



DISTRIBUTOR SALES SUPERSTARS OF THE YEAR

In its second-annual Distributor Sales Rep of the Year contest, *SGR's* sister publication, *Advantages*, shines a light on a powerhouse performer and two runners-up.

BY JENNIFER VISHNEVSKY

Energetic →



**SALES REP
OF THE YEAR**
Mark McCormack

► Distributor Sales Rep of the Year

As if more than doubling his sales and winning two international requests for proposals (RFPs) last year wasn't impressive enough, Mark McCormack also spent 2010 taking a new approach with clients and prospects.

The super-selling owner of Proforma Identity Marketing Group (*asi/300094*), who is responsible for 80% of the sales, has transitioned to selling complete programs which incorporate e-commerce, technology and multimedia into the mix. "It's been phenomenally successful. We've taken all of the elements and put them into one program. When someone asks me if I'm a promo guy, I tell them that I work at a comprehensive branding and deployment agency," he says.

McCormack points out the importance of starting up the right conversation the first meeting. "Instead of pitching an item, we explain that we do more. If they look at me as the guy who sells hats once a year, they won't think of us as the total resource," he says.

Positioning his company as that total resource has paid off. In 2009, total sales were \$1.6 million and the company was slated to reach \$3.3 million in 2010. In a nutshell, that's our winner.

SALES SUPERSTARS



Mark McCormack (center) and the team at Proforma Identity Marketing Group.

Where it All Started

Hailing from Omaha, NE, McCormack ventured out of state to Northwest Missouri State University, where he majored in fine arts. “When I was getting out of school, my dad had a friend who bought a promo products company. All of his employees quit and he didn’t have anyone, so he asked me to do some artwork. Then, I went on a sales call,” he says.

What happened next was eye-opening. McCormack went out to sell pens and wound up getting a \$20,000 order. When he came home to tell his girlfriend Jennifer, who is now his wife and does the billing and runs the office, she asked him if he was going to get paid commission. He asked his boss, who told him that he would. He realized that his commission from two hours was more than he had made in the last two months. “I was doing 94% of their sales and nobody else was really selling,” he says. Starting his own business was enticing. “But, it was like the video game Frogger. I didn’t want to jump off the curb and get hit by the bus. I didn’t have the cash flow to put into a new business and I wasn’t ready to mortgage my house,” he says.

However, McCormack met up with a Proforma recruiter at a trade show and left that first promo products company almost seven years ago. He began his business by searching the phone

book and calling all of the places that had big ads, which translated to a big budget.

Fast-Forward to Today

He’s come a long way since then. Now, McCormack has two support people who manage accounts and two full-time graphic artists that help with the creative part. And while he handles the bulk of the sales (in December alone, he had about 300 orders), the other 20% is handled by his mother, a retired schoolteacher who has an in and does a great job with the educational market.

Having a background in design helps McCormack stay at the top of creativity, both product-wise and in regard to tools he creates for his clients. “I can present 20 products in 20 minutes. This allows me to float ideas to see what sticks and resonates with a client. Out of the 20 items, I know the products that will work and I can guide the client to the right ones through dialogue with

LIGHTNING ROUND

- **Favorite drink:** Margaritas
- **Favorite meal:** Ribs
- **Favorite musical artist:** White Stripes
- **Favorite season:** Spring
- **Favorite sports teams:** Boston Red Sox, University of Nebraska Huskers
- **Favorite color:** Green
- **Astrological sign:** Capricorn



Motivated →

them on rollout, budget and lead times,” he says.

“I’m a gadget guy, so rather than go play basketball, I check and see what I can create. I’ll end up creating a tool that I can pitch across different industries, which translates into sales,” McCormack adds.

One example is his creation of an inventory-less company store for a client to help them save money and speed up the ordering process. “Most company stores start as a way to liquidate trade-show inventory. But if an item has been in a store for three months and it’s not getting any traffic, it shouldn’t be there,” he says.

McCormack decided that the inventory-less store was a great way to manage the pipeline. “The inventory is a huge burden, either for the client or for the distributor,” he says. “I had a client last year that wanted about nine pages of inventory on items. The cost for carrying one of every size in every color the client desired would have been over \$500,000 in inventory. And that is for only one of each color in each size.”

While this would have been a huge sale, the client usage would have never equaled the volume to justify it and, “I would look like a crook,” McCormack says. “I presented the inventory-less solution and we were awarded a long-term deal that will be much more profitable in the long run.”



LIGHTNING ROUND

- **Favorite drink:** Coca-Cola
- **Favorite meal:** Chicken cordon bleu
- **Favorite musical artist:** Billy Joel
- **Favorite season:** Fall
- **Favorite sport:** Soccer or boxing
- **Favorite color:** Purple and black
- **Pet:** Dog, she’s a rescue
- **Astrological sign:** Aries



department. Then, he broke into the mortgage industry as a loan officer. After figuring out the business, he decided to go on his own and opened a brokerage branch, which he ran for over two years, until he noticed a decline in the mortgage industry. He was ready for a change.

He found an opportunity that was all in the family. His mother, Heather, is the CEO of Overture, so Sanderson came onboard and went after Fortune 500 companies. At age 26, he is the youngest sales rep at the company, not to mention,

a single dad to Ashton, who is 7.

“The transition from mortgages to promotional products was a huge learning curve. As far as the sales side, I had done a lot of cold calling and networking, so I had to learn more about products and industry terms,” he says.

As a prior entrepreneur, Sanderson has learned to build relationships and secure multi-million dollar sales. When he came to Overture, he took part in the mentoring program, working

► The Runners-Up

It took two major moves and a huge career shift for Cody Sanderson to land at Overture, but the result has been

plentiful. Born in Montana, he moved with his family to the San Francisco Bay Area as a kid. When he was a senior in high school, they moved to Illinois, his current home.

Sanderson attended the College of Lake County in Waukegan, IL, and right out of school, went to work at a credit union in the member services



OVERTURE PREMIUMS & PROMOS LLC (asi/288473)
Cody Sanderson

SALES SUPERSTARS

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CODY SANDERSON,
OVERTURE PREMIUMS & PROMOS LLC (asi/288473)

with industry leaders. He secured well over \$1 million in sales for 2010 after being in the industry for only three years. “I really like going into large corporations and working with them on their marketing initiatives. My favorite things are both the creative side and then closing a big sale,” he says.

Sanderson educates his clients about smart buying and planning out a promotion. “I’m constantly striving to change our customers’ image of the promotional products industry. I’m providing them with solutions that tie into the brand initiative,” he says.

One such project is finalizing a contract with a major beverage and bottling company. “I reached out to them for almost a year and a half making contacts. We finally got an opportunity to do a request for proposal,” he says. Overture flew the potential client in to take a tour of the facility. Sanderson made a presentation that blew them away: “They went back home and selected us as the vendor to work on custom projects and national programs,” he says.

And while it might sound like Sanderson is all work, he takes time out for concerts, cooking and adventures with Ashton. Most recently, the father-son duo wrapped Christmas presents for needy children. “I told Ashton that I received a top-secret letter from Santa Claus and that Santa needed his help,” he says.

When it comes to fresh, creative ideas, look no further than Nina Shatz. In May 2010, Shatz joined Red Ball Promotions (a division of Triad Advertising) as head of sales. With just about a year under her belt, her sales volume in 2010 was at least \$500,000.

Her path to Red Ball is definitely nontraditional. In college, Shatz worked for the New York State Senate as a legislative assistant. After school, she planned to go to law school. “My car was packed and ready to go. I pulled out of the driveway and changed my mind. I had no clue what I wanted to do,” she says. She worked for a year at a camp, doing special events, and was referred to a program at Brandeis University, where she earned her Master’s in nonprofit management.

During her program, Shatz had a few internships,

one of which was working with the special-needs department of the Jewish Community Center (JCC) of Greater Boston. She went on to become the youth director at Striar JCC and moved her way up the chain to become Jewish family educator.

Shatz did a lot of programming and fundraising within the building and partnered with other nonprofit organizations, which led to a natural progression to promotional products. She broke into the industry in 2005, and later found the Red Ball opportunity through social media. “A partner at Triad reached out to me on LinkedIn,” she says.

So how did Shatz get her sales off the ground so quickly? A few unique projects didn’t hurt. Think: condoms. She wrote an order for 100,000 condoms for The AIDS Support Group of Cape Cod, co-sponsored by the Massachusetts Board of

Feisty →



LIGHTNING ROUND

- **Favorite drink:** Cosmopolitan
- **Favorite meal:** Chocolate or all things Chinese
- **Favorite musical artist:** Neil Diamond
- **Favorite season:** Summer
- **Favorite sports team:** I’m a huge Yankees fan, although that’s very scary in Boston.
- **Favorite color:** Purple
- **Pet:** A hamster named Zeke
- **Astrological sign:** Virgo



Health. “My favorite slogan that they used was, “This is Just Between You and Me,”” she says.

In addition, each summer, the same group orders fashion-forward T-shirts to give out. If someone fills out an anonymous survey for the Board of Health, they get a package with the T-shirt and some condoms. “I’ve been doing that order every year now. It’s very amusing when you see my files and it says water bottles, robes, condoms, shirts,” she says.

Shatz is also currently working on an internal training program for a high-end hotel chain, where she put together a “party in a box” for each hotel to bring together all employees to kick off the program. She came up with the idea of a Girl Scout-type pin that everyone receives. The managers can give employees other pins that they earn through acts of professionalism, passion and kindness at the workplace.

Being a foodie helped her land one of her favorite clients. Before Guy Fieri was the host of *Minute to Win It*, Shatz noticed that Fieri always wore a terrycloth wristband. So she sent an e-mail to his website, telling them that she’d love to send a pink wristband for him to wear in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and got a response from his manager asking for wristbands with Guy’s logo on it. She wound up doing bobbleheads and plenty more for the account, too.

A day at Red Ball looks perfectly busy. Shatz gets at least 10 orders a day, which gives her a chance to be creative. “It’s a lot like being a personal shopper on a very different level. You’re able to create long-lasting relationships. That’s not something you get in every job,” she says.

She’s no slacker in her “free time,” either. She’s mom to a 10-year old daughter and 22-year-old stepdaughter. Two nights a week, she taps back into her JCC roots and teaches seventh-grade Hebrew. And if you’re headed to The ASI Show Orlando, stop by and meet Shatz for yourself. She’s presenting “Secrets to Penetrate the Billion-Dollar Education Market,” on January 23 from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m.

► Spotlight on a Sales Team

Sometimes, you just can’t pick one. That’s the issue that Rachel Levin ran into. The marketing/sales manager at Moti-

vators Inc. (*asi/277780*), was struggling to choose one member to spotlight from the 10-person sales team. So, she nominated everyone.

Levin did so with good reason. In the past six years, Motivators has had an increase in sales of more than 375%. It’s been voted a top place to work and among the fastest-growing small businesses in the U.S. Each member of the sales team strives to reach more than \$100,000 in sales each month. The team averages more than 1,000 orders per month.

They also have a wide range of experience levels, ranging from employees who have been there since the near beginning, like Greg Hill, to newbies like Ali Derkatch.

Hill started with Motivators more than six years ago. In the beginning, he did everything from order entry to customer service. Three years ago, he moved to Massachusetts with his wife and began working remotely. Even though he’s not in the office, he feels like he’s in the thick of it all. “The rest

of the sales team has been super-helpful and does some leg-work for me,” he says.

That all-for-one mentality makes all the difference. Everyone brings something special to the table, and they are all working toward the same objective: success for everyone.

“We come from different backgrounds, but our personalities mesh very well together,” says Derkatch, who’s been with the company for a little over a year. She’s a recent college grad from the University of Miami, where she studied advertising and marketing. “My favorite thing is that I’m always busy and I get to be creative,” she says. As for the team she says, “We have the same goal in mind, but everyone has their own specialty.” 🌐 🌐

Jennifer Vishnevsky is a staff writer for Advantages magazine, Supplier Global Resource’s sister publication for distributor sales reps.

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