

Business Strategies for the Distributor Sales Professional

PRINT+PROMO

Pictured from left,
Vera Muzzillo, CEO,
and Greg Muzzillo,
Founder, Proforma

TOP 50 Distributors

Seeking the opportunities behind every challenge

+TOP50 DISTRIBUTORS: ANALYSIS

Print+Promo's 2020 Top 50 Distributors

What the data tells us

By Elise Hacking Carr

At the time of this writing, Americans are waiting for election results. They're also waiting for a safe and effective COVID vaccine. Both will influence the course of our economy, which will in turn determine whether some distributors close new deals or close their doors.

For many distributors of print and promotional products, the coronavirus pandemic has been a mixed bag of challenges and opportunities. There have been lost accounts and payroll challenges. But, there has also been time to rethink strategies and expand product offerings—personal protective equipment, anyone? The fiscal numbers presented on the following pages of Print+Promo's Top 50 Distributors resource were primarily achieved before the pandemic upended the world as we know it. And it should

be known that our outreach for the 2020 list began roughly 6.5 months into COVID. That being said, the data tells an interesting story, so let's break down the facts.

According to our findings, overall revenue for Top 50 submissions was \$2.49 billion, a 34.9% decrease over 2019's \$3.83 billion. Of the 42 distributors returning from last year's Top 50:

- 24 had revenue increases.
- 17 had revenue decreases.
- 1 finished evenly.

Those who have been tracking our lists will recognize striking changes within our top five—most notably, the absence of the previously \$1.1 billion, top-ranked Inner-Workings, who, in July, signed a definitive agreement to combine operations with HH Global Group Limited.

TOP 10 FASTEST-GROWING DISTRIBUTORS

Twenty-four of our Top 50 Distributors had revenue increases this time around. The following list showcases 11 of those companies due to ties. Sales are based on the most recent fiscal year completed.

1. NPN360

Bannockburn, IL
2020 List: \$44,000,000
2019 List: \$34,004,535
Growth: 29.4%

2. Vanguard Direct

New York, NY
2020 List: \$64,718,750
2019 List: \$53,967,775
Growth: 19.9%

3. Safeguard by Innovative (Tied)

Phoenixville, PA
2020 List: \$7,600,000
2019 List: \$6,796,669
Growth: 11.8%

3. Winbrook (Tied)

Billerica, MA
2020 List: \$24,600,000
2019 List: \$22,000,000
Growth: 11.8%

5. Regency360

Raleigh, NC
2020 List: \$63,291,017
2019 List: \$57,932,912
Growth: 9.2%

6. Brand Advantage Group Inc., a Safeguard Company

Minneapolis, MN
2020 List: \$20,100,000
2019 List: \$18,511,709
Growth: 8.6%

7. Stran Promotional Solutions

(Tied)
Quincy, MA
2020 List: \$33,942,000
2019 List: \$31,475,000
Growth: 7.8%

7. Touchstone (Tied)

Mason, OH
2020 List: \$48,500,000
2019 List: \$45,000,000
Growth: 7.8%

9. Millennium Marketing Solutions

Annapolis Junction, MD
2020 List: \$7,300,000
2019 List: \$6,900,000
Growth: 5.8%

10. City Paper Company (Tied)

Birmingham, AL
2020 List: \$15,995,029
2019 List: \$15,139,000
Growth: 5.7%

10. CTP Solutions (Tied)

Agoura Hills, CA
2020 List: \$11,200,000
2019 List: \$10,600,000
Growth: 5.7%

TOP 50 DISTRIBUTORS: ANALYSIS

“Over the past several months, we’ve been taking actions to put InnerWorkings in the best position to weather the challenging environment in which we’re operating,” Rich Stoddart, CEO of InnerWorkings said in a statement. “In these times of significant economic uncertainty, the board of directors and management determined to undertake a comprehensive process to preserve and enhance value for shareholders. After exploring a range of financing and strategic alternatives, and implementing meaningful cost-saving measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we’re confident this combination represents the best path forward for our shareholders and InnerWorkings.”

InnerWorkings chose not to submit financial information for this year’s Top 50, which paved the way for Proforma, led by the husband-and-wife team of founder Greg Muzzillo and CEO Vera Muzzillo, to take the No. 1 spot. Promotional products distributor DiscountMugs.com, who placed fourth in 2019, also opted out this year. American Solutions for Business moved up to second place, and iPROMOTEu jumped two spots to round out the top three. Not to be outdone by Smart Source LLC, WebbMason Marketing, who tied with the Thomas D’Agostino Jr.-run company in 2019, enjoyed a 2.4% increase in revenue—enough to assume the No. 4 spot. Smart Source LLC completed the top five.

Other missing entries were: The Sourcing Group (No. 10, \$98.0 million); Image Source (No. 25, \$25.5 million); Inspired Results (No. 29, \$18.7 million); Bradley Marketing Group (No. 34, \$13.9 million); and SLBF Group (No. 42, \$9.6 million). While their absence was felt from InnerWorkings’ departure alone (collectively, the remaining companies earned \$380.5 million), it created room for eight new companies. Say “hello” to The Ampersand Group (No. 20, \$31.2 million); RBO Print-Logistix Inc. (No. 25, \$21.7 million); Brand Fuel Inc. (No. 31, \$14.0 million); One Source Inc. (No. 43, \$7.3 million); Interna-

tional Printing Solutions (No. 47, \$5.2 million); Central Valley Business Forms (No. 48, \$4.9 million); Beachley Medical Office Solutions (No. 49, \$4.7 million); and Benjamin Litho Inc. (No. 50, \$4.6 million).

Independent product sectors were down across the board—partially the result of gaps left by the handful of distributors that did not return for this year. Additionally, several distributors do not disclose that information. Promotional Products put forth the strongest showing with \$552.9 million, though this was a 47.3% decline from 2019’s \$1.1 billion. The biggest drop, 86.0%, belonged to Signs/Displays/Wide-Format Printing, which finished at \$64.1 million. Ironically, this category had an explosive 505.5% growth in 2019, generating \$456.9 million in sales.

Printed Forms accounted for \$150.6 million (2019: \$153.6 million). Labels & Tags fell to \$97.9 million (2019: \$127.9 million). Commercial Print, consisting of marketing pieces, catalogs, brochures, presentation folders, envelopes, stationery and business cards, fell to \$220.5 million (2019: \$511.1 million). Direct Mail produced \$93.5 million (2019: \$266.9 million). Plastic Products and Cards came in at \$18.2 million (2019: \$29.4 million). The “Other” category tumbled to \$65.4 million (2019: \$274.5 million). New this year was Packaging, and it represented \$51.9 million in sales.

For the complete analysis and interviews with leading executives of four of our top-ranked companies, turn to page 14.

We congratulate each company that made the list and wish everyone the best of luck and, more importantly, good health in 2021. Cheers to the power of partnerships in the print community. ■

(Editor’s note: Factors to consider when interpreting sales figures are ongoing industry consolidations and responses reporting idiosyncrasies.)

OTHER STATS

- Three out of the five top companies had revenue increases. American Solutions for Business’ 3.9% rise in sales was the biggest increase.
- In all, 21 U.S. states were headquarters to at least one Top 50 distributor. Ohio led the way with six distributors calling it home, while California and Minnesota each had five. Nine other states appeared at least two times on the list, leaving nine states with a single distributor.
- This year’s Top 50 distributors employed more than 5,000 people at 1,741 locations (data includes some, but not all, parent company head counts and subsidiary or division locations). The highest employee count for any one Top 50 distributor was 1,154; the lowest was six. Three Top 50 distributors had 300 or more employees, and 39 had fewer than 100 employees.
- Of the 52 principal officers listed for the Top 50 Distributors (two companies listed more than one principal), 47 were men and five were women.
- The top five vertical markets for distributors on our list were Medical/Health Care (listed 29 times); Banking/Financial (listed 21 times); Manufacturing (listed 18 times); Retail (listed 15 times); and Education (listed six times).

+TOP50 DISTRIBUTORS

	COMPANY	REVENUE	PRINCIPAL(S)	LOCATION
1	Proforma	\$501,000,000	Greg Muzzillo, Founder; Vera Muzzillo, CEO	Cleveland, OH
2	American Solutions for Business	\$326,316,310	Larry Zavadil, CEO	Glenwood, MN
3	iPROMOTEu	\$178,000,000	Ross Silverstein, CEO/President	Wayland, MA
4	WebbMason Marketing	\$128,000,000	Warner Mason, Chairman of the Board/Co-Founder/CEO	Hunt Valley, MD
5	Smart Source LLC	\$124,000,000	Thomas D'Agostino Jr., CEO	Atlanta, GA
6	Kaeser & Blair Inc.	\$121,000,000	Kurt Kaeser, CEO	Batavia, OH
7	Fully Promoted	\$107,550,000	Mike Brugger, President	West Palm Beach, FL
8	Vanguard Direct	\$64,718,750	Robert O'Connell, CEO	New York, NY
9	Regency360	\$63,291,017	Eric Beguelin, President	Raleigh, NC
10	ePromos Promotional Products	\$61,000,000	Steve Paradiso, CEO/President	St. Cloud, MN
11	Touchstone	\$48,500,000	Derek Block, Founder/CEO	Mason, OH
12	The Shamrock Companies	\$48,000,000	Bob Troop, Chairman/CEO	Westlake, OH
13	Quality Resource Group (QRG)	\$46,641,034	Todd Pottebaum, MAS+, President	Plymouth, MN
14	Quality Logo Products	\$44,090,593	Bret Bonnet, President	Aurora, IL
15	NPN360	\$44,000,000	Artie Collins, CEO	Bannockburn, IL
16	American Diversity	\$35,253,184	Diane Zavadil, CEO	Glenwood, MN
17	The Image Group	\$34,815,276	Jon Levine, CEO	Holland, OH
18	Stran Promotional Solutions	\$33,942,000	Andy Shape, CEO/President	Quincy, MA
19	HDS Marketing Inc.	\$31,737,201	Howard Schwartz, Founder/CEO	Pittsburgh, PA
20	The Ampersand Group	\$31,200,000	Todd Mellon, President	Akron, OH
21	Tray Inc.	\$27,200,000	Brian Burlace, President	Glen Burnie, MD
22	Meridian	\$26,000,000	Bob Chanson, President	Loves Park, IL
23	Winbrook	\$24,600,000	Scott Lattanzio, President	Billerica, MA
24	Consolidated Graphic Communications (CGC), a Safeguard Company	\$21,852,921	Jim Rhodes, CEO/President	Bridgeville, PA
25	RBO PrintLogistix Inc.	\$21,730,000	Jim Riley, CEO/President	St. Louis, MO
26	Hygrade Business Group	\$20,467,513	Victor Albetta, CEO	Secaucus, NJ

TOP 50 DISTRIBUTORS

	COMPANY	REVENUE	PRINCIPAL(S)	LOCATION
27	Brand Advantage Group Inc., a Safeguard Company	\$20,100,000	David Daoust, CEO	Minneapolis, MN
28	C&S Sales Inc.	\$16,529,028	Terry Storms, President	Hawthorne, CA
29	City Paper Company	\$15,995,029	Brad Friedman, CEO/President	Birmingham, AL
30	DFI – Solutions in Print	\$15,578,000	Bryan Miller, President	Davenport, IA
31	Brand Fuel Inc.	\$14,039,147	Danny Rosin, Co-President; Robert Fiveash, Co-President	Morrisville, NC
32	Cooley Group	\$12,206,565	Phil Yawman, President	Rochester, NY
33	Midwest Single Source Inc.	\$11,930,970	John H. Osborne, Chairman	Wichita, KS
34	Piedmont Graphics	\$11,500,000	John Rutledge, President	Greensboro, NC
35	CTP Solutions	\$11,200,000	Jack Schachtel, President	Agoura Hills, CA
36	Voluforms	\$10,413,859	C. Michael Stewart, President/Owner	Jeffersonville, IN
37	ADi Group	\$10,090,543	Doug Freeman, CEO/President	Urbandale, IA
38	ABC Printing Company	\$9,471,871	RJ Strauss, President	Chicago, IL
39	SWAG Web and Graphics	\$8,500,000	David Sutherland, CEO/President	Sparks, NV
40	Advanced Business Graphics Inc.	\$8,492,310	Kristine Sorokwasz	Grapevine, TX
41	Tabco	\$8,000,000	Brad Bilyeu, President	Terre Haute, IN
42	Safeguard by Innovative	\$7,600,000	Jordan Hartline, CEO	Phoenixville, PA
43	Millennium Marketing Solutions	\$7,300,000	Janice Tippett, President	Annapolis Junction, MD
43	One Source Inc.	\$7,300,000	Mark Grosvenor, CEO	Franklin, TN
45	Suncoast Marketing	\$7,091,372	Robert Scala, President	Davie, FL
46	SOLV, a Safeguard Company	\$6,347,000	Tressa McLaughlin, CEO/President	Meridian, ID
47	International Printing Solutions	\$5,200,000	Scott Thurman, President	Vista, CA
48	Central Valley Business Forms	\$4,996,838	Gary Amon, President	Visalia, CA
49	Beachley Medical Office Solutions	\$4,738,379	Timothy Beachley, President	White Marsh, MD
50	Benjamin Litho Inc.	\$4,598,132	Ron Habit, President	San Jose, CA

Editor's note: All sales information provided directly by distributors and may represent estimates on their part.

+TOP 10 FORMS DISTRIBUTORS

	COMPANY	FORMS REVENUE	TOTAL REVENUE	LOCATION
1	American Solutions for Business	\$52,700,084	\$326,316,310	Glenwood, MN
2	WebbMason Marketing	\$12,160,000	\$128,000,000	Hunt Valley, MD
3	Hygrade Business Group	\$11,257,132	\$20,467,513	Secaucus, NJ
4	The Ampersand Group	\$9,360,000	\$31,200,000	Akron, OH
5	American Diversity	\$7,011,858	\$35,253,184	Glenwood, MN
6	Vanguard Direct	\$6,471,875	\$64,718,750	New York, NY
7	CTP Solutions	\$6,160,000	\$11,200,000	Agoura Hills, CA
8	RBO PrintLogistix Inc.	\$4,997,900	\$21,730,000	St. Louis, MO
9	Voluforms	\$4,894,514	\$10,413,859	Jeffersonville, IN
10	Meridian	\$3,900,000	\$26,000,000	Loves Park, IL

+TOP 10 LABELS & TAGS DISTRIBUTORS

	COMPANY	LABELS & TAGS REVENUE	TOTAL REVENUE	LOCATION
1	American Solutions for Business	\$28,030,571	\$326,316,310	Glenwood, MN
2	WebbMason Marketing	\$11,392,000	\$128,000,000	Hunt Valley, MD
3	NPN360	\$8,360,000	\$44,000,000	Bannockburn, IL
4	DFI – Solutions in Print	\$7,944,780	\$15,578,000	Davenport, IA
5	Smart Source LLC	\$7,440,000	\$124,000,000	Atlanta, GA
6	Meridian	\$5,200,000	\$26,000,000	Loves Park, IL
7	American Diversity	\$5,083,509	\$35,253,184	Glenwood, MN
8	Vanguard Direct	\$3,235,938	\$64,718,750	New York, NY
9	CTP Solutions	\$2,240,000	\$11,200,000	Agoura Hills, CA
10	International Printing Solutions	\$2,080,000	\$5,200,000	Vista, CA

+TOP 10 COMMERCIAL PRINT DISTRIBUTORS

	COMPANY	COMMERCIAL PRINT REVENUE	TOTAL REVENUE	LOCATION
1	American Solutions for Business	\$47,250,602	\$326,316,310	Glenwood, MN
2	WebbMason Marketing	\$35,840,000	\$128,000,000	Hunt Valley, MD
3	Smart Source LLC	\$24,800,000	\$124,000,000	Atlanta, GA
4	Vanguard Direct	\$19,415,625	\$64,718,750	New York, NY
5	NPN360	\$14,960,000	\$44,000,000	Bannockburn, IL
6	Meridian	\$9,100,000	\$26,000,000	Loves Park, IL
7	American Diversity	\$7,057,687	\$35,253,184	Glenwood, MN
8	The Ampersand Group	\$6,240,000	\$31,200,000	Akron, OH
9	Consolidated Graphic Communications (CRG), a Safeguard Company	\$5,397,671	\$21,852,921	Bridgeville, PA
10	Piedmont Graphics	\$4,945,000	\$11,500,000	Greensboro, NC

+TOP 10 DIRECT MAIL DISTRIBUTORS

	COMPANY	DIRECT MAIL REVENUE	TOTAL REVENUE	LOCATION
1	American Solutions for Business	\$26,888,464	\$326,316,310	Glenwood, MN
2	Smart Source LLC	\$26,040,000	\$124,000,000	Atlanta, GA
3	WebbMason Marketing	\$9,728,000	\$128,000,000	Hunt Valley, MD
4	Vanguard Direct	\$6,471,875	\$64,718,750	New York, NY
5	NPN360	\$4,840,000	\$44,000,000	Bannockburn, IL
6	American Diversity	\$2,527,653	\$35,253,184	Glenwood, MN
7	Safeguard by Innovative	\$1,900,000	\$7,600,000	Phoenixville, PA
8	The Printing, Fulfillment and Mailing Group LLC	\$1,750,400	\$4,376,000	Medford Lakes, NJ
9	CTP Solutions	\$1,680,000	\$11,200,000	Agoura Hills, CA
10	Benjamin Litho Inc.	\$1,609,346	\$4,598,132	San Jose, CA

+ TOP 50 DISTRIBUTORS: INTERVIEWS

Rise Up

It's been a test of character for distributor leaders—see how they fared

By Elise Hacking Carr

Over the last decade, industry talk has turned to extending the value proposition of the supply chain partnership. Companies are no longer categorized as “manufacturers” or “distributorships” (except when it comes to Print+Promo’s respective Top 50 lists); rather, “marketing service providers” has become the preferred descriptor. MSPs are expert communicators who excel at hearing the voice of the customer and responding to that voice. But what happens when organizations slash marketing budgets because of downswings in revenue or the economy? A savvy MSP maximizes adaptability because they know success depends on pivoting quickly and efficiently in the face of disruptive change.

Just look at the distributors, or MSPs, that comprise Print+Promo’s 2020 Top 50 Distributors chart. Before COVID-19 ravaged the world, personal protective equipment (PPE) never had a place in their product lines. Now, it’s a lifeline—and, for some, it has taken them above fiscal year projections. That’s not to say these business leaders have it all figured out. They are humans grieving lost routines, social connections and a sense of security like the rest of us. They lie awake at night worrying about the welfare of their employees.

In the following section, we’ll get to know more about the executives behind four of our top-ranked distributors. Find out how they inspire others, what they’ve learned from adversity and where they’re headed.

TOP 50 DISTRIBUTORS: INTERVIEWS



1. Proforma
Greg Muzzillo, Founder
and Vera Muzzillo, CEO

Technology drives so much of what Proforma does. What role is technology playing in a time when the rate of change is unprecedented, and little is known? Would you say your past investments have given you an advantage in today's turbulent business climate?

Vera Muzzillo: Technology is the game changer across all businesses worldwide. At our core, we are a sales and marketing company that is powered by the best technology. Our \$20 million investment in technology is providing the key advantage for our owners' success in today's business climate.

How has the COVID-19 climate impacted Proforma?

VM: Although COVID-19 has been a terrible pandemic that has affected the entire world, Proforma has emerged stronger than ever through our entrepreneurial spirit, ability to pivot and our laser focus on our distributors who are the best in the industry. PPE has emerged as a product category that we have capitalized on with our distributor owners, and our efforts in this area have resulted in the emergence and growth of more than 100 of our Million Dollar and Multi-Million Dollar Club owners.

How can your supplier partners better assist you right now to ensure you remain successful? Are there areas where they're excelling?

Greg Muzzillo: First and foremost, we understand that most of our valued supplier partners are struggling to get through these times. However, I believe that with diminished sales, the suppliers have a keen eye on what products are selling and what end-user customers are buying to keep their own businesses safe and productive. We've established some amazing relationships in our more than 40 years in the industry, and our supplier partners have all risen to the challenge to help wherever they can—conducting webinars, creating valuable information, and helping to educate our owners and their sales reps on new and creative ideas to continue to uncover selling opportunities.

How do you motivate and inspire teams to achieve big goals, especially when things feel so heavy right now?

VM: We motivate and inspire our teams to achieve big goals by empowering them, and listening to their suggestions and constructive feedback. We have always believed that our teams work with us, not for us, and they are our greatest asset. We are surrounded by the best and brightest in the industry, and we are so lucky to have their ideas, feedback and even critiques.

What is the biggest professional risk you've ever taken?

VM: The biggest professional risk we have taken is wiring almost \$10 million for cargo planes to bring PPE to the States to allow our distributor owners to become the partner of choice in the PPE arena. Great business is informed risk-taking, and we understand that measured and calculated risks result in high rewards.

What goal(s) are you most excited for in 2021?

GM: As our team quickly pivoted to create a variety of programs and resources that have helped our distributor owners, one of the pivots included expanding our e-commerce offering to include online stores, including PopUp ProStores and Advanced ProStores. To date, we've launched just over 2,000 company stores and are confident that 2021 will bring us well beyond the 5,000 mark for online stores.

What is the greatest lesson that 2020 has taught you?

VM: One thing that 2020 has done is affirm the belief that every challenge presents an amazing opportunity. As business leaders, it is our responsibility to identify these possibilities and to empower our distributors with the best tools to achieve their goals and recognize their potential even in the midst of turmoil and crisis. It is our obligation to 'right the ship' and help the entire organization to pivot to new areas that present new opportunities.

How are you decompressing during these unprecedented times?

GM: At Proforma, we love what we do! Our most important job is to empower the success of our distributor owners and their sales representatives. When we do that, and we see them excel during challenging times such as these, it is very gratifying, and it is a source of great joy for us.

Is there anything you would like to add to give our readers a better sense of your business approach and the industry at large?

GM: At Proforma, our philosophy has always been to focus on the success of our owners and sales reps. Because only when our owners grow their success are we able to grow our success.

TOP 50 DISTRIBUTORS: INTERVIEWS



**2. American Solutions
for Business**
Justin Zavadil, President

In our past conversations, you've been very accepting of change. You've also expressed that your goal is not necessarily "to be the largest company, but the last company standing." Considering that 2020 has been a year of unprecedented change, how have you and your team been adapting?

Justin Zavadil: 2020 has been a year filled with adaptation. We had to adapt to technology changes when we transitioned our entire 300 home office employees to remote work in a weekend without a hiccup. The technology team and help desk, along with all of our supervisors, had to adapt to supporting a staff that they could not meet with in person. I am incredibly proud of how we were able to make these changes so successfully.

We also had to adapt in what products and services to offer. We switched directions to offer PPE in the same amount of time as we had to move our employees remote. We were able to outsell our fiscal year projections with the help of PPE and other COVID-related sales, which made up for more than our shortfall in our normal business products. This year has proven what I already knew about our tremendous team. When you work with amazing people, you can get anything done.

How has the COVID-19 climate impacted American Solutions for Business?

JZ: In short, COVID has impacted us a lot. We have completely changed gears with how we go to market to our customers and how we support our sales associates. Because of our ability to be nimble, we were able to achieve record-setting sales. That being said, we expect a downturn in

PPE sales, which could result in less overall sales in 2021. We have been able to keep our employees fully on and expect that to continue. We have, however, cut down on many things, like travel and non-essential items.

How can your supplier partners better assist you right now to ensure you remain successful? Are there areas where they're excelling?

JZ: Our suppliers have been amazing over the past six months. We are doing everything we can to use technology to get our sales associates and suppliers together. The best situations have been the suppliers who have been proactive in supplying sales with what our customers need in a new remote work setting.

What is the biggest professional risk you've ever taken?

JZ: There have been a lot of risks with large PPE orders over the past six months, but I think the biggest was to start an internal retail fixtures and displays business. The overhead was large, and the risk was considerably bigger than our normal business process, but so far, the reward has been great.

What is the greatest lesson that 2020 has taught you?

JZ: To continue to surround yourself with great people. I am not the smartest person by any means, but the team that we've assembled is so incredible that it makes up for my shortcomings. I have learned that building a team of experts in their field and listening to their expertise will allow ASB to achieve way more than me pretending to have all the answers.

Is there anything you would like to add to give our readers a better sense of your business approach and the industry at large?

JZ: My dad has the saying, "do the right thing for the right reasons," and oftentimes it is that simple. This is a time of great stress for a lot of people, so showing kindness and compassion is always at the forefront of my thinking. People don't always remember what you say, but they often remember how you made them feel. I feel like people will come out of this situation remembering how everyone made them feel when times were the toughest.

TOP 50 DISTRIBUTORS: INTERVIEWS



3. iPROMOTEu
Ross Silverstein, CEO
and President

(but I studied it extensively). When I quit my job to start iPROMOTEu, I had three young children, and my wife was nine months pregnant with our fourth child.

What goal(s) are you most excited for in 2021?

RS: Increasing the number of independent distributor affiliates to be a part of the iPROMOTEu network. During challenging economic times, iPROMOTEu tends to do very well. This, in part, is due to the fact that so many distributors and salespeople realize, during these challenging times, that they need (or at least can benefit from) all the resources that iPROMOTEu provides.

What is the greatest lesson that 2020 has taught you?

RS: You need to be nimble and act quickly when circumstances require it.

How are you decompressing during these unprecedented times?

RS: While times certainly are stressful, there actually is less scheduled—no trade shows, no travel, no business meetings. Work is hard, but not frenetic.

Is there anything you would like to add to give our readers a better sense of your business approach and the industry at large?

RS: "I'd rather be a pirate than join the Navy." Meaning, I prefer to be aggressive, to push limits and to try new things rather than be the same as everyone else [with] all of us behaving the same way and doing the same things.

Be optimistic and enthusiastic. Explain that changing circumstances always create new opportunities. We need to identify these opportunities and then pursue them relentlessly.

— ROSS SILVERSTEIN, CEO AND PRESIDENT, IPROMOTEU

How has the COVID-19 climate impacted iPROMOTEu?

Ross Silverstein: Remarkably, iPROMOTEu's sales have been roughly flat during the pandemic. There are many reasons for this. One reason, though, is that iPROMOTEu provides its independent distributor affiliates with the tools and resources (technology, marketing, financial, accounting and administrative support) to help them succeed—in good times and bad.

How do you motivate and inspire teams to achieve big goals, especially when things feel so heavy right now?

RS: Speak to them—my employees and customers—and keep them apprised of what is happening in the industry and within the company. Be optimistic and enthusiastic. Explain that changing circumstances always create new opportunities. We need to identify these opportunities and then pursue them relentlessly.

What is the biggest professional risk you've ever taken?

RS: [It was] leaving a successful career as a corporate attorney and business executive to start iPROMOTEu. I had no experience working in the promotional products industry

TOP 50 DISTRIBUTORS: INTERVIEWS



5. Smart Source LLC
Thomas D'Agostino Jr., CEO

In our past conversations, you've been very accepting of change, understanding that it's the one constant in an unpredictable world. You've also maintained that your company's future success is based on each of your sales reps embracing the change that is occurring in the marketplace. Considering that 2020 has been a year of unprecedented change, how have you and your team been adapting?

Thomas D'Agostino Jr.: Before our team was able to embrace the change that was occurring at a rate never previously experienced, they first put forth an effort to understand several key aspects of the change, which included: identifying what markets/businesses were being impacted the most, what Smart Source product lines would be best suited to offset some of the impact being experienced and, finally, what was the best way to take these products and services to market during the given climate. We quickly accepted the fact that selling traditional products to our existing customer base was not going to be successful. As a result of approaching 2020 through fresh eyes, we will finish the year with an increase over 2019 sales.

How has the COVID-19 climate impacted Smart Source?

TDJ: Unfortunately, we have had multiple Smart Source team members diagnosed with COVID. We are thrilled to say that all of them have seen full recovery from this devastating virus. Rather than putting plans on hold, as a company we have actually been very aggressive in moving forward with strategic initiatives that were put in place both before and during COVID. We have faith in our country and the resilience of our citizens. Because of this, we feel it is critical for Smart Source to be well-positioned to capitalize on the pent-up demand that will be unleashed during the second half of next year, post-vaccine. Many of our plans are addressing this preparation.

How can your supplier partners better assist you right now to ensure you remain successful? Are there areas where they're excelling?

TDJ: Smart Source has taken a step back to look at our customers and the markets they serve through a different lens, based on the unique environment we are faced with. This has allowed us to be creative in bringing new and innovative ideas to the forefront that address the new world we are in as it relates to our customers. We would ask that our suppliers do the same for Smart Source. We are very pleased to say that many of our key suppliers have accomplished this, and more. We ask that this ongoing innovation and creativity continue in the products and services introduced to Smart Source.

How do you motivate and inspire teams to achieve big goals, especially when things feel so heavy right now?

TDJ: Our team members have a very clear understanding of the negativity that surrounds them and their families today. It is reinforced by the media hourly. It is the responsibility of our leadership team to constantly provide vision of where we are going both as an organization, as well as business community in general. By keeping our focus on the possibilities of next year, we are all inspired to move beyond where we are today. The future is bright!

What goal(s) are you most excited for in 2021?

TDJ: Smart Source is fully committed to our BPO presence. We are looking forward to great results in 2021 in this area. In addition, many of the operational best practices supporting BPO customers also have excellent application with our transactional business. These processes will continue to be refined and implemented in 2021. ■

WHO WE ARE

PRINT+PROMO

Print+Promo is the leading source of business strategies for the distributor sales professional. Featuring a monthly print magazine, weekly e-newsletter (*The Press*), in-person events (Distributor Connect) and an updated website that includes a free product search database to sort through more than 300,000 promotional products, Print+Promo helps print industry professionals protect legacy revenue and grow new revenue streams.

NAPCOMEDIA

NAPCO Media, Print+Promo's parent company, is a leading B-to-B media company specializing in creating community through content via integrated media programs, video services, marketing services, events and event management, custom content, eLearning and market research. NAPCO Media has rapidly expanded its portfolio to include NAPCO Video Services, NAPCO Events, NAPCO Marketing Services and NAPCO Research.