

Pay-per-click advertising is a relatively new effort for Guernsey. “We have just started to run a couple of campaigns with Google and need more time to evaluate,” said Guernsey. “The idea is to put our money where we see our customers.” The campaign is driven by a somewhat unique strategy that Guernsey developed in consort with Fortune Web Marketing.

Guernsey consults regularly with Fortune personnel to review the SEO work, go over blog schedules and review Google analytics. Analytics show where online visitors come from and when and where they leave the site. “Our work with Fortune has been really productive and should continue going forward,” she added.

GOPD: Robust online sales are critical for dealer success

When Steve Pawloski recognized a dozen years ago that his business needed to expand to online sales, he went looking for a software solution to make it possible. That was when Pawloski, owner and president of Arkansas Office Products, Jacksonville, Arkansas, first encountered the system he has been with ever since. “We had to get a web presence and we picked GOPD,” he says.

From the start, Pawloski felt like he had made the right choice. “They got us set up and walked us through it,” he says. AOP did not go live until GOPD felt the dealership was ready. “They held our hand all the way through,” he says, "and they haven’t let go yet." When needed, he says, help is just a phone call away.

What hooked Pawloski was the ability of the system to treat customers individually. Customers could receive different pricing, variable promotions and perhaps even...
a coupon, based on their log-in. What one customer sees when she makes a purchase might not be the same offer or image the next visitor sees, even when looking at the same product.

The webstore that GOPD created for Arkansas Office Products compares strongly to the sites put up by big box competitors. Pawloski says that many of those sites have a “cookie-cutter” sameness, especially on product pages, which is where his web offering stands out. “It is a little more colorful than most websites,” he says.

Search has been added and expanded in the past several years. “We now have much better search capabilities instead of what the wholesaler offered,” says Pawloski. This capability is vital to the success of any dealer webstore. “Search needs to bring up the exact products the customer is looking for,” he adds. What remains is the order of the products that come up, and that is under dealer control.

“Say you wanted your house brand of toner to come up first, you can do that,” says Pawloski. “Of course if you are an HP dealer, then the HP toner will be first.”

The ease of making changes for non-computer experts is one of the standout features of the GOPD offering, says Pawloski. “If you see that something isn’t working, you can just flip it around,” he adds. Updating the website—by adding images or banners, replacing items, or moving copy and images around—can be easily accomplished without computer expertise.

“They make it real simple,” says Pawloski. “It took me two or three days of constantly making changes. Then once you get the hang of it, you can go in and make changes real quick.” This makes it easy to freshen up the website and give it new look.

“We are not asking every person in the world to visit our website, but we are asking our customers,” says Pawloski. “If you don’t invest in technology, you are going to get left behind.”
S.I.T.S. Business Management Software: Greater control promotes improved online capabilities

With more than 90 percent of orders coming in online, the internet has taken on the role of a primary salesperson for Granite Office in Salt Lake City. Since June, 2017, the dealership has been receiving those orders via the SITSerp platform from S.I.T.S. Business Management Software.

“The system appeared extremely capable and could be easily customized,” says Lee Mercer, co-owner with Garth Hood. Ease of customization was important but it didn’t hurt either that it also proved a cost effective solution.

The Granite website features a custom design that Mercer describes as visually pleasing and fully functional.

While he wanted something that would stand up against big box competition and include many of the same features, he recognized that his primary customers are local. “Our biggest focus still is local, business-to-business service,” he added. To best serve those customers he
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wanted the best search functionality he could offer. The search capability from SITS is an improvement on what was previously available, yet the configuration and optimization of search remains an ongoing challenge, says Mercer.

With some effort search terms can be modified to take advantage of the latest metrics developed by Granite Office. “If there’s a term that people search for frequently, I can usually pick which SKU I want to show up first,” says Mercer. “I can meet customers’ needs and sell what I want.”

The inventory module that is provided improved upon what the dealership had been using. The previous system had looked at availability and pricing from wholesalers in the system and came up with the most cost effective way to make purchases. From its early days in operation the owners of Granite Office had gained a reputation for being sharp operators who always found the best deal.

With the new system the purchasing routine is more efficient than ever, in large part because manual inputs were eliminated in favor of increased automation. After the first full year of operation, Mercer reviewed results and says he couldn’t believe what he was seeing. “I had to review our accounting but the numbers didn’t lie,” he says. “We saved about $200K in cost of goods in the first year.”

Technology is indispensable for office products dealers, especially ones who view the internet as a primary sales tool. “I don’t know how you could do it without technology,” says Mercer. There are so many efficiencies that are possible. “The savings that we realized was because we took as much as we could out of a person’s hands.”

To make the switchover run smoothly Ives opted to have his contact person on site for the change. “Whenever I talk to anyone who is looking to switch to SSI, I always tell them to spend the money and have someone on site when you go live.” That helps with the conversion because no matter what system a dealer selects there are always issues at conversion, he adds.

SSI has converted to a web-based system, which has streamlined many operations but especially purchasing. “They have a tool called Automated Quick Buy where you see all of your data and all your orders in a web-based tool,” says Ives.

The purchasing routine is completely automatic and Automated Quick Buy reviews all orders and pulls out any that fall under the wholesaler’s minimum and would incur a charge. These are accumulated into one purchase order to avoid additional charges. “It’s not a huge daily charge but it adds up,” he says.

Ives recognizes that investing in technology is essential for his dealership. He is always on the lookout for some digital way to differentiate the dealership from big box and online competitors. SSI shares data with a company called Automark which offers an online ordering application that identifies abandoned shopping carts and attempts to have the customer complete their order.

SSI suggested this application to Ives. In instances such as this he says the software company acts more like a partner than a vendor. “They look for ways to make sure we are successful,” he adds.

SSI: Gaining more website control

After a good experience with an ERP system, Andrew Ives, vice president at Office City Express, Delaware, Ohio, believed it was time to seek out a new provider. The monthly fees kept increasing, and there were multiple issues with inventory. That was six years ago when the decision was made to change systems and go with software from SSI.

An additional issue was to have complete control of what goes on the website. Ives had an experience with product showing up on the website that was not for sale at Office City Express and didn’t belong there. At that time SSI offered a seemingly more attractive solution. “I know I made the right decision because my customers liked the new website more,” said Ives. What’s more he says he now has complete control over every item on the website.

The SSI software runs the entire operation at Office City Express. “It does everything from accounting—accounts receivable and payable—to purchasing. Everything happens through SSI,” says Ives. But it was the everyday website experience that truly won the day. And the conversion was relatively painless, as the developer was familiar with the old system and knew how to bring Office City Express onboard as quickly and easily as possible.

The conversion couldn’t have gone better as Ives remembers. “They put you in touch with one person and that person handled the entire conversion for you,” recalls Ives. He worked closely with this person who helped with the conversion and conducted all the training. “I made sure that everyone was trained over the couple of months before we went live,” he said.
Benjamin Office Supply & Services, Rockville, Maryland, selected the Thalerus Group to run its office supply company years ago and continues to find it to be the ideal choice. “It covers all the intricacies of running a company from financial to sales to operations to supply chain,” says Daniel Benjamin, vice president. “It consolidates and centralizes the way our company is run.”

The Thalerus system oversees and automates operations in four main areas: sales, financial, operations and fulfillment.

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The Thalerus system oversees and automates operations in four main areas: sales, financial, operations and fulfillment.

All four modules work together. “The most important part is to make sure that products get to our customers,” says Benjamin. “That is the priority.”

Some might say that everything starts with sales and it is the sales module that leads the way with the variety of reports that can be generated. Everything from overall sales volume and gross profit to comparisons to last month and last year. At the same time it offers quick looks at where sales are increasing and where they might be declining. “I think of it as a CRM system because it houses all of our client information and provides product usage data and contract usage data for each client,” says Benjamin.

The fulfillment module tracks supply chain needs and sources while it navigates seamlessly between offerings from the two national wholesalers. Decisions on which wholesaler gets an order are based on price and availability along with additional parameters set by the dealership. “Thalerus helped us write the program that automates this process,” Benjamin adds.

The four modules readily share data and the system performs accounting functions such as accounts receivables. “All the data is integrated so there is no need for a separate accounting system,” says Sandy Benjamin, president.
Thalerus also runs and supports the Benjamin Office Supply e-commerce website. The way the site has been developed, every visitor is treated to a custom format including pricing, shopping lists and favorites lists. The format was developed over the years with input from Thalerus users; changes suggested by users have been added to the system and now all dealers benefit from these enhancements.

The resulting website is clean, clear and easy to navigate. “The customization makes the customer feel that it is their account,” says Daniel Benjamin. Iconography that was developed for the site readily identified the different product categories that are available. It also enhances the dealership’s ability to easily showcase specific products and the latest offers.

Of special importance are the advantages gained through Thalerus as a cloud-based system. “Other systems we’ve had required us to go out and buy hardware and maintain it,” says Sandy. Even with all the data in the cloud he never felt he was giving up control. Thalerus has been totally responsive and has not missed a beat with its hosting, he says.

Daniel maintains that having the Thalerus system running his business gives him confidence in the marketplace. “I feel like we really have a leg up because they have been ahead of the competition, not only in e-commerce capabilities but also in terms of the reports I can use,” he says. “It just feels like I am a step ahead.”

Michael Chazin is a freelance writer specializing in business topics, who has written about the office supply business for more than 15 years. He can be reached at mchazin503@comcast.net.

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ORGANIZED BY OPI, IN ASSOCIATION WITH S.P. RICHARDS COMPANY
Dear Friends,

On behalf of the board of directors of Office Products Women in Leadership, I would like to invite you to the OPWIL Bourbon Tour, May 9 – 11, 2019, benefiting City of Hope. Come and taste the true spirit of Kentucky in America’s Bluegrass State. Our tour will let you sample America’s signature liquor in three different distilleries where bourbon is crafted with pride and care. The tour will also be a great opportunity to network with other industry leaders and to come to the aid of others through our support of City of Hope.

Event Pricing – includes invitation to Welcome Dinner, Bourbon Tour and Kentucky Porching

- Individual - $550
- Group of 4 - $2,000
- Bourbon Tour Sponsor – $3,500--Group of 4 plus sponsor recognition on event websites, communications, social media & event signage, an OPWIL Executive Membership

- To register for the OPWIL Bourbon Tour benefiting City of Hope, contact Andy Ishii aishii@coh.org

Agenda

**THURSDAY MAY 9**
6:30 – 9:30 pm
Welcome & Kickoff Dinner
Casual barbeque dinner and bourbon tasting at the home of Kelly & Joni Burke.
550 Primrose Way, Louisville, KY, 40206

**FRIDAY MAY 10**
8:30 am – 5:30 pm
Bourbon Tour, including Buffalo Trace, Four Roses & Wild Turkey Distilleries
Start at Galt House Hotel, 140 N. 4th St, Louisville, KY, 40202
Dinner on own
7:00 pm....
Authentic Kentucky Porching!
Enjoy an informal evening of snacks, stories and bourbon sipping on the porch of lifelong Kentuckians, Tricia Burke & George Van Arsdale.
2028 Midland Avenue, Louisville, KY, 40204

**Saturday MAY 11**
Departures
I've written a lot about how to build a “sales culture”: the idea, throughout your company, that you are first and foremost a sales organization. This makes sense, because if any company doesn’t sell, no one in the company has any work to do. That’s the macro level—the view from the corner office over the entire company.

Let’s go down one level and talk about the micro level—the culture within the sales team itself. You can do a great job of building a macro sales culture but still fail because of a toxic sales culture on the micro level.

The sales culture within the sales force is determined by management attitudes, the mix of personalities, leadership, policies and principles.

Essentially, the difference between a toxic culture and a positive culture is this: A toxic culture is one where your people don’t enjoy their work; a positive one is one where they do. Here’s how we can build a positive culture in a few steps:

**Seek culture, not compensation:** If the Beatles were so rich, why did they still break up? The answer is, because they didn’t enjoy being the Beatles anymore, and even the money wasn’t enough to get them to keep being the Beatles. Think about it—what would a Beatles reunion in, say, 1979, have been worth financially? I remember some monstrous numbers talked about even into the ’90s, with Julian Lennon taking the place of his dad. And yet, it never happened.

It never happened because money didn’t motivate them at that point. That happens with salespeople, too. Good salespeople must be ENGAGED employees. That means they must love the profession of selling (the activity, not just the result); they must love what they are selling (your products) and they must love who they are selling it for (you).

Enough money can overcome any of these three factors but only for a while. There will come a point on the curve where even huge amounts of money aren’t enough to get your sales team to keep doing what they’re doing.

Don’t get me wrong. Salespeople should be paid very well for what they’re doing. But never assume money will overcome a culture that isn’t supportive, positive and fun for them to be a part of.

Good sales cultures respect each individual member of the team and their contributions. Good sales cultures seek to develop and maximize talents. And good sales cultures create an environment that people want to be a part of.
Build competition that is collaborative, not cutthroat: Most salespeople have a competitive impulse. Channeled correctly, that can drive performance and results ever higher; channeled badly, that can be disastrous and result in high turnover and a toxic culture.

Think of your competitive atmosphere like a bowling team. On a bowling team, each member wants to have the highest score in any game but they also want everyone else on the team to perform well so that they can beat the other team.

A good sales team works the same way. Everyone wants the entire team to do well, because there are no consequences to any member for the other guy doing well.

I once talked to a vice president of sales for a national company who told me that he directed each of his branch sales managers to fire their bottom person at the end of the year. That was the best way to both motivate salespeople and make their sales teams better. Not surprisingly, this company’s turnover was high.

His idea was that, since no one wanted to be the bottom person, everyone would perform their best. The problem with that philosophy, however, is that there are two ways not to be the bottom person. One is to push your own performance higher. The other is to attempt to push the other guy’s performance down by working on his mindset.

It’s like the old saying when two guys are running away from a bear and one says, “I don’t have to outrun the bear—I only have to outrun you!” It’s the kind of management philosophy that always leads to high turnover and lower performance.

Your ideal sales team should be one where each member feels good about asking for help—from management and even from other team members. I have managed several sales teams that worked this way and it’s fun. You get to hear stories about how the top team members are calling struggling ones at night to offer help and pep talks. Not surprisingly, these teams also perform the highest overall.

Select the right personalities: To make all of this work, it takes the right mix of personalities. This means being a little strategic about how you hire and getting a good mix.

Sometimes you’ll want to hire to complement and build upon existing personalities in your team; other times, you’ll want to hire to offset characteristics in your team. But think about your personality mix and go beyond simply hiring for sales skills and qualifications.

Also, hire people who are what I call “good company citizens”. That means that they naturally treat everyone well, inside and outside the company. Some salespeople can, unfortunately, be denigrating to support staff that they see as beneath them. Don’t hire these people. No matter how good their performance is, they aren’t worth the trouble and the negative effect on everyone else they can cause.

What you need to remember in building a positive sales culture is this: How you treat your salespeople will be reflected in how they treat their customers. Choose your culture, your managers and your team members wisely.

Troy Harrison is the author of “Sell Like You Mean It!” and “The Pocket Sales Manager” and a speaker, consultant, and sales navigator who helps companies build more profitable and productive sales forces. To schedule a free 45-minute Sales Strategy Review, call 913-645-3603 or e-mail Troy@TroyHarrison.com.
Following my article last month on how big firms can become disillusioned with their current office movers, I will now share my “backdoor” approach to winning all their business.

All you need is a “white paper” like the one below. You can use this one or write your own. Wikipedia defines a white paper as an authoritative report or guide that addresses issues and how to solve them. White papers are used to educate readers and help people make decisions. I will explain how to use this white paper next month.

**FIVE STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL COMMERCIAL RELOCATION**

The office is moving and it’s your responsibility to choose the right mover. “Simple,” you say. “I’ll just Google “Office Movers” and pick three to bid on our job.” That’s the wrong approach. Unfortunately, you can’t judge a service provider’s quality by the content of their website.

Did you know that most moving companies’ forte is their residential moving, while their weakest area is commercial moving and furniture reconfiguration?

An experienced office mover knows that the difference between a residential and a commercial move is like night and day. Yes, many will get you to your new location, but there’s a high likelihood that it will not be on time, within budget or without mishap.

Your goal is to accomplish this move as a hero, not end up as the scapegoat. So instead of playing Russian roulette on the Internet (and maybe with your career), ask the building managers at both your present and new locations to recommend two or three companies—furniture dealers and/or movers.

Property management people have extensive first-hand experience with movers and dealers and are as anxious as you are to have a successful move, making them a great place to start your selection process.

Have a decision-maker (not just an information gatherer) from your company meet with each vendor during the inventory process. The same representative from your company should meet with all the service providers.

During the initial inventory process, determine whether the mover or the dealer will be responsible for the disassembly, movement and reconfiguration of the modular furniture and whether your employees or the vendor will handle fragile items such as lamps, paintings and plants.

The next step will be to interview your vendors. Allow enough time for your vendors to make formal presentations and to answer the following questions:

1. **What type of moving cartons will you provide?**

Similar in size to the office legal tote, the plastic crate offers an efficient alternative to the conventional moving carton. Because of its strength and shape, the plastic crate can be stacked four high without crushing the boxes below or their contents. Stacking the boxes four high reduces your contents’ volume by approximately 15 percent, lowering your total moving costs. Less volume means that movers make fewer trips to and from the moving van and can even reduce the number of truckloads.

2. **How will you handle our computers and other electronic equipment?**

The preferred manner is to first wrap each computer component with two layers of bubble wrap (with the bubbles facing the bubbles) and then place the protected components into a container for safe transport. A better
technique, using a device called a Comp-U-Wrap, has all the advantages of bubble wrap but none of the disadvantages. It’s faster and easier to use. Since it’s reusable, it doesn’t fill landfills and is much more efficient.

3. How will you protect the office building from damage?
To protect carpet, a new product called Polynite covers carpet with plastic. It has all the benefits of Masonite but is lighter, does not disintegrate and does not leave behind a powdery residue that requires extra labor to clean up. Another unique device, called Mat-A-Doors, is the only product that protects elevator entrances and main building entrance doors.

4. Will you furnish a list of your last five office moves?
Ask for a list of the last five commercial relocations, with contacts and telephone numbers. Call all five contacts and ask the following questions:
A. When did the job take place? If the move occurred more than six weeks ago, be suspicious.
B. Ask how well the vendor protected their furniture, computers and copiers.
C. Ask if the vendor protected their offices against damage.
D. Ask if the vendor completed the job in the time allotted and if the bill exceeded the price quoted.

5. Finally, mass walk-throughs do not save time.
This herd concept often undermines the entire selection process. Here’s why:
• Vendors on a mass walk-through will be afraid to raise vital questions for fear of informing their competitors how they propose to do the job.
• Mass walk-throughs also encourage unrealistically low bids by intimidating those who participate into second guessing their competitors’ bids.
If you follow the procedures outlined above, you will have taken a giant step toward being a hero. You will be congratulated for a job well done and not end up the scapegoat for all the things that went wrong.
Please see my next article (Part 3) to learn how to use this white paper to win large companies’ daily moves.

Ed Katz is the president of the International Office Moving Institute (IOMI) based in Madison, MS. IOMI provides online office moving training to movers and furniture dealers. He can be reached at edkatz@officemoves.com, 404-358-2172. His website is www.officemoves.com
According to InsideSales.com, inside sales programs are growing 300% faster than outside sales programs. Other studies report that outside field reps are now spending 40 per cent of their time or more selling remotely due to a significant shift in customers no longer wanting to meet face-to-face to purchase products or services.

In the supply industry, inside sales often means different things to different organizations.

For one company, having an inside sales team could mean they have a self-motivated CSR who is incentivized to make some outbound calls for a couple of hours each week when the phones are not busy.

For another organization, inside sales refers to a full team of four dedicated inside reps making outbound calls, whereby the entire relationship is cultivated and maintained over the phone.

A third dealership may define inside sales as merely lead generation, with the inside reps finding opportunities by phone and then setting appointments for the outside reps to visit.

All of these examples are forms of inside selling. Each requires specific (learned) expertise, management, oversight and coaching.

No matter how the inside sales mechanism is utilized, it starts by scouting the appropriate talent in the recruiting process, having a cohesive and continuous training regimen and then having the necessary amount of “stick-to-it-ness” to see the program through to success.

For easy reference, here is a list of some “do’s and don’ts” when it comes to building an inside sales team. There are exceptions to every rule, but these recommendations will be applicable to most inside sales teams.

DO:
1. Capture and document your dealership’s Top Ten Differential Advantages and why they matter in the lives of your customers.
2. Document at least five customer success stories for new hires to learn and perfect. Stories about how you saved the day for your customers and how you created solutions to their problems need to become the fabric of your company branding.
3. Upgrade your telephone system to include call analytics and recording capabilities. This is a critical tool for managing, training and developing any inside sales team.
4. Use a CRM. There are many good ones to choose from.
5. Become proficient at running key reports from the CRM and reviewing these numbers with the team regularly.
6. Identify the team leader (manager) who will lead the inside sales team by
example and have the pig-headed discipline to stay the course.

7. Maintain a culture of accountability and establish regular one-on-one meetings starting from the top. (Weekly meetings are a must!)

8. Expect to experience some new hire turnover—typically one out of every three hires will not make it, usually within the first 90 days of starting the job.

9. Have a stash of $5-$10 gift cards and other small incentives to reward behavior on a regular basis. Inside sales reps deal with a high volume of rejection, much more than field sales, and therefore need frequent recognition and encouragement.

10. Start the team off with a mix of cold calling and calls to win-back accounts. Existing customer accounts should be earned and not given out to brand new hires. Reward them with active accounts as they generate new accounts.

**DON’T:**

1. Transition an outside salesperson to an inside salesperson. It seldom works and they often feel chained to a desk, aren’t willing to make the calls and end up hating the job.

2. Micro-manage. Create a culture of leadership, accountability and coaching but in doing so, give employees room to make mistakes and fail forward.

3. Wing it. DO…have a system. Set clear goals. Track everything. Follow the process. Train continually. Reward success and create a culture of winning.

4. Go at this solo. Ensure that you have a strategic partner to help you through the process and be sure that each of your inside sales people have a battle buddy to cover them and encourage them. (Tip: Hire in pairs!)

5. Rush the hiring process. Yes, it’s tough to find good people but it’s even harder to train the wrong person and ultimately see them fail.

In closing, you should know that adding an inside sales component to your business is a powerful and practical alternative to the traditional outside field sales channel. As is true with most areas of business, there are best practices that can help provide the guardrails necessary to keep your business heading in the right direction. Hopefully these insights have added to your knowledge and can be put to good use by your organization.

Good selling out there and my very best to you in 2019!

Marisa Pensa is founder of Methods in Motion, a sales training company that helps dealers execute training concepts and create accountability to see both inside and outside sales initiatives through to success. For more information, visit www.methodsinmotion.com

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**Coming Soon April 2019**

**METHODS IN MOTION**

**COMPETITIVE SELLING**

*THE GUIDEBOOK TO PROACTIVE CALLING IN A REACTIVE WORLD*

**STACIA SKINNER | MARISA PENSA**
Finding a Cure for Type 1 Diabetes

A cure for type 1 diabetes in five years is the goal of the Diabetes & Metabolism Research Institute at City of Hope.

At City of Hope, we are committed to designing highly effective treatments, preventions and cures for patients coping with type 1 diabetes.

Building on the pivotal breakthroughs made in precision medicine over the past few years, our experts are creating powerful new approaches to treating type 1 diabetes — approaches that will move beyond just managing the disease to curing it.

For more than 30 years, the National Business Products Industry has supported City of Hope in its mission to find the cures to cancer, diabetes and other life-threatening illnesses. To date, you have helped raise more than $184 million which has helped more than 100 million patients around the world.

Join us in 2019 for the “Science Creating Hope” campaign honoring Brad Graves of 3M and help bring hope to those who need it most.

2019 Science Creating Hope campaign honoring Brad Graves of 3M Stationery and Office Supplies Division

For more information on City of Hope’s National Business Products Industry, visit CityofHope.org/nbpi or contact Matt Dodd at mdodd@coh.org.

BRAD GRAVES
2019 Spirit of Life® Honoree,
Vice President and General Manager,
3M Stationery and Office Supplies Division

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY
9 to 11
Office Products Women in Leadership “Bourbon Tour”
Louiville, Kentucky

JUNE
10 to 11
Bob Parker Memorial Golf Outing at Kohler, Hosted by HP, Inc.
Whistling Straights Golf Club and The Kohler Resort — Kohler, Wisconsin

19 to 20
HON Golf Outing & President’s Roundtable
Geneva Country Club — Muscatine, Iowa

23 to 26
AFFLINK Summit Conference, Exhibitor Show and Raffle
Gaylord Rockies Resort — Denver, Colorado

JUNE
24
Northern California Golf Outing, Hosted by The Office City & Vanguard Sales Group
Olympic Club — San Francisco, California