

2010 HOT LIST

Meet the 41 people who are shaking up the market with new and innovative approaches.

By Michele Bell, Andy Cohen and Dave Vagnoni

What's hot now? Social networking, business growth, new marketing strategies, and yes, good-old-fashioned networking.

Indeed, 2010 has brought many shifts to the business world – and the people who are succeeding are approaching the market in new ways. They're promoting themselves and their companies with innovative tactics,

they're looking for new opportunities and they're working harder than ever to, very simply, make it happen.

These are the types of people on the 2010 Hot List. It's a group of savvy networkers, successful businesspeople and driven entrepreneurs who are going to succeed at all costs.

Read on to check out their stories.

The Brand Leader

ALAN PATRICK
Mars Direct (*asi/68888*)

It takes a visionary leader for a big brand-name to recognize the vitality and massive opportunity presented by the ad specialty market. Alan Patrick, the vice president of sales for Mars Direct/M&M's, is such a leader. He has launched M&M's foray into the industry with splashy magazine ads, a stream of online and offline marketing. Very quickly, M&M's has also created a vast presence at trade shows over the past year, as the company has satiated the cravings of show-goers from coast to coast. It's Patrick, though, who has the responsibility of making M&M's effort in this market a success – and so far, sweet job! – AC



The New Marketer

BOBBY LEHEW
Robyn Promotions (*asi/309656*)

When you show up just about everywhere, how can you not be hot? Bobby Lehew, the director of fast-growing distributor firm Robyn Promotions, is ubiquitous both virtually and live in-person. He's one of the most prevalent online social networkers in the industry – nearly 1,000 Twitter followers, a blog called Branded Matters that gets hits and business, and Facebook and LinkedIn pages that are updated constantly – and he even teaches others in the market how to use online social media in their marketing and sales plans. Sharing your innovative strategies with others? Most definitely hot. – AC



The Product Pusher

BRIDGET MUSCAT

ALL-ETT Billfolds (*asi/30162*)

You can't go to an industry show these days without taking note of a new landmark product – the ALL-ETT Billfold, promoted as



“The World's Thinnest Wallet.” The ever-presence of the new product is thanks to Bridget Muscat, the tireless director of sales for ALL-ETT, who has managed to get exposure for

the product on *The Doctors* (Dr. Phil's new TV creation) and on local news programs in San Diego. Plus, the promotional and public relations plan has gotten so much coverage for the company's product that its sales have increased 35% annually for each of the past two years. Rapid success equals hot. – AC



The Personality

CHAD MAJEWSKI

Noteworthy (*asi/74360*)

Every company needs a face – somebody who is the outward personality of the organization to both the industry at large and to customers. For *Counselor* Top 40 supplier Noteworthy, that outsized personality certainly belongs to Vice President of Sales Chad Majewski. He's the one in front of Noteworthy's booth at every show trying to get distributors to stop by and chat. He's the one staying late at all the parties to ensure every last client and potential client sees his face. And, he's the one always having fun – whether it's working with distributors or running toy drives in his office or simply giving gifts to employees for a job well done. For Majewski, work is undoubtedly fun. – AC

The Music Promoter

CONNIE MANDULA

CM Promotions (*asi/154919*)



Turning a passion into a business is often a route to success. Connie Mandula, the president of CM Promotions, did exactly that as she transferred her love of country music into a country music merchandising operation that's become a fast-growing distributor firm. Mandula works closely with country music stars to creatively leverage their talents with branded merchandise. She's the go-to gal for country music promos – and her spin-off company, Silver Wings Merchandise, not only sells branded items for clients, but also runs marketing (online and offline) and promotional programs for them. It's that creativity and resourcefulness that make Mandula one to watch – and not only in the country music scene! – AC

The Networker Extraordinaire

COURTNEY HERRIN

Otto International (*asi/75350*)

Meet a tireless networker who is leading the marketing effort for Otto International, a new entry this year on *Counselor's* Top 40 supplier list. Courtney Herrin has an office, but she makes a name for herself on the road, at trade shows, visiting clients. She's the last one to leave a social gathering during trade shows, and she's the one at the Otto exhibit booth happily welcoming all visitors. Herrin is also the mastermind of Otto's creative ad campaigns that integrate multiple media points – online, print, trade shows, social networks, just about everywhere. – AC



The Visionary

DAMIAN WANT

Logomark (*asi/67866*)

With an entrepreneurial spirit and a drive to innovate, Damian Want – senior vice president of Logomark – is every bit the right hand man of owner Trevor Gnesin. During his tenure, the always-impeccably dressed Want has spearheaded the company's sales and marketing efforts, but it was his creation this year of *www.99centpromos.com* where his marketing genius has really shined. By using the Amazon model, Want crafted a self-serve online portal for Logomark's less expensive items, sold at rock-bottom prices, with clients alerted of specials using Twitter and other forms of social media. Unveiled at the January shows in a uniquely staged, black-and-white booth of Want's design, customers have flocked to the concept of online, self-serve purchasing. With an intuitive sense of buying habits and market forecasting, Want knows what you need. – MB

The Fun Evangelist

DAN TAYLOR

BamBams (*asi/38228*)

Dan Taylor is a believer in fun. He preaches it in the BamBams office, where he is president. And, he most certainly markets it through the fun line of products that he's bringing to the industry. He's introduced flash drives in unique shapes, buttons, balls for every sport (foam and real), cheering accessories, people figurines, and happy-face beverage holders. We could go on, as the company lists nearly 1,400 different items in ESP. Taylor's philosophy: If it's not fun, it's not worth it. And for BamBams, the philosophy has been worth it – the company has increased its sales more than 20% each of the past three years. – AC



The Branding Magnate

DANA ZEZZO

Pro Towels Etc.
(*asi/79750*)

Looking for Dana Zezzo? Go online and you'll easily find his whereabouts. As the vice president of sales for Pro Towels Etc., Zezzo updates his every move through Twitter and Facebook. You'll know when he's at a hockey game with clients or setting up his trade-show booth or heading out for a dinner with friends. His updates are all geared to one goal: increasing the brand exposure for his company. Call him the industry's Poster Child for successful use of online social media. He's maximized it to the hilt. Plus, Zezzo is such a believer in building a brand through social media that he even shares his secrets with others in the industry. – AC



The Selling Machine

DANIELLE REINSTROM

Professional Gifting (*asi/300000*)

Danielle Reinstrom is constantly selling – through any medium possible. She's landed five-figure clients solely through LinkedIn contacts. She's always sending e-mail blasts to current clients and prospects, looking for new avenues to catch people's eyes with. She creates her own videos and posts them to YouTube and her Facebook page. She runs monthly contests to get clients' attention, and she provides random and spec sample programs that consistently close deals. In all, she's a multifaceted selling machine who uses all the tools available to her. Full speed ahead. – AC

The Entrepreneur

JARED OPPER

Clothpromotions Plus (*asi/45513*)

His company may be a family business, but Jared Oppen is the entrepreneurial vision behind its foray into the ad specialty market. A few years ago Oppen, vice president of operations for Clothpromotions Plus, started the division of his company that now drives its promotional products sales. Plus, Oppen is constantly dreaming up new sales and marketing strategies for distributors to sell Clothpromotion's patented Oppen Fiber screen cleaner. Want more? Oppen recently launched a technology company called Dashboard that helps salespeople turn leads into sales. When does he stop? Probably never. – AC



The Creator

JEFF HENDERSON

Pony Xpress Printing
(*asi/297068*)

If creativity is hot – and we sure think it is – then Jeff Henderson is white-hot right now. As vice president of Pony Xpress Printing, a fast-growing distributorship in Texas, Henderson oversees the company that created one of the most buzzworthy products of 2010: The Abs Shirt. What's an abs shirt, you ask? It's a heat-sensitive T-shirt that shows off a wearer's abs when it gets hot. The company can create any image into a T-shirt and have it be enhanced when exposed to heat. This dose of creativity doesn't even mention the highly unique promotions and marketing programs that Pony Xpress does for its high-level sports clients. If the Dallas Mavericks' owner Mark Cuban thinks the company is hot, who are we to argue? – AC

The Fashion Maven

JEFFREY LEVINE

Golden Goods USA (*asi/57695*)

Jeffrey Levine defines a whole new classification of hip and unique – especially as it relates to the ad specialty market. As cofounder of Golden Goods USA, an apparel supplier that just launched in the industry earlier this year, Levine has most definitely earned his fashion stripes. He also designs his own fashion lines that have been sold in premier retail outlets in 18 countries, including Bloomingdale's, Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus. Levine also created a vintage apparel line called RetroSport that Reebok purchased, and he has designed custom collections for the likes of DKNY, SeanJohn, FUBU, and The Grateful Dead. Now, that's an apparel mind who can shake up the status quo. – AC



The Savvy Socialite

JILL ALBERS

WorkflowOne (*asi/333647*)

Because in her ever-present high-heels, she's a blonde who stands over 6 feet tall. Because in her relatively short time in the industry – seven



years – she's been on the supplier side of the business (at Visions Awards) and the distributor side, at *Counselor* Top 40 distributor WorkflowOne, where she's currently a regional sales manager. Because in 2009

when industry sales were scant, she held her own and gained clients and market share. It's for these reasons alone that you may have met – or at least seen – Albers (“Jilly,” to her nearest and dearest). Haven't had the pleasure? Then consider this: She's also spearheaded an informal, yet critically important event at the Las Vegas show in January – “Tequila Tuesday” at the Border Grille in Mandalay Bay. Looking to boost your business, learn the secret to her success (hint: self-promos!) or discover “the” places to party at a show? Put Jilly on your speed dial. – MB

The Tough-And-Fun Exec

JULIE HARMS

Halo/Lee Wayne (*asi/356000*)

It's rare that someone is tough as nails, smart as a whip AND the life of the party, but that's Julie Harms, the supplier relations administrator at *Counselor* Top 40 distributor Halo/Lee Wayne. Known for creating and planning some of the best supplier account executive networking events in the industry, Harms is so plugged in she shines. “It's her personality-plus,” says Terry McGuire, the company's senior vice president of marketing. “She's the most fun person at every party, and suppliers love her to death, but they realize the fun exterior hides a tough mindset. Fact is, if you're a supplier and want to get anything done with our sales force, you go to Julie to do it.” Enough said. – MB



The Strategist

JOHN BOOTH

Quintain Marketing (*asi/303131*)

John Booth was so successful with social media last year that he built a whole business around it. While his customers' spending was plummeting, Booth embarked on a new marketing campaign through Twitter, Facebook, Yelp and a new blog on his website. He then translated the effort into a new revenue channel by creating a

whole practice area of his company dedicated to advising clients on their own social media strategies. He even brought on eight new clients – on retainer, no less – within the first year of offering the service. An innovative – and successful – plan from an enterprising businessperson, and an expansion model for other distributors to follow. – AC



The Green Guy

JOHN SIMONETTA

Proforma Green Marketing (*asi/300094*)

Looking for a distributor that's truly embracing the eco-friendly movement? John Simonetta is your guy. He even went so far as to change his company name to Proforma Green Marketing. Yeah, he believes in the power of green products for clients' promotional efforts. He espouses his green theories – and lifestyle – in a

popular online blog at www.ecopreneurist.com, where clients and prospects can find new ideas for how to incorporate eco-friendly items into their marketing efforts. Simonetta has embraced the power of green products – and he wants you to do the same. – AC

The Innovator

KATHLEEN MILBIER

AddVenture Products

(*asi/31940*)

Kathleen Milbier of AddVenture Products is a young and energetic marketer with a knack for getting noticed.

In fact, she dreamed up a project recently which fulfills all the goals of building a brand, demonstrating her company's products, increasing sales, getting exposure for herself and her company, and using new media to market. It's the Compressed Kathleen Project. Milbier had a caricature of herself made, printed it on T-shirts and compressed the shirts in plastic packaging (yes, AddVenture sells compressed T-shirts). She then sends the T-shirts out to people, who take pictures of themselves with the compressed T-shirt and put the images on a website. It's a creative promotion that has not only gotten attention in the industry, but has succeeded in giving Milbier that all-important business necessity: a constant conversation. – AC





The Radiant Rebel

KATHLEEN WATTS
The Brandmarket (*asi/145006*)

Pens, lanyards and stress balls just aren't her thing. Kathleen Watts, the California-cool president of The Brandmarket, prefers to promote ideas rather than products – something her customers seem to like. A lot. Her client list is like a screaming billboard of heavy-hitting media magnates, including ESPN, HBO, Disney and Columbia Records. And, while her big personality is a perfect fit for Hollywood, her ego is comparatively itsy-bitsy. This is definitely not a me-first gal. Besides supporting charities like Share Our Selves and Samaritans Purse, Watts mentors students at CSU Fullerton and Chapman University. – *DV*



The Wonder Woman

KIM NEWELL
World Wide Lines (*asi/98290*)

Some bosses frown on their employees using Facebook in the office. Not Kim Newell. The progressive president of World Wide Lines opened a Facebook account for every salesperson and customer service rep in her company. That's right. Every single one. Since, she's encouraged each of her employees to become Facebook friends with their clients, which led to a jump in sales during 2009. When Newell isn't winning over clients online, she's winning business with her safety-first mantra. Simply put, she

knows the rules. CPSIA regulations? Check. Proposition 65 requirements? Check. Pending legislation? Check. Oh, and by the way, she's the first woman president in the history of the 70-year-old company. – *DV*



The Mover & Shaker

KLAUS GRIMM
Blue Moon Promotions
(*asi/141834*)

Granted, his name sounds like that of a character in a James Bond movie, but Klaus Grimm, owner of the Nevada-based Blue Moon Promotions has something considerably less sinister than world

domination on his mind: running his own conglomerate of ad specialty companies. Though he only joined the industry in 2006, his distributorship's growth has been quick, formidable and mainly through acquisition. "It's the fastest way to expand," he says. "We've grown 150% in the last three years." Known as a "party animal" with off-the-charts smarts, Grimm has big plans for his company's expansion into Las Vegas and California. "I'm going at a rate of one acquisition every 12 to 18 months," he says. – *MB*



The Young Gun

KELSEY BRENNAN
Thinkwerx
(*asi/343718*)

His nickname is K-Dog. Maybe it should be K-O. In two short years, Kelsey Brennan has knocked out his Canadian competition, transforming a small screen-printing business he bought into a full-service, do-anything-on-deadline agency. This year, thanks in part to a mega-size deal with the 2010 Alberta Winter Games, Brennan is projecting revenues of \$1.5 million, a 50% increase over 2009. During the three-day event, Brennan's three-person company, called Thinkwerx, sold \$130,000 in merchandise. The former real estate investor and property flipper then took his Winter Games profits and donated 20% to charities. He's clearly authoring quite the success story for any new distributor, but it gets even better when you consider he's just 25. No doubt he's one of the hottest entrepreneurs this side of Saskatchewan. – *DV*

The Shining Star

LEE ROMANO SEQUEIRA
Sparkle Plenty Designs (*asi/88444*)

What do Rachel Bilson, Al Gore and Lee Romano Sequeira have in common?

They all have more than 5,000 followers on Twitter, of course. These days Sequeira, an Internet marketing maven, is shining as brightly as the Swarovski crystal-embellished T-shirts her company creates. A current fashion phenom

and former New York publicity power player, her nationally known clients include NASA and the Dallas Cowboys. Besides T-shirts, her business, Sparkle Plenty Designs, also offers crystal-covered hats, headbands, jewelry and even body tattoos. And while you can find Sequeira frequently on Twitter (she has the most followers of anybody in the industry), she also has multiple Facebook pages that combine a little humor with a ton of shimmering style. Certainly her creative designs are hot and so is she. – *DV*





The Service Standout

LISA MADISON
AspenLine (asi/37159)

While her humdrum title of business manager may seem plain, there's nothing ordinary about AspenLine's Lisa Madison. Clients across the country rave about her get-it-done attitude. Coworkers gush with praise for Madison, calling her vision for growing the Arizona-based company "groundbreaking." So what's her secret? Personalization. Madison doesn't blindly blast out e-mails with uniform product flyers. Instead, she works to personalize a set of sales tools for each distributor. She specializes in need-it-yesterday orders and can juggle jobs without forgetting product and client details. If you want to experience the personal touch that's burning up the industry, get to know this extraordinary customer-pleaser. — DV

The Sweetheart

MELINDA WATSON
Advanced Embroidery & Promotions
(asi/109005)

They say everything is bigger in Texas. Apparently, hearts are included and Melinda Watson has one of the biggest. Carefully she



crafts a variety of often awe-inspiring pieces, but she might take the most pride in spawning baby blankets. A professional heart-string tugger, Watson posts photos

on Facebook of her customers' newborns wrapped in her embroidered masterpieces. But, the love doesn't end there. This past Valentine's Day, Watson mailed Sweet Tart candy heart boxes to nearby businesses, hoping to connect with potential customers in a unique way. Her follow-up "warm calls" were much better received than sometimes silence-spurring, nerve-racking cold calls. Her clever ideas and superior stitchwork make Watson a hot commodity. — DV

The Environmentalist

MARK TROTZUK
Boardroom Custom Clothing
(asi/40705)

If you were sculpting a Mount Rushmore of eco-friendly industry leaders, Mark Trozduk's face just might be the first one you'd carve. While many apparel manufacturers offer organic options, Boardroom Custom Clothing (BCC) has gone further. Much, much further. Currently, Trozduk's championing an eight-step closed-loop system garment-recycling program. Translation: BCC will take back any of its old polyester clothing and turn it into new polyester clothing. The process stresses a low environmental impact that ends with a high-quality garment that customers love. With Trozduk at the helm, BCC promises materials will be tested, sourcing will be ethical and manufacturing will be local. That combination makes Trozduk one of the hottest apparel players in the industry. — DV



The Risk-Taker

NANCY CAROTHERS
EYB Promotions (asi/470631)



Nancy Carothers could've been making a huge mistake. In 2007 in Columbus, IN, she bought some embroidery machines and started EYB Promotions. And, while she had quite the entrepreneurial spirit, she knew absolutely nothing about embroidery. Now three years

and hundreds of custom projects later, Carothers can claim success. With an underdog story fitting for the Hoosier State, EYB has successfully expanded to offer laser engraving, silk screening and promotional products. Most recently, Carothers has made her company a Web wonder, marketing through Facebook, Twitter and a frequently updated blog that includes videos. — DV

The Cover Boy

NATE RODRIGUEZ
Cutter & Buck (asi/47965)

Brad Pitt has some new competition. With charm, sophistication and excellent posing skills, Nate Rodriguez ranks as one of the hottest promo celebrities (and catalog models) anywhere. Always advancing the Cutter & Buck brand, Rodriguez earns more frequent flier miles than George Clooney in *Up in the Air*. And, when he's not at the airport, he's probably the center of attention at a trade show, known for his fun and ubiquitous style. Young, trendy and the life of any promotional products party, Rodriguez is one cover boy you should search out. — DV



The Dye Guy

NATHAN BROWN
Dyenomite (*asi/51185*)

In the beginning, he did it for the beer. Nathan Brown, a student at Ohio State in the late 1990s, ran a screen-printing press to make some extra cash.



With the money he made, he'd occasionally buy some buzz-bringing refreshment. But by 2000, he had a chance to seize a much more lucrative business opportunity. That year, with two partners and just one customer,

Brown founded Dyenomite. Since, the fast-growing company has flooded the market with hand-made, multicolor tie-dye shirts. Today, he has a little more money to spare than during his days at OSU. But one thing hasn't changed. Every day, Brown is still creating something fresh and new, making him one of the hottest young execs you'll find. – DV



The Producer

PAUL SHRATER
Minimus LLC (*asi/71357*)

Paul Shrater knows how to make it big. Long before he founded aptly-named Minimus, he produced television shows and films with some of the most influential names in Hollywood. But, his latest script just might be his greatest work of all. At the end of a vacation in New Hampshire, Shrater realized he was throwing away bottles and bottles of stuff. There had to be a better, less wasteful way, he thought. Soon after, Minimus was born. From cosmetics to toys to specialty foods, Minimus offers a travel-size promotional version of almost anything. With his big idea to make things small, Shrater is as hot as the California sun. – DV



The Geeky Goddess

SANDY GONZALEZ
MadeToOrder (*asi/259540*)

Every good company needs a geek. At least Sandy Gonzalez can make her geekiness look hot. A senior partner at MadeToOrder, Gonzalez often pours through tech manuals, breathing life into web-sites and dull data. But don't be fooled by the nerdy glasses she whips out at night. Gonzalez made her reputation as an idea generator and her creative flame still burns bright. Resourceful and self-driven, she is also a pretty fun boss. MadeToOrder has made two appearances on *Counselor's* Best Places To Work list. The Pleasanton, CA-based distributor lives up to its location's lofty billing, and Gonzalez is a big reason why. – DV

The Design Divas

SARAH & JENIFER CAPLAN
Footzyrolls (*asi/54915*)

Some girls listen to their heart. These girls listen to their feet. Sarah and Jenifer Caplan have burst onto the retail and promotional red carpet with their chic but practical product called footzyrolls. Years of wearing painful heels around



town gave these stylish sisters an idea. In 2009, they ran with it, creating rollable relief in the form of comfortable slipper-like shoes that can be worn on any surface. Since their launch, footzyrolls have been featured on *Oprah* and *Good Morning America*, and have been used to promote feature films like *Sex and the City 2*. As if they weren't hot enough already, the Caplans soon expect to reach \$5 million in sales. With fashionable, yet functional footwear, this pair is clearly on a roll. – DV

The Hot Family

ELY, SHARON & TALY EYAL
ETS Express (*asi/51197*)

Drinkware is no longer drab. Siblings Sharon and Taly Eyal and their father Ely Eyal have made plastic fantastic and acrylic terrific. The trendy tri-umvirate at ETS Express has invented a total branding experience from drinkware. Clients can choose from a limitless bank of colorful designs,



paper inserts and custom packaging options. The company's spirit tumbler has become especially popular, known for its double wall and included straw. Every three months ETS also prints a new promotion book with new products and prices. The fashion-forward formula is working, making this talented trio of executives the hottest around. – DV



The Marketing Magician

TIFFANY ZIOMEK

Spectrum Uniforms (*asi/88680*)

When a company recruits you from halfway across the country and creates a position just to bring you in, you're probably pretty hot. Tiffany Ziomek certainly is that. With a background in the fashion industry, Ziomek came to Texas-based Spectrum Uniforms to inject some flair and pizzazz. Mission accomplished. As the company's marketing manager, she's developed several new print and electronic sales tools for distributors. She's created buzz by connecting collegiate logos to uniforms. And she's been instrumental in installing in-house decoration services. It's safe to say this Texas native knows how to bring the heat. – DV



The Game-Changer

WARREN STRUHL

DYR Design Your Recognition (*asi/48051*)

The playing field is tilting and serial entrepreneur Warren Struhl has the edge. The CEO of DYR Design Your Recognition is the driving force behind a new online platform that is reshaping the awards business. The cutting-edge process allows customers to build their own recognition program in real time, erasing the need for tedious artwork exchanges and costly samples. Text can be added and pictures can be uploaded. Even proofing can be done on-screen. What used to take days has been trimmed to a few mouse-clicking minutes. It's clear DYR's leader is using hot new ideas to get the recognition revolution underway. – DV



The Creative Grower

TONIA ALLEN GOULD

TAG! The Creative Source (*asi/341358*)

With big-name entertainment-industry clients and a slew of creative promotions under her belt, Tonia Allen Gould is making a name for herself in the industry. TAG! The Creative Source – yes, the name of the company has an exclamation point in it; very bold – has become one of the fastest-growing distributors in the market (even showing double-digit increases last year), and with its Southern California location and roster of big-name clients, also one of the coolest. Plus, with Gould as the leader, the firm is a woman-owned operation that's laying the foundation for others in the industry. – AC



The Innovators

WILLIE VADNAIS & JEN FRAZIER

Think Geek (*asi/91123*)

Who would ever think to design a T-shirt that includes an electric guitar? Well, Willie Vadnais, Jen Frazier and the smart people at Think Geek did. That's one of the growing number of reasons why the company's cofounders are scorching hot. And, by the way, this super-hip *Counselor* Product Design Award-winning T-shirt is not a toy. We're talking about a shirt with a built-in guitar, allowing a user to rock out by playing actual musical chords. Not impressed yet? Think Geek has plenty of other ingenious products, like fragrance fido charms, cosmic catnip bubbles and steadily swinging clocks. The company's website is a cradle of coolness and a haven of hotness. – DV