

# THE 2013

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Meet the 49 people who are shaking up the ad specialty market, creating unique business plans, networking like maniacs, and overall, making the industry a fun and successful place to work.

By Michele Bell, Andy Cohen & Dave Vagnoni



## Aaron Bradley

### American Greenwood

Want to know what's trendy in the ad specialty market? Ask Aaron Bradley. The head of sales and marketing at supplier American Greenwood (*asi/35500*) is always searching for fun and stylish products to bring to market. His newest idea gem has led his company to roll out a double-walled, reusable, USA-made red party cup – similar to the famous Solo cup, but designed to be much more durable. It's modern, fresh and has a bit of flair – just like Bradley.



## Allison Robbins

### Crystal Impressions By Seaena

A Minnesota girl at heart, Allison Robbins has reached industry stardom under the bright lights of Las Vegas. The co-owner of Crystal Impressions By Seaena (*asi/47782*), Robbins has transformed her company from a cookie-cutter, order-taking operation to a chic, boutique-style designer, offering custom work on everything from crystal awards to ornaments to coolers. Robbins also revels in new-age marketing and one-on-one networking, plus she's a mainstay on the trade show circuit.



## Andrew Witkin

### StickerYou.com

There's nothing quite like walking through Manhattan Beach to get some inspiration. It was there that Andrew Witkin noticed how stickers were such a big part of the local scene. But how easy is it to customize a sticker? Not that easy. Witkin saw a business opportunity and pitched a plan to some prominent angel investors. They loved what they heard, and five years later with Witkin at the helm, StickerYou.com (*asi/89791*) operates out of downtown Toronto, shipping stickers all over the world.



## Ben Turry

### Cotton Candy Inc.

Well-connected and well-respected, Ben Turry is a true pro's pro. With a long history in the industry, Ben transitioned back to the distributor side of the business in 2011, opening the first U.S. office of Canadian-based Cotton Candy Inc. (*asi/169186*). He promptly earned more than \$1 million in sales and continues to expand his staff. He's also a dedicated fundraiser. Last year, Turry and his family raised more than \$100,000 for Misericordia – a support community for individuals with developmental disabilities.



## Bethany Brevard

### Proforma Professional Business Solutions

If it's not fun, Bethany Brevard isn't interested. That's why she only works with fun clients – just 10 of them in total (yes, really). Her niche is *Fortune* 500 firms, which she continually wins over by suggesting bold, creative ideas. She also is a tactful self-promoter, developing custom kits for every employee within entire client departments – an approach that's helped increase her annual sales by 50%, eclipsing the \$1 million mark in 2012. What's an example of her strategy in action? She recently turned a \$70,000 awards order from Keller Williams into a \$170,000 program.



## Brittany David, SnugZ/USA

There are people who've learned how to network, and those who are born to do it, with a preternatural talent to simultaneously put people at ease and draw people to them. Brittany David has that in spades. But lest you think she's merely a social butterfly, consider that she helped put together and manage a National Accounts Team for several of SnugZ's (*asi/88060*) top accounts and streamlined the ordering and customer service process to make doing business with SnugZ quick and painless. Still, if you're at an industry event, look for Brittany – where she goes, fun follows.



## Charlie Facini, Freehand Graphics

The developer of pre-press Separation Studio and AccuRIP software, Charlie Facini is considered a screen-printing guru and computer whiz by colleagues. He's worked as an artist, production manager and owner, but his biggest contribution to the decorating industry might be as a teacher. He trains large and small shop owners alike through seminars and one-on-one instruction. He's used YouTube to demonstrate his innovations, and his firm has created a slick website that offers free downloads, a straight-talk blog and a "get help" section.

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### Chris Camarella

#### AlightPromos.com

His products have gotten the attention of Google, Parrot Bay and *Wheel of Fortune*, not to mention rock bands Kiss and Aerosmith. Yet, AlightPromos.com (*asi/34194*) owner Chris Camarella always has his sights set on something bigger. In fact, he recently took advantage of a buyer's real estate market to acquire a new larger facility for his company. So what's next for Camarella? He's super-protective of his sales and marketing strategies, but it's clear he wants to use technology to race past his competition.



### Chris Lee

#### Brand Addition

The moment Chris Lee closed on the deal to acquire U.K.-based distributor Brand Addition from 4imprint, its previous parent company, is exactly when he rose to the top of the industry's radar. Now the largest independent distributor in Europe, Brand Addition is a \$100 million operation, which Lee is now tasked with overseeing. He led the management buyout, which closed in March 2012, and works with private equity owner HIG Capital to ensure the company's success. A leader in the ad specialty market in Europe, Lee's next move will be watched closely across the globe.



### Cory Schroepfer

#### Bridge Marketing Services

As the owner and president of the multiline rep firm Bridge Marketing Services (*asi/821030*), Cory Schroepfer juggles clients from both the supplier and distributor sides of the industry with humor, respect and an almost obsessive attention to detail and follow-up. In positioning his business as a full-service marketing firm to clients, his goal is fairly simple: "We aren't looking to simply slap logos on stock product images," Schroepfer says. "We're trying to give them content that really blows their customer away."



### David & Kerrie Poore

#### Love Rocks

This husband and wife team has made a commitment to eco-friendly and U.S.-sourced products, an approach that's winning rave reviews from distributors and end-buyers. Based in Florida, David and Kerrie Poore's company – fittingly named Love Rocks (*asi/68029*) – provides clever word stones, glass pebbles, wooden nickels, sea beans and even logoed palm and spruce trees. But it's not all work for this power couple. The Poores are raising a one-year-old daughter, Stella, and enjoy volunteering at a dog rescue in Ft. Myers.

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### Denise Taschereau & Sarah White

#### Fairware

Think the green movement has peaked? Fairware's (*asi/191452*) co-founders Denise Taschereau and Sarah White would beg to differ. With a passion for social and environmental responsibility, the business partners have built Fairware into one of the industry's fastest-growing distributors, recently doubling their firm's annual sales. Taschereau and White exclusively focus their pitches on ethical sourcing and sustainable materials, winning business from stand-out brands like Aveda and Patagonia. The dynamic duo also places a premium on social media and closely tracks online metrics. As if all that's not enough, they're also leading Fairware through a re-branding effort to maximize the distributor's appeal throughout North America.



### Don Martin, Bloomin' Promotions

Armed with a marketing MBA from the University of Colorado, Don Martin always seemed destined for success. As president of Bloomin' Promotions (*asi/40646*), he's developed a unique line of seed paper-based products that includes coasters, calendars and wristbands. Bloomin's signature items are made from 100% post-industrial, recycled paper and dyed with all-natural, vegetable-based pigments. But Martin doesn't just sell sustainability – he relies on it. His company uses a 30kW solar power system to run its Boulder-based production facility. Martin also serves on the board of directors for nonprofit Community Link and provides job opportunities at Bloomin' for individuals with disabilities.



### Erin Reilly & Sterling Wilson

#### College Glasses

Erin Reilly and Sterling Wilson, the co-founders of College Glasses (*asi/45657*), seem to have found the winning niche product – custom sunglasses. But even the best product won't have staying power without great customer service – something Reilly and Wilson understand. When College Glasses' Chinese factory was damaged in a typhoon last year, the pair refused to let orders get sidetracked. DHL expressed sunglasses to the U.S., and Reilly drove six hours to deliver them to the University of CT.



### Greg Alterman, Alternative Apparel

When he started Alternative Apparel (*asi/34850*) in 1995, Greg Alterman had a very simple vision: create the perfect T-shirt. Now, as founder and chief creative officer for the progressive apparel company, Alterman provides the ad specialty market with fashionable clothing in a socially responsible way – its Alternative Earth collection is 100% made of organic cotton.



### Heidi Perrault, Clean Fun Promotional Marketing

Sass. Spunk. Chutzpah. Heidi Perrault, an account executive at Clean Fun Promotional Marketing (*asi/162979*), is the walking, talking, selling definition of those words. In the industry for 11 years, she prides herself on treating every client "like they're Bill Gates" and points squarely at referrals as the reason for her success. "I have had such luck getting business by treating clients as friends that many of them spin me forward to their contacts," she says.



### Heidi Thorne, Thorne Communications

Heidi Thorne's main job is the head of distributor firm Thorne Communications (*asi/344244*), but, wow, does she do a whole lot more than that. She's published five books that are focused on various aspects of the promotional products business. She's been a speaker at ASI Shows, and she's highly active in social networks. In fact, she's one of the most-followed people in the industry on Twitter, with more than 4,500 followers. All of that leaves precious little time to root for her favorite Chicago sports teams: the Bears and Blackhawks.

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### Isaac Childs, Rustico

It's common to leave college not really knowing what you want to do in life. But when you turn that indecisiveness into a thriving business? Pretty cool. That's exactly what Isaac Childs, CEO and chief creative officer of supplier firm Rustico (*asi/84264*), did. When he was making custom journals for friends, a local business asked Childs if he could make them for the company. The rest is history, as Rustico now sells custom notebooks and journals in both the retail and ad specialty sectors by the thousands. As a creator of products, Childs has banked his whole company on its craftsmanship.



### Janet Trachter, Superex

Following a successful 17-year career with Starline (*asi/89320*), Trachter has been the vice president of sales and marketing at Superex (*asi/90231*) since 2010. What's been Trachter's impact? Last year, *Counselor* recognized Superex as one of the industry's fastest-growing suppliers, with the company increasing sales 68% in 2011. Not bad, but there's more to come. Trachter continues to add more reps and spotlight Superex's core safety products. Her creativity also extends beyond promotions – she's the author of a children's book called *SheilaWisHaLot*.



### Javier Zetter, Uniforms Corporate Image

Uniforms Corporate Image (*asi/92883*) owner Javier Zetter recently introduced his company's Big Bang brand of apparel in the U.S., dazzling distributors with high-quality merchandise. For 20 years, Zetter's company has been a market leader in Mexico, selling promotional T-shirts. Now, Zetter is making a bigger push into corporate wear.



### Jeff Sliva, Pepco Poms

A driving force at family-owned Pepco Poms (*asi/77280*), Jeff Sliva has helped his company to three consecutive Distributor Choice Award wins in the cheer and spirit category. Besides its American-made pom-poms, the supplier offers every possible rally accessory, from foam novelties to car flags to pep rags. In addition to holographic, wet-look, coupon handle, iridescent and metallic fire styles, Pepco is now offering a new variety of glitter pom-poms.



**Jennifer Dawson**

**SanMar**  
An LA-based district sales manager for SanMar (asi/84863), Jennifer Dawson is the total package – combining California cool with a feisty Jersey attitude. Her coworkers say she's the ultimate go-getter, fated to smash sales records as she roughs up the competition. She knows her territory in and out, bouncing between states, appointments, meetings and trade shows with plenty of energy to spare. If you want to see her in action, check out one of her product showcase videos, where she highlights the latest in forward-looking SanMar fashion.



**Jill Oppolo, Brown & Bigelow**

Jill Oppolo has been known to go on sales calls with her clients' reps and ride along with their delivery drivers. She'll do whatever she can to understand the culture of a customer's workplace. Last year, she increased her sales by \$625,000, finishing the year with \$1.75 million in orders. One of her firm's most effective closers, Oppolo won Brown & Bigelow's (asi/148500)

Southern region Sales Executive of the Year Award in 2010, 2011 and 2012.



**Marc Giroux, Spector & Co.**

Marc Giroux is omnipresent. Averaging 40 business trips per year for the last 10 years, Spector's (asi/88660) vice president of sales used his talent to help the company win PPPC's award for Canada's Supplier of the Year in 2013. "I can't do my job effectively if I don't spend more than 50% of my time meeting with distributors," Giroux says.



**Josh Ebrahemi, Jack Nadel International**

When you consider that Josh Ebrahemi is a full partner at Counselor Top 40 distributor Jack Nadel Int'l (asi/279600) and has been a multimillion-dollar producer there for the past 10 years, it's impressive. But ponder this: He's only 32. The definition of an industry wunderkind, Ebrahemi has clients throughout the entertainment industry and is such a multi-

tasker that he had a hand in designing JNI's new building in LA.



**Marcus Sperber, Elasto Form KG**

With a marketing slogan of "Oktoberfest," you know Marcus Sperber's company, Elasto Form KG (asi/51817), must be a fun place. In fact, the German company showed just how fun it could be by creating a beer garden for a trade show booth at this year's PSI show. The family business served Bavarian snacks, beer and other drinks to booth visitors. And now

Sperber is leading his company's effort to expand into North America.



**Matt Gray & Larry Ramirez**

**Dunbrooke**  
With 10 kids between them, the two guys at the helm of apparel supplier firm Dunbrooke (asi/50930) are busy, to say the least, but find time to hit the trade show circuit and strike deals with big brands like Reebok and the NFL.



**Matt Kesten & Jon Wollman**

**Direct Green Bags**  
Highly aggressive businesspeople and only in their 20s, the co-owners of Direct Green Bags (asi/49809) have burst onto the scene recently. Matt Kesten and Jon Wollman are working to capitalize on the

increasing number of single-use plastic bag bans across the country.



**Nathan Baine**

**The Magnet Group**  
As the e-marketing manager for Counselor Top 40 supplier Magnet (asi/68507) – Counselor's Supplier of the Year for 2013 – Nathan Baine's savvy social media skills are part of the reason the company has seen resurgence in its sales and perception of its brand. "I created a digital and direct mail ASI Supplier of the Year Marketing Campaign that has led to an increase in sales and generated weekly social media viewership of roughly 100,000 impressions per week," says Baine. "I enjoy marketing through all forms of media in different ways in order to cater to each person/business in the audience."

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**Katie Smart, Axis Promotions**

Katie Smart may be Axis Promotions' (asi/128263) marketing director, but where she really shines is in her role as trend spotter and fashion forecaster. Google "Axis Trend Report 2013" – we'll wait. Go ahead, take a minute. So cohesive and creative is this piece as a client primer for how runway and retail trends trickle down to the ad specialty industry, that the editors of *Vogue* couldn't have done it better. "No matter how old I get, I never want to be the person who says, 'I can't' or 'I don't know how' just for the sake of laziness," she says. "If I don't understand something, I educate myself."



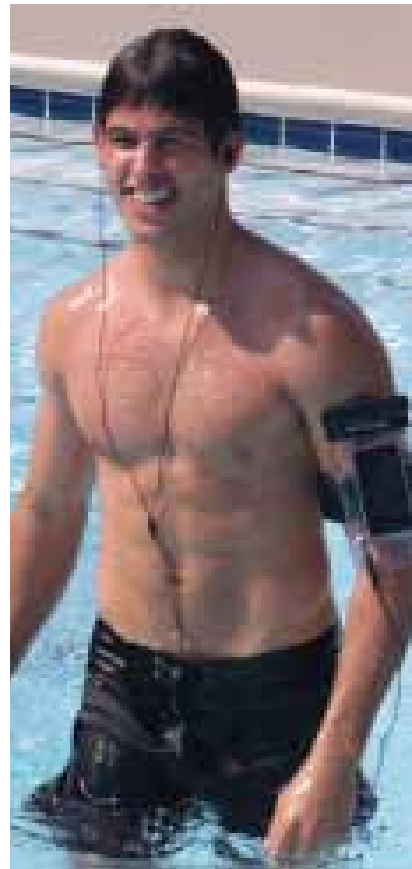
**Kirby Hasseman**  
**Hasseman Marketing & Communications**

Kirby Hasseman may run a relatively small business, but his company is big on marketing. It has done a video marketing campaign that has attracted much attention and showcased the company's fun personality. Speaking of fun, Hasseman Marketing (asi/221824) adopted this as a company slogan last year: Delivering Marketing Joy.



**Malia Anderson, CleggPromo**

Just in her 20s and with a passion for her job that exudes fun wherever she goes, Malia Anderson is quickly becoming known in the ad specialty market. As marketing manager for CleggPromo (asi/45450), Anderson is constantly in touch with distributor clients. But this outdoor enthusiast may have found a new calling after experiencing what she says is the most exhilarating moment of her life: skydiving.



**Jordan Messick, DryCASE LLC**

Jordan Messick, national sales manager for DryCASE (asi/50771), sells and helps develop the company's products, which are brand-new to the ad specialty market. Capitalizing on the popularity of smartphones and other devices, DryCASE items allow water-bound consumers to keep their electronics dry while still having all of their info at their fingertips. Messick certainly knows the importance of this, as he spends much of his free time on the water. "I actually use our DryCASE a few days a week in my free time when going out on the boat with friends, surfing, spear fishing, scuba diving or wakeboarding," he says.



**Pierce Fabian, BrandCharger**

Bringing a new product category to the ad specialty market, Pierce Fabian and BrandCharger (asi/88751) have introduced on-the-go electronics chargers to the market over the past few years. The company is also a socially responsible organization, recently receiving BSCI certification (Business Social Compliance Initiative) that commits it to fair labor policies and environmentally-sound business practices. In fact, it's an industry quest for Fabian: He believes all suppliers should gain the same certification.



**Mitch Mounger, Sunrise Identity**

Providing an empowered and trusting workplace, Mitch Mounger has led Sunrise Identity (asi/339206) to the Counselor Best Places to Work list multiple times. But, it's his business success – conducting promotional campaigns for brands such as Microsoft, Starbucks, T-Mobile and Amazon, and leading the company to more than \$25 million in sales – that garners Mounger industry attention and respect.



**Pamela Ferguson, Tekweld**

Pamela Ferguson is the do-everything vice president for supplier firm Tekweld (asi/90807), taking part in product creation, sourcing, business development, purchasing, inventory control, marketing, and more. "Tekweld has expanded into an additional 20,000 square feet, and my input and involvement made it an easy transition," she says. And, through it all, she says that it's her heritage from Ahousaht First Nations that "keeps me grounded, being that I come from nothing and have grown into the person I am today."



**Paul Kory, Dyenomite**

As a 20-plus-year veteran of the industry, Paul Kory, vice president of sales at Dyenomite (asi/51185), is one of the most traveled execs around. He attends more than 35 shows and events every year and has volunteered as the president of OPPA, been on the board of OPPA and was the director of SPPA. Plus, he's consistently increased sales at each of the apparel company stops he's made – Bemrose, Alpha, Hartwell, Ash City, Bullet, Vantage, and now Dyenomite.



### **Rob Samulewitsch**

#### **Sourcing Central Promotional Products**

Turning its lightbulb logo into a whole marketing plan, Rob Samulewitsch and Sourcing Central Promotional Products (*asi/330125*) conduct "lightbulb sessions" with each of its clients.

The goal? No selling or buying or signing contracts. Just brainstorming and probing to find out the marketing objectives and needs of their clients. Since instituting the strategy in 2010, the company's revenues have grown by more than 40% a year.



### **Robert Charlton**

#### **The Next Trend Designs**

Robert Charlton is a man with an apparel vision. He developed his own line of athletic and fitness gear called Authentic Wicked Wear, and has now built a whole distributor firm around it. Plus, The Next Trend Designs (*asi/283375*)

lives up to its name by creating new items to sell to the health and fitness sectors. Charlton, who owns the slogan used on many of his items, "Train Wicked," has also recently introduced line extension products like water bottles, shaker cups and mouth guards.



### **Ruth Verver**

#### **Paperclip Promotions**

Self-promo is the marketing modus operandi of Ruth Verver's Paperclip Promotions (*asi/290142*). The company does mailers for Earth Day, Valentine's Day and just about any holiday it can attach a clever promotional

product to. Using its eight-part direct-mail strategy, Paperclip makes a point to connect closely with its prospects and customers. "The copy doesn't really pitch our company," Verver says. "Instead, it pitches the power of promotional products." Smart strategy.



### **Stephanie Friedman**

#### **WorkflowOne**

With boundless energy, Stephanie Friedman attacks her job and her life every day with genuine passion. As director of branded merchandise marketing for Top 40 distributor WorkflowOne (*asi/333647*), Friedman is responsible for supplier relations, the training and education of WorkflowOne salespeople, and overall corporate sales and marketing efforts. Busy, right? Doesn't faze Friedman. "I love what I do," says Friedman, who does Pure Barre workouts virtually every day after work.



### **Zachary Tyler, Creative Marketing Concepts**

Zachary Tyler is on the fast track at Creative Marketing Concepts (*asi/170631*). He started working at the company at age 19 eight years ago as a receptionist. Then, he moved to phone prospecting to sales to sales manager to executive vice president and finally, to the only spot left, president/owner. A highly-driven and highly-successful leader, he has doubled the company's size since taking over as president in 2009. It's a drive that started young – Tyler sold Kirby vacuums for four years as a teenager, to the tune of \$50,000 a year when he was 18.



### **Stephanie Preston**

#### **HALO Branded Solutions**

Responsible for the marketing efforts of one of the largest distributor firms in the industry, Stephanie Preston has found a way to merge old and new strategies into today's marketing efforts. Under Preston's direction, HALO Branded Solutions (*asi/356000*) has dramatically increased its client outreach over the past 12 months through direct mail. "It's unique

because we found a way to engage technology and apply it to an 'old-school' method of client engagement in direct-mail marketing," says Preston.



### **Tej Shah, Overture Premiums & Promotions**

Tej Shah has already done more in his nascent career than many executives do in a lifetime. Shortly after graduating college, he founded Internet company WeRemember.org, which was featured in articles in publications such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times* and *U.S. News & World Report*. He was nominated as one of *BusinessWeek's* Top 25 Entrepreneurs Under 25. And, now as vice president of marketing and e-commerce at Overture Premiums & Promotions (*asi/288473*), Shah promotes and develops business for this fast-growing distributor.

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