

COUNSELOR

DISTRIBUTOR CHOICE

AWARDS

Meet the winning suppliers in the 60 product categories of the 2014 *Counselor* Distributor Choice Awards. Plus, find out what makes their service offerings so special.

Award program overseen by Karen Akers

Top-notch service immediately gets noticed by customers. It shows up when an order goes wrong, or even when things are perfect. It occurs when a phone call is returned quickly with an answer to a question. And, it becomes entirely clear when a vendor seamlessly updates a client during the order fulfillment process.

These are the traits of companies that offer only the best service, and they're on display on the following pages, which honor the winners of the 2014 *Counselor* Distributor Choice Awards. Chosen by ad specialty industry distributors, these suppliers display all the characteristics of great service: They deliver on time, communicate at every possible step in the process, admit mistakes when things go wrong, and partner with distributors to ensure that everybody's ultimate client – the end-user – is satisfied.

Divided into 60 product categories, this year's *Counselor* Distributor Choice Awards program garnered nearly 56,000 votes from industry distributors. In each category, they voted for their favorite supplier, and the winners are shown here. Turn the page to find out how speed, technology, and resolving problems factor into their service success.

AUTO ACCESSORIES

Garyline (asi/55990)

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

The Magnet Group (asi/68507)

BADGES & BUTTONS

Express-A-Button (asi/53408)

BANNERS, FLAGS & PENNANTS

Showdown Displays (asi/87188)

BEVERAGE HOLDERS

Numo (asi/74710)

BLANKETS

Kanata Blanket Co. (asi/63823)

BOXES & PACKAGING

The Chest (asi/44830)

CALENDARS

Norwood Triumph Calendars

(asi/92185)

CAPS & HATS

SanMar (asi/84863)

CARDS & BUSINESS FORMS

Warwick Publishing Co. (asi/95280)

CHEER & SPIRIT PRODUCTS

Pepco Poms (asi/77280)

CHILDREN'S APPAREL

Broder Bros. Co. (asi/42090)

CLOCKS & WATCHES

Logomark (asi/67866)

COOLERS

Gemline (asi/56070)

DECALS, LABELS & BUMPER STICKERS

Gill Studios (asi/56950)

DECORATED APPAREL

Ash City (asi/37127)

DESK ACCESSORIES

Leed's (asi/66887)

DRINKWARE - GLASS & CERAMIC

Moderne Glass Co. (asi/71920)

DRINKWARE - PLASTIC & OTHER

ETS Express (asi/51197)

ELECTRONICS

Sweda Co. (asi/90305)

ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY & RECYCLED PRODUCTS

Leed's (asi/66887)

FANS

Lion Circle Corp. (asi/67620)

FLASHLIGHTS

Starline USA (asi/89320)

FOOD & BEVERAGES

Maple Ridge Farms (asi/68680)

GLOW PRODUCTS

CleggPromo (asi/45450)

GOLF ACCESSORIES

Gold Bond (asi/57653)

HEALTH & BEAUTY ITEMS

Evans Mfg. (asi/52840)

HOSPITALITY ITEMS

Digispec (asi/49716)

HOUSEWARES

Evans Mfg. (asi/52840)

INFLATABLES

Galaxy Balloons (asi/55675)

JEWELRY, EMBLEMS & PATCHES

EMT (asi/52263)

JOURNALS & DIARIES

Journalbooks (asi/91340)

KEYTAGS & LUGGAGE TAGS

Evans Mfg. (asi/52840)

LANYARDS & BADGE HOLDERS

Snugz/USA (asi/88060)

LUGGAGE & BAGS

Leed's (asi/66887)

MAGNETS

The Magnet Group (asi/68507)

MARKERS & HIGHLIGHTERS

Sanford Business-To-Business

(asi/84833)

MOUSEPADS

Digispec (asi/49716)

OFFICE PRODUCTS

Journalbooks (asi/91340)

OUTERWEAR

SanMar (asi/84863)

PARTY PRODUCTS

WOWLine (asi/98360)

PENCILS & ERASERS

Aakron Rule Corp. (asi/30270)

PENS

Bic Graphic USA (asi/40480)

PERFORMANCEWEAR

SanMar (asi/84863)

PICTURE FRAMES

Illini (asi/62190)

SAFETY PRODUCTS

Starline USA (asi/89320)

SHIRTS

SanMar (asi/84863)

SHOPPING BAGS

Bag Makers (asi/37940)

SIGNS & DISPLAYS

Showdown Displays (asi/87188)

SPORTS & OUTDOORS

Gold Bond (asi/57653)

STRESS RELIEVERS

Ariel Premium Supply (asi/36730)

TECH ACCESSORIES

Leed's (asi/66887)

TOOLS

Starline USA (asi/89320)

TOWELS & ROBES

Towel Specialties (asi/91605)

TOYS & GAMES

WOWLine (asi/98360)

UMBRELLAS

Peerless Umbrella Co. (asi/76730)

UNIFORMS

SanMar (asi/84863)

USB DRIVES

iClick (asi/62124)

WEARABLE ACCESSORIES

Cap America (asi/43792)

WOMEN'S APPAREL

SanMar (asi/84863)

In addition to our sales coordinators being enabled to resolve issues, our management team is also easily accessible to provide support throughout the process.
Cap America

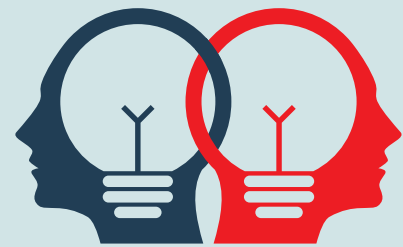
Problem resolution rule number 1: The customer is always right.
Rule number 2: See rule number 1.
Numo

Customer service agents are empowered to make any decision needed to resolve a problem. They may need to work with production to determine the best plan of action, but they can, and are encouraged to, have a one-call resolution for any customer problem or opportunity.
Gill Studios

Our team works within a small supervised area, where we keep open eyes and ears on the department all throughout the day. There is constant support readily available, which keeps things moving quickly and efficiently.
CleggPromo

Each week, we send out random surveys to our customers, getting feedback on the specific order in question. When a customer reports an issue on the survey, we call to better understand why so we can improve and learn from the experience.
Leed's

We monitor internal communications by the second, from hold times to on-line inquiries. We strive for 100% customer response within minutes.
Towel Specialties



HOW DO YOU RESOLVE ORDER PROBLEMS?

Our customer service reps are empowered to make quick decisions, as they are all put through an intensive five-week training process. An escalation channel has also been established, so that we traffic other issues to the management team.
Ash City

Problem resolution follows a process known internally as "escalation." As soon as we receive notification of a problem or potential problem, the escalation process begins. The problem is logged and tracked until it is resolved.
Gemline

Made-in-USA really helps us in the keeping turn times low. Also, we're located centrally in the U.S., which helps to keep the shipping costs down.
Lion Circle



HOW DO YOU ENSURE FAST CUSTOMER SERVICE?

All of our sales representatives go through a rigorous training process to ensure that problems are resolved quickly and efficiently when helping a customer overcome a potential issue.
Digispec

Through better technology and constant re-evaluation of how we process orders, we are able to do things faster than in the past.
Warwick Publishing

The first step in any problem resolution is communication. We immediately take steps to reach out to the customer and begin the resolution process. These are delicate situations and time sensitive, so it is our goal to get all of the information sorted out and provide a solution quickly.
Sweda Co.

When problems arise, our team is trained to resolve issues and generally do 99% of the time. In the case of an extreme issue, our supervisory and management staff are always available to make sure any issue is settled in a timely manner.
WOWLine

First we address the solution which will meet the customers' needs and then we can go back and reflect on the circumstances and put systems in place to avoid future problems. Anticipating a problem is the best avoidance.
Journalbooks

Speed of service is something that our customer service manager reports on every morning. We consistently monitor our speed to answer and hold times. We have an internal goal to keep our time to answer below 15 seconds and hold times below a minute.
Gold Bond

We try and make sure that all phone calls are answered by a live person. We have a pretty strict schedule for following up on orders and we live by the in-hands dates. Quick turnaround is essential.
Galaxy Balloons

We have a 48-hour production policy for all catalog quantity orders. To do so requires quick and efficient processing of all orders as well as prompt problem resolution.
Illini

We have created a new position within the company to work on our website and look at ways to constantly improve it, giving our customers access to information even when we are closed.

Kanata Blanket

We have videos and webinars that help educate distributors on the power of packaging.

The Chest

Our Quality Recording system is used to provide our reps with additional product, process and procedure training to ensure they are proactive. We also utilize business analytics to consistently identify opportunities to reduce processing and production times.

BIC Graphic USA

A client needed 140,000 products made and delivered from China in four weeks. Our staff were based at the factory permanently during the entire process while our shipping team coordinated with several airlines to get the shipment to reach its destination on time.

Logomark

Who wakes up in the middle of the night and remembers they need 1 million magnets in the morning? One of our distributors did. And we rearranged our production schedule by adding another crew to make it happen.

The Magnet Group

UPS added an extra sort day because ground is not guaranteed from December 11-24, so our customer's package was delayed. We remade the 1,200 buttons and shipped them overnight to the customer so they received them when needed.

Express-A-Button



HOW IS TECHNOLOGY IMPROVING YOUR SERVICE?

We introduced a new automated order entry system that gets information into our system faster and makes our proofreading process quicker.

By processing orders faster, we can get orders to production faster and, ultimately, get products shipped to customers ahead of schedule.

Bag Makers

We are moving toward a paperless system, which will enable us to respond faster to customers through online processes.

Moderne Glass

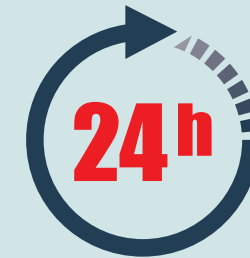
A distributor called in a panic about 10,000 lanyards that had been botched by a competitor. We accommodated the request the same day and all 10,000 shipped that night. I'm 100% positive we gained a customer for life.

SnugZ USA

Our order system allows customer service reps to be able to trace the status of any orders once they are in the system. Auto e-mail alerts also updates our distributors throughout the order process.

Ariel Premium Supply

THIS ONE TIME, WE HAD TO GO OVER-THE-TOP...



Our new website allows distributors to track orders, customize sales flyers, check inventory and download product images.

Aakron Rule

We have our own custom CRM program that allows us to track all communications with a customer for any order.

Starline USA

All service reps have direct 800 numbers. If a customer calls our main 800 number, the phone system will look for the dedicated rep, but if they are not available, the call will be routed to the next available rep, so our customers will always be able to have their questions answered.

Evans Manufacturing

We had a rush-overnight truck shipment where the courier showed up for pickup at 11 p.m. Our customer service representative stayed late to ensure we would be able to open up our facilities, load up the goods, and send the truck off to complete the on-time delivery for an event that took place at 10 the next morning.

ETS Express

We were alerted by a distributor on a Saturday morning that, in tracking their shipment, they learned that the product was to arrive at an incorrect address. Because it was the weekend, redirecting the shipment was not an option. So, we called in a production team to re-make the product and put it on a plane – counter to counter on Sunday – to arrive in time.

Showdown Displays

A customer had a rush order for lapel pins that they needed for a special event. Production was completed the actual day of the event, and an EMT employee met the distributor at a rest stop off the interstate and hand-delivered the pins.

EMT

UPS mistakenly routed a client's order to Florida, rather than California. When we learned of the problem, we shipped a replacement order overnight, at no charge, to meet the client's in-hand date.

Maple Ridge Farms