



2012 POWER 50

Meet the most influential executives in today's ad specialty market.

By Michele Bell, Andy Cohen, Joe Haley & C.J. Mittica

When gauging influence

and, yes, power, you can look at many factors. Business success is important. Sheer size of a company that an executive runs matters. But, there are intangibles, as well. Who is shifting strategies – and winning? Who is mentoring others in the market, and setting an agenda that many want to follow?

These are the attributes we look at when choosing members of the annual *Counselor* Power 50. The 2012 group has all of the traits above – and then some.

The people on the following pages set the agenda for the market, provide successful examples for others to follow, and ultimately, dictate how business is done in the ad specialty industry. You'll find the 1-50 rankings along with reasons for why they place where they do on the list. Indicated along with each profile is where they placed on last year's list, to reflect their changing influence on the market. Rankings are often based on a survey *Counselor* conducts, which asks the industry and the Power 50 themselves to rate whether each person on last year's list has gained or lost influence over the past 12 months.

Turn the page to see the 2012 Power 50, as well as five profiles of members of this year's Power 50 class who stand out from the crowd. Plus, wondering how this group views the market outlook, what they do in their spare time, and who they'd pay to hear give a speech? Check out the infographics that begin on page 68.

1 MARTY LOTT
SANMAR (ASI/84863)
2011 RANK: 2
Leading a perennial Distributor Choice Award winner, as well as receiving overwhelmingly positive votes from both the Power 50 and the industry, Lott moves up one spot to again capture the top spot on the list. If customer service is the key to industry success, then Lott is leading the way. He was also number one in 2008.

2 KEVIN LYONS-TARR
4IMPRINT (ASI/197045)
2011 RANK: 3
The 2012 *Counselor* Person of the Year moves up one spot to number two after consecutive years (2012 and 2011) of double-digit revenue growth for 4imprint. Providing a model of online and catalog business that others in the industry are trying to emulate, Lyons-Tarr is offering the industry a success roadmap.

3 MICHAEL BERNSTEIN & DAVID NICHOLSON
POLYCONCEPT
2011 RANK: 1
Bernstein takes the place of Philippe Varnier and Yann Leca on the Power 50 list, after he was installed as CEO of Polyconcept earlier this year. Nicholson, president of Polyconcept North America (Bullet, Journalbooks, Leed's, Trimark Sportswear), joins Bernstein, as PCNA represents the second-largest supplier firm in the industry.

4 ERIC BENSUSSEN & JAY DEUTSCH
BDA (ASI/137616)
2011 RANK: 6
The duo at the helm of BDA jumps three spots after receiving high scores for improved influence from both the industry and the Power 50. With more than \$300 million in ad specialty sales, BDA has also grown its business by more than 20% each of the past two years.

5 GREG MUZZILLO & VERA MUZZILLO
PROFORMA (ASI/300094)
2011 RANK: 4
After growing revenues by double digits in recent years, the heads of Proforma retain their top-five spot on the Power 50. The tandem, however, received low scores for increased influence from the industry and move down just one spot on this year's Power 50.

6 MARC SIMON
HALO BRANDED SOLUTIONS (ASI/356000)
2011 RANK: 5
Solidifying his place in the top 10, Simon continues to oversee a growing operation at Halo, which completed two acquisitions in 2012. Halo itself was also sold in May of this year, moving from equity firm Compass Diversified Holdings to PSP Capital Partners.

7 GENE GEIGER & JO-AN LANTZ
GEIGER (ASI/202900)
2011 RANK: 9
Geiger and Lantz move up two spots in the top 10 after overseeing 12% growth last year and showing a similar growth pattern in 2012. The company is also a model in the market for green operations, as it signed a carbon neutral deal with UPS in October to ensure the eco-friendliness of all of its shipments.

8 RICH WITASZAK
STAPLES PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS (ASI/120601)
2011 RANK: 8
Witaszak, who oversees the promotional products division of office retailer Staples, retains his number-eight position after growing sales by 7% in 2011. The division has shown similar growth patterns this year, and is the largest distributor in the ad specialty market.

9 DAVID WOODS
AIA CORPORATION (ASI/109480)
2011 RANK: 11
In growth mode for the past few years (including a 17% increase in sales last year), Woods and AIA have been shooting up the Power 50 and Top 40. Woods jumps three spots after receiving positive influence ratings from both the Power 50 and the industry.

3 MICHAEL BERNSTEIN & DAVID NICHOLSON POLYCONCEPT THE STABILIZERS

“You’re not going to compare me to Michael Corleone, are you?” laughs Michael Bernstein, the recently-installed chairman and CEO of Polyconcept, referring to the famous *Godfather* quote from Vito’s favorite son: “Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in.”

He’s asking because Bernstein, though he’s always retained a seat on the Polyconcept board, had, in fact, left the industry entirely three years ago to run his boutique guitar company and immerse himself in the music industry. But as of May of this year, he was back in the promotional products business and at the helm of the world’s largest supplier company.

The why of that is the real question. “The reality was that Polyconcept was facing significant challenges in Europe for a number of reasons, and the Board asked if I would get involved, and I thought I could potentially help,” Bernstein says, adding that he felt a sense of loyalty to the company, as his father founded Leed’s, the flagship entity within Polyconcept North America. “The opportunity to transform the business model in Europe to more reflect what we’ve been successful doing in North America was a terrific challenge. Time will tell if everything we’re planning works, but from a business challenge standpoint, coming back to the industry felt like the right next step for me.”

When asked about his outlook for the industry in 2013, Bernstein points out that his perception is framed in an international context as he’s spent the majority of this year in markets outside the U.S. “While the North American market appears to be stable and could continue to grow at a moderate rate, the problems in Europe will continue into 2013 and possibly beyond,” he says. “We anticipate the European market to be down around 10% in 2013, after declines of approximately 15% overall in 2012 and 10% down in the second half of 2011. The European crisis is having a ripple effect throughout the world and poses significant risks to the North American market, so we’re taking an overall conservative approach to 2013.”

Just how conservative? “I think it’s a difficult period for the industry and global economy in general,” Bernstein says. “We’re expecting industry revenues in North America to be moderately up 1%-3% barring any major macroeconomic disruptions. For our companies, we’re looking at growth of 4%-8% before taking into account new initiatives such as our apparel launch into the U.S.”

David Nicholson, who oversees the company’s U.S. and Canadian business as president of Polyconcept North America, views the official launch of Trimark apparel into the U.S. market as the company’s major initiative next year. “This is our top priority for 2013 and we’re very excited to bring it to our distributors,” he says. “We will be hiring more employees next year to support the growth of our core businesses as well as our apparel expansion.”

With Bernstein’s main goal for next year to “increase profitability,” he aims to develop a truly global supplier company that gives Polyconcept an opportunity to leverage its scale and expansive geographic positioning. “It seems to be the time in the industry when scale is going to become more of an issue,” Bernstein says. “I don’t think the global industry is growing, nor do I think it has long-term growth prospects that are dramatic, so it comes down to being more efficient and doing things better to gain market share. In most industries that are mature like ours, the largest players who use their assets most effectively tend to be the winners.” – MB



MICHAEL BERNSTEIN



DAVE NICHOLSON

17 BONNI SHEVIN-SANDY DARD DESIGN THE INTERNATIONALIST

“Innovation. Creativity. Uniqueness.” It’s the tagline of Dard Design International, but does a fair job describing what its president and CEO, Bonni Shevin-Sandy, brings to the table as well.

Dard Design was officially incorporated in March 2011, and at that time the company was generating a seven-figure sales revenue. Shevin-Sandy had started doing custom work in the overseas marketplace 10 years earlier, as an offshoot of *Counselor* Top 40 supplier Dard Products, the third-generation company her family owns. But soon Dard Design became her sole focus and passion, and she made the unusual decision to separate it from the parent company.

“This year we moved into our own facility 20 minutes from the supplier company we were once part of,” Shevin-Sandy says. “I only work with one distributor in each end-user account and partner with them to the fullest capacity – we don’t work with our partners’ competition, which is the key to our growth. Sometimes being more selective with clients is better – this is how to build a strategic alliance. As a Top 40 supplier in the industry, Dard Products traditional business plan wouldn’t allow for the strategic alliances my select partners needed for growth.” Is her plan working? Apparently, as Dard Design tripled its revenue in 2012.

Consider that in 1993, with 10 years of formal education and training as a psychologist, Shevin-Sandy was poised to work in that field. But her father, Cary Shevin, and grandfather, Jack – who founded *Counselor* Top 40 supplier Dard – urged her to give the family business a try for one year. “I had to work my way up, which was a challenge, but a good one as I learned all facets of the business,” she says.

But her real talent, perhaps because of her psych background, was selling. When her grandfather and father gave Shevin-Sandy a list of 12 accounts that weren’t doing much business with Dard Products at the time, she quadrupled their sales.

Cut to 2001, when she opened up the import division within Dard and called it Dard Design International (DDI). “I grew it double digits every year,” Shevin-Sandy says. “DDI does a large portion of business in import sales, so I partnered with a design house and then opened a Hong Kong office. In addition, I was in charge of product development, so I’ve designed hundreds of items and patented over 40 worldwide.”

Counselor named Shevin-Sandy its International Person of the Year in 2009, and she’s been living up to that title ever since. “When I started doing business abroad, my very first custom order was for \$1.1 million,” she says.

She’s overseas about six weeks out of the year, and despite a global economy that can most charitably be described as “tumultuous,” Shevin-Sandy’s gift for selling remains. “There are always opportunities, and every time I go overseas I make new connections and come back with new international clients,” she says. “Right now, we’re manufacturing, warehousing, fulfilling and shipping to more than 48 countries.”

More recently, inspired by her mother, Harriet, Shevin-Sandy decided to, as she says, take her company “to the next level.” “Earlier this year, Dard Design was given the designation of a Woman-Owned Certified Business,” she says. “It was always 100% run by me, and managed by Danielle Torres, and we have several clients who have long-term relationships with *Fortune* 500 companies. It’s these corporations that have established supplier-diversity programs, and our distributor clients urged me to explore woman-owned certification. As a woman-owned company, DDI will now be able to meet the requirements of supplier-diversity initiatives in these larger, *Fortune* 500 accounts. We choose to partner, not just supply.” – MB



BONNI SHEVIN-SANDY

10 DALE ADAMS
OMNICOM DAS
2011 RANK: N/A
Adams is the highest-ranked newcomer to the 2012 Power 50. He oversees the division at ad agency giant Omnicom, parent to Group II Communications and TIC, two separate Top 40 distributors (ranked number four and 15, respectively) that are both growing and combined would total more than \$300 million in annual sales.

11 BOB LEDERER, JEFF LEDERER & PAULA SHULMAN
PRIME LINE (ASI/79530)
2011 RANK: 16
The Prime Line group is rated highly by both the Power 50 and the industry at large, and its members oversee a growing operation (17% in 2011) that has successfully integrated new lines (Leeman, Built NY) into its offerings.

12 TREVOR GNESIN
LOGOMARK (ASI/67866)
2011 RANK: 12
After launching two new brands in the past couple of years (Val-uemark and 99centpromos.com), Gnesin has successfully overseen his company’s move into new product lines. He has also turned his company into a technology leader in the market, following its introduction of interactive mobile apps.

13 JONATHAN ISAACSON
GEMLINE (ASI/56070)
2011 RANK: 14
Isaacson moves up one spot on the Power 50 after receiving positive influence ratings from his fellow Power 50 members. A perennial Distributor Choice Award winner, Gemline has also become a go-to supplier in the industry.

14 ROSS SILVERSTEIN
IPROMOTEU (ASI/232119)
2011 RANK: 15
After growing revenues by more than 25% last year at his company, Silverstein jumps up one spot in the Power 50. iPROMOTEU continues to add distributors to its affiliate ranks (now with more than 700), and has increased its sales by 75% in the past five years.

15 JACK MA
ALIBABA GROUP
2011 RANK: 13
Despite growing his company’s revenues by 60% in the first half of 2012 (to reach \$1.8 billion), Ma falls two spots on the Power 50. Also, while Alibaba had tried to make a splash last year with a U.S.-based ad campaign, the company’s U.S. business has stagnated.

16 IRA NEAMAN
VANTAGE APPAREL (ASI/93390)
2011 RANK: 22
Neaman vaults into the top 20 this year after receiving high influence scores. His company is a leader in the imprinted apparel space, and is a consistent winner of *Counselor*’s Distributor Choice Award.

17 BONNI SHEVIN-SANDY
DARD PRODUCTS (ASI/48500)
2011 RANK: 23
Sandy, who also received high influence ratings from the industry and other Power 50 members, jumps up six spots on this year’s list. She is a key industry player on the international stage, and is a trusted voice on global economic and product safety issues.

18 GLENN CHAMANDY
GILDAN ACTIVEWEAR
2011 RANK: 20
While Gildan grew its revenues by 32% last year, Chamandy jumps two spots thanks to his company’s acquisition of competitor Anvil Knitwear. Gildan is now an even bigger player in the apparel market – as well as one of the largest companies represented on the Power 50.

19 BILL SCHMIDT SR., CJ SCHMIDT & BILL SCHMIDT JR.
HIT PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS (ASI/61125)
2011 RANK: 27
The Schmidt family takes the largest jump on the Power 50, making a leap into the top 20 after showing impressive sales growth (30% last year and 125% in the last five years), becoming a customer service industry model (double Distributor Choice Award winner this year) and receiving high scores for influence.

21 ERIC BELCHER INNERWORKINGS THE GROWER



ERIC BELCHER

These are the facts. When Eric Belcher joined InnerWorkings (*asi/168860*) in 2005, the company had 97% of its business based in Illinois. The company's yearly revenue was \$76.5 million. Today, the distributor has recorded seven straight quarters of growth; is on pace for revenue between \$780 and \$810 million in 2012; underwent a massive international expansion; and is knocking on the door of becoming a Top 10 distributor in the ad specialty industry. Says Belcher, who became CEO in 2009: "I, along with others at InnerWorkings, had the vision of becoming a major global player across all physical branded marketing materials."

That's about the biggest personal boast that can be elicited out of the company president and CEO. While Belcher staunchly believes in his company's unique approach – "We're convinced it's the way of the future," is a common sentiment of his – he nimbly deflects any notion of sole ownership for InnerWorkings' rapid success. For example, what effect has Belcher had on the culture of the company?

"We ultimately measure ourselves based on our clients' opinion of us," says the 44-year-old, mentioning the company's 98% client retention rate. "That's a big part of the culture. And that hasn't changed, and I don't expect it to change going forward based on the way in which we manage our business."

While many of the same values have been maintained on the inside, outward success has come quickly. The publicly-traded company grew its promotional product revenue by 27% from 2007 to 2011, and is slated to grow its overall revenue in 2012 by as much as 22% compared to last year. Belcher admits the company is in "full-blown growth mode right now."

So, how has the Chicago-based distributor done it? It starts with its method of doing business – offering an array of branded services, which include promotional products as well as print management, direct mail, signage, fulfillment and more. The offering, Belcher says, is unique and enticing to its clients, even if it takes some effort to convince corporations that they should look to a single provider for all of these services.

"It takes quite a bit of education and trust," he says. "Yet it's a logical approach, and therefore, once we have an opportunity to show a client what we mean, how it works and our track record ... it can be a very convincing and persuasive argument."

Next, Belcher spearheaded an aggressive expansion. InnerWorkings raised its national profile and then made a global jump, rising from selling in just a half-dozen countries a couple of years ago to 44 countries today, with flagship offices in Brazil and France. Its strategy is to expand to the international markets in which its *Fortune* 500 clients are located to help service them better. (For example, InnerWorkings is now working with one high-level client in 15 different countries.) Besides some additional planned expansion in Asia, the distributor is focusing on fleshing out the international strongholds it has built. "I don't think we'll be looking to grow from 44 countries to 200 countries in the next two years," Belcher says. "It's more about growing with existing and new clients in markets where we're established but not currently supporting them."

What else is on Belcher's plate? Additional collaboration across countries. Diversifying its client portfolio by working with middle market-sized companies. And, establishing internal creative studios, as it did for one *Fortune* 500 company. With no signs of let-up, the company's rapid rise validates the vision set forth years ago. It even allows Belcher to indulge in a moment of pride. "We've been thinking big all along," he says. "Along the way, we were told our approach wouldn't work, particularly from people within our industry. But we hear that a little less now." – *CJM*

20
NICOLAS PAILLOT & EMMANUEL BRUNO
NORWOOD & BIC GRAPHIC NORTH AMERICA
2011 RANK: 10
Emmanuel Bruno, who became vice president and general manager for Norwood & BIC Graphic North America earlier this year, joins Nicolas Paillot on the list for 2012. After the supplier's sales fell by 9% in 2011 and by 35% over the past five years, though, the duo drops 10 spots in the Power 50.

21
ERIC BELCHER
INNERWORKINGS (*ASI/168860*)
2011 RANK: 25
Growth and expansion are on the menu for this print and promo products company. InnerWorkings has filed record revenue growth for every quarter this year, averaging more than 20% growth. Belcher is also overseeing the company's international expansion, after it recently acquired Merchandise Mania in the U.K. Also, it has grown its North American ad specialty revenues by 27% over the last five years to surpass the \$100 million last year.

22
JASON BLACK
BOUNDLESS NETWORK (*ASI/143717*)
2011 RANK: 18
Black falls four spots after receiving lower ratings for influence from both the Power 50 and the industry at large. His company, however, has grown into a \$60 million distributorship in just eight years, increasing revenues from \$24 million five years ago.

23
BILLY DOLAN & VIVIAN LO
CAMSING GLOBAL
2011 RANK: 17
The Camsing duo, which oversees supplier brands such as Senator, Adva-Lite and Toppers, drops six spots after receiving low influence ratings from both the Power 50 and the industry at large. Camsing has also added the Avaline and Custom HBC brands to its stable this year. Current challenge: integrating all these lines into one operation.

24
SHARON, TALY & ELY EYAL
ETS EXPRESS (*ASI/51197*)
2011 RANK: N/A
Another newcomer to the 2012 Power 50, the Eyal family heads up one of the fastest-growing large suppliers in the industry. Increasing revenues by more than 200% in the past five years, ETS is now firmly entrenched in the Top 40 – and the leaders also run a company on the *Counselor* Best Places to Work list.

25
JACK SO
HONG KONG TRADE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
2011 RANK: 26
The HKTDC runs multiple trade shows that impact and service the ad specialty market, including the Hong Kong Gifts & Premium Fair. It's a show that continues to attract the interest of domestic suppliers (and some distributors) that are looking to expand and source globally.

26
CRAIG CALLAWAY
ECOMPANYSTORE (*ASI/185782*)
2011 RANK: 24
Callaway received lower scores for influence over the past year, but eCompanyStore increased its sales last year by 5%. Callaway is also a respected industry voice on economic and corporate strategy issues.

27
KEITH WALTERS
ENNIS (*ASI/52493*)
2011 RANK: 21
While Ennis is one of the largest suppliers in the industry, the low-profile Walters received low scores for ad specialty market influence. The result drops him six spots this year.

28
ALAN VAUGHT
EVANS MANUFACTURING (*ASI/52840*)
2011 RANK: 29
Jumping one spot this year, Vaught runs a *Counselor* Distributor Choice Award-winning supplier, and has provided a paperless-operation business model for others to follow. His influence scores also improved this year.

29 KURT KAESER & GREGG EMMER

KAESER & BLAIR (ASI/238600)
2011 RANK: 28
Power 50 stalwarts drop one spot after receiving slightly lower influence ratings. The company, though, is the 18th-largest distributor in the industry and grew its sales by 7% last year.

30 MIKE RHODES

BODEK AND RHODES (ASI/40788)
2011 RANK: 32
The head of the sixth-largest supplier firm, Rhodes jumps two spots on this year's list after receiving positive influence ratings from the industry at large. Also, Bodek and Rhodes increased its revenues by 18% last year and 30% over the past five years.

31 DAVID THOMPSON

NATIONAL PEN (ASI/281040)
2011 RANK: 30
Thompson drops one spot after his company posted a 3.5% sales gain last year but a 9.4% drop over the past five years. The low-profile industry newcomer also received low influence ratings from the industry's voters.

32 JOE FLEMING

HUB PEN (ASI/61966)
2011 RANK: N/A
New to the list in 2012, Fleming is the head of *Counselor's* Supplier of the Year award winner earlier in 2012. As a supplier with very high ratings from distributors, Fleming runs an organization that's highly valued by industry companies.

33 ALAN CHIPPINDALE

BRANDALLIANCE (ASI/145177)
2011 RANK: N/A
Another newcomer, Chippindale oversees the second-largest distributor firm in Canada. It's a company that came together after it merged a group of mid-size Canadian distributors. And, now it's focused on more growth, as it created a partnership with U.S. distributor Activate Marketing + Promotions this year to help both expand into the other's geographic markets.

34 GARRY HURVITZ

ASH CITY (ASI/37127)
2011 RANK: 36
Hurvitz jumps two spots after winning *Counselor's* International Person of the Year award in May, and receiving positive influence ratings from his Power 50 peers. Ash City also grew its revenues by 3% last year to reach \$123 million.

35 MERLE HINRICHS, SPENSER AU & TOMMY WONG

GLOBAL SOURCES (ASI/40788)
2011 RANK: 31
The trio that leads Global Sources, a media and trade show company in Asia that helps domestic suppliers source products overseas, falls four spots after receiving low influence ratings in the U.S. industry. Global Sources, though, has brought its Gifts & Premiums China Sourcing Fair to the U.S.

36 JIM HAGAN & PETER SEIDLER

SWEDA (ASI/90305) & SEIDLER EQUITY (ASI/102905)
2011 RANK: 39
The head of Sweda and the company's equity partner pair together to jump three spots this year, as Sweda posted a 6% increase in sales in 2011.

37 DAN CRAIG

ACCOLADE PROMOTION GROUP (ASI/102905)
2011 RANK: 34
Craig, the head of the largest distributor firm in Canada, falls three spots after posting a 3% sales increase last year. However, the company, which is owned by large Canadian retailer Golf Town, is on a fast growth track over the past five years: sales increase of 56%.

38 BILL KOROWITZ

THE MAGNET GROUP (ASI/68507)
2011 RANK: 38
After leading a successful buy-out of The Magnet Group from Seidler Equity late last year, Korowitz retains his position on the Power 50. While Magnet's revenues have been flat in recent years, Korowitz is a leading economic expert in the industry and is looked to as a resource by other suppliers and distributors.

33 ALAN CHIPPINDALE

BRANDALLIANCE

THE NEWCOMER



ALAN CHIPPINDALE

BrandAlliance arrived on the 2012 Top 40 list at number 30 with \$44.8 million in sales. The company, helmed by Alan Chippindale, is the second-largest distributor in Canada, and it approaches business in a unique way.

“Back in early 2008 there was a group of people – four distributors – and we started talking about creating a unique business model on the distributor side,” Chippindale says. For months the principals involved spent time getting to know each other, the nuances of each company and what each offered its client base. The discussions focused on eventually creating a company that was different in how it approached business, the value it offered its clients and the idea that there was real business value to the entity beyond being a purveyor of promo products.

The merger of the four was announced to personnel a year and a half before it took place. They wanted to grow the BrandAlliance brand from the ground up, creating a mission statement and core values on which to build the new company. One of the themes that emerged was that distributors are in business to create brands for clients, but too often they don't consider themselves to be a brand. That changed with BrandAlliance.

The merger finally happened in March 2010, and when the new entity opened its doors, a new idea was born. “Our tagline is ‘Build Your Brand Together,’” Chippindale says, noting that there isn't a focus on products; the focus is on a culture of collaboration with clients. For him, the difference between a good client and a bad client is that the good client actually believes in the word “together.” Chippindale says that while there is not one person in charge of attaining goals, it's a collective effort and the leadership team is built from within and that it will continue to grow.

“The difference between a good client and a bad client is the good client actually believes in the word ‘together.’”

Operating in the Great White North isn't all that different from the U.S., Chippindale believes. “I think there is less difference than people say there is,” he says. In fact, it's his opinion that Cleveland is more similar to Toronto than it is to cities on the West Coast. The one major difference is that everything is bilingual in Canada, and the company's success is due to the nationalistic approach it takes toward the marketplace. For instance, when the new company's original name did not translate well into French, leaders shortened it to BrandAlliance.

Other reasons for success include organic growth, account penetration and team selling – as well as further alliances. “We are strategically pursuing mergers and acquisitions,” Chippindale says, noting that the company made three acquisitions this past summer in order to cement a stronger presence within a needed market.

The outlook for 2013 is conservative, yet Chippindale is forecasting growth. “We think the industry is going to be flat, although we do think it has stabilized,” he says. “We're budgeting for growth.” – *JH*

48 MARIBETH SANDFORD

BAG MAKERS

STRIDING TO SUCCESS



MARIBETH SANFORD

“The roar of the crowd and the singing of *My Old Kentucky Home*.” Those will be the lasting memories of the 2012 Kentucky Derby for Maribeth Sandford, CEO of Bag Makers Inc. (*asi/37940*). Unlike the majority of people who notice those early May staples from the comfort of their own couches, though, Sandford had a decidedly different view. She was in the grandstands watching the race not as a mere spectator, but as the owner of an up-and-coming colt named Take Charge Indy.

With a favorable pedigree, accomplished trainer in Patrick Bryne and three-time Kentucky Derby-winning jockey Calvin Borel on board for the ride, the day started out promising. “We had an animal that was exceptional,” says Chuck Sandford. But, it didn't end so well. The horse finished last after succumbing to an injury to its leg – a bone chip that would need surgery and put the horse's career in jeopardy.

The Sandfords' business, though, with Maribeth at the helm, has been running quite well over the past five years. Buoyed by an increase in the popularity of reusable bags, Top 40 supplier Bag Makers grew its sales by nearly 50% between 2007 and 2011. And, while its sales leveled off a bit last year (growing by 2% from 2010 to 2011), the company is having a bounce-back year in 2012. “We're up. We're strong,” says Chuck Sandford. “We're presently up around 9%.”

Of course, Bag Makers, like many in the industry, has been forced to face increasing numbers of plastic bag bans in the United States. While this has certainly presented new opportunities for sales of reusable bags that many supermarkets and retailers are beginning to sell or give away, it has also put a dent in the traditional plastic bag business.

That's where Bag Makers has found itself in an advantageous position. One reason the company's sales of plastic bags has not been in decline is that it manufactures a thicker bag that does not fall under the many restrictions. “We haven't closed on any press because of the bans,” Maribeth Sandford says.

And, the Sandfords believe their company will continue to grow, as it expands its bag offerings even further. “We've never had a down cycle,” Chuck Sandford says. Steady sales growth can also be attributed to a product category that sees about 40% in reorders.

Maribeth believes that the bag market will find even more opportunities for expansion, as more customers who used plastic bags are now moving to nonwoven, she says. And while plastic bags remain Bag Makers' top seller, nonwoven bags are coming on strong. “People have also gone back to the use of paper bags,” Maribeth says.

With her business career thriving, Maribeth still looks forward to more success on the horse race track. Originally from Louisville, she had been to the Kentucky Derby many times before arriving as an owner this year. But the differences are stark: This race, she was afforded a concierge to guide them through the day's events. And as for the tradition of the hats, well, Sandford designed a hat that was over the top. “I went a little bit beyond the style of the hat that's traditional,” she says.

The story ends well for Take Charge Indy, too. After successful surgery, he has returned to the track and even ran in the Fayette Stakes in late October. – *JH*

39 KIM NEWELL

WORLD WIDE LINES (ASI/98290)
2011 RANK: 37
Newell falls two spots after receiving lower influence ratings this year. Newell, though, is one of the foremost respected voices in the industry on the topics of product safety and compliance.

40 PAUL LAGE

GILL STUDIOS (ASI/56950)
2011 RANK: 40
In an election year, Lage and Gill are at the forefront of the signs, labels and stickers market. He retains the same spot he held last year, as many in the market look to him for guidance and advice.

41 DEREK BLOCK

TOUCHSTONE (ASI/345631)
2011 RANK: 48
Making one of the biggest leaps on the list, Block jumps seven spots this year after receiving positive influence ratings and closing a deal with Cintas that has Touchstone managing the Top 40 distributor's enterprise promotional marketing client relationships.

42 RAY TITUS

UNITED FRANCHISE GROUP (ASI/102905)
2011 RANK: 33
The head of the EmbroidMe and SignARama franchises drops nine spots on the list, as he has ceded day-to-day responsibilities of the organizations to other executives. He is a major cog in his company's international expansions.

43 PAUL BELLANTONE

PPAI (ASI/40653)
2011 RANK: 45
After receiving positive influence ratings from both the Power 50 and the industry at large, Bellantone jumps two spots this year.

44 ERIC RUBIN

BLUE GENERATION (ASI/40653)
2011 RANK: 35
Rubin falls nine spots after garnering low industry influence ratings. A big player in the uniform market, his company's sales increased by 6% last year.

45 CHRIS VERNON

THE VERNON COMPANY (ASI/351700)
2011 RANK: 42
Following a 16% revenue drop over the past five years, Vernon falls a few spots. The company showed growth, though, last year of 3%.

46 FRED PARKER

ACTIVATE! PROMOTIONS + MARKETING (ASI/141964)
2011 RANK: 43
Parker has successfully steered his company through a total re-branding effort this year. Activate (formerly Bluegrass Promotions) has grown by double digits in recent years. Parker, however, received lower influence ratings.

47 DOV CHARNEY

AMERICAN APPAREL (ASI/35297)
2011 RANK: 49
In a year (2012) in which American Apparel has increased its sales each month and has stabilized its finances, Charney moves up two spots on the Power 50.

48 MARIBETH SANDFORD

BAG MAKERS (ASI/37940)
2011 RANK: 41
Bag Makers rode the wave of burgeoning reusable tote bag sales to a 50% sales increase over the past five years. However, sales were flat last year.

49 LARRY ZAVADIL

AMERICAN SOLUTIONS FOR BUSINESS (ASI/120075)
2011 RANK: 47
The leader of the 13th-largest distributor in the industry falls two spots after receiving lower influence ratings.

50 DANIEL TSAI & JENNIFER TSAI

TRI-MOUNTAIN (ASI/92125)
2011 RANK: 50
These apparel supplier leaders retain their spot on the Power 50 after posting a 15% sales increase. Glenn Oyoung left the company earlier this year to begin an outside endeavor.

the POWER POLL

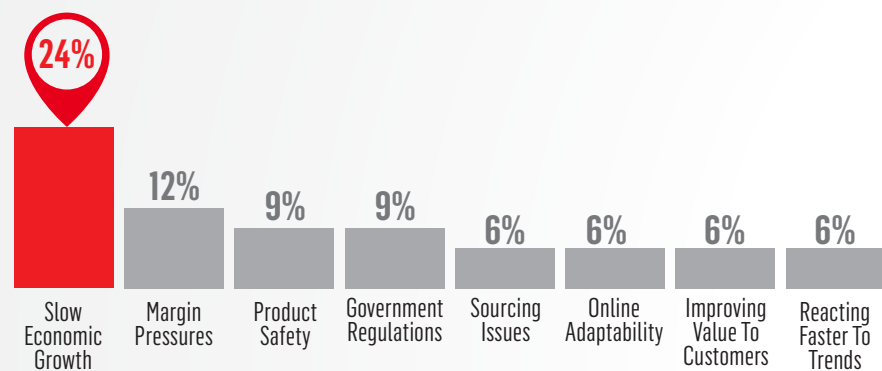
Power 50 members give their views on everything from industry trends to travel to technology.

What's your outlook for the industry in 2013?

86% POSITIVE

14% UNCERTAIN

What will be the industry's biggest challenge going forward?

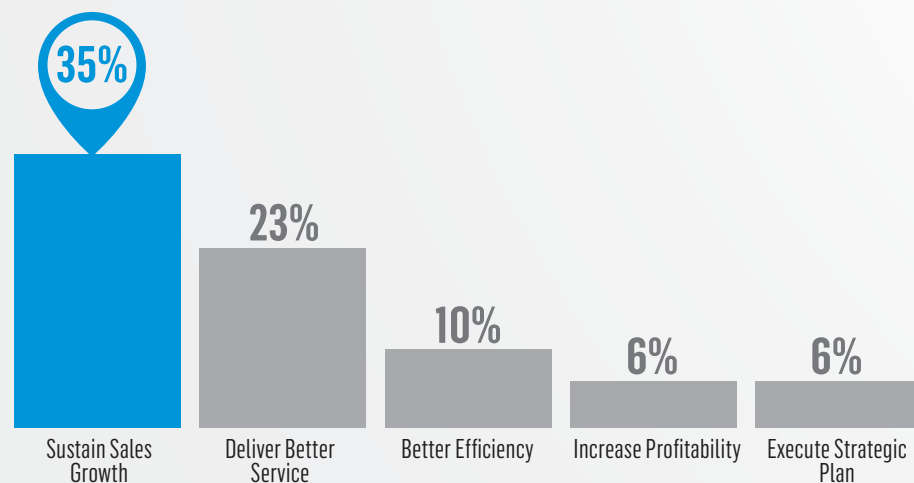


*All other responses received one vote

4.3% INCREASE

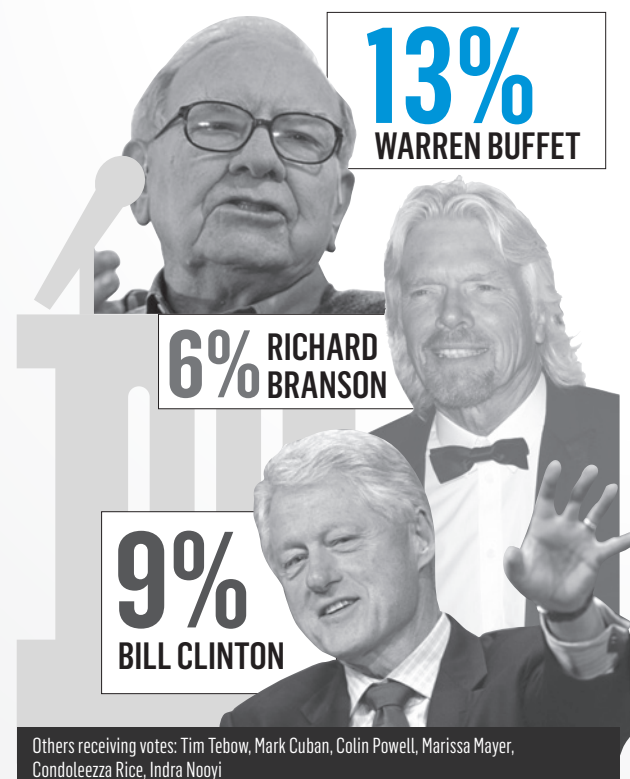
Power 50's projected industry sales increase for 2013

What's your **number-one goal** for your company in 2013?



*All other responses received one vote

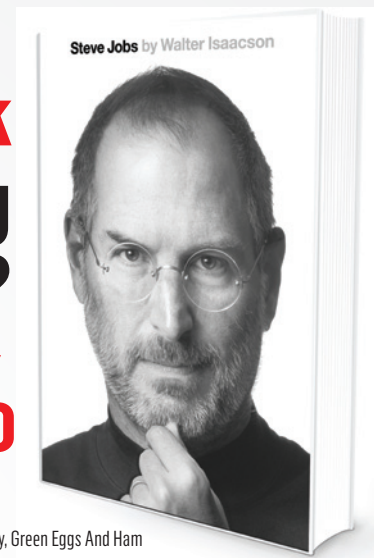
Who would you pay to hear speak?



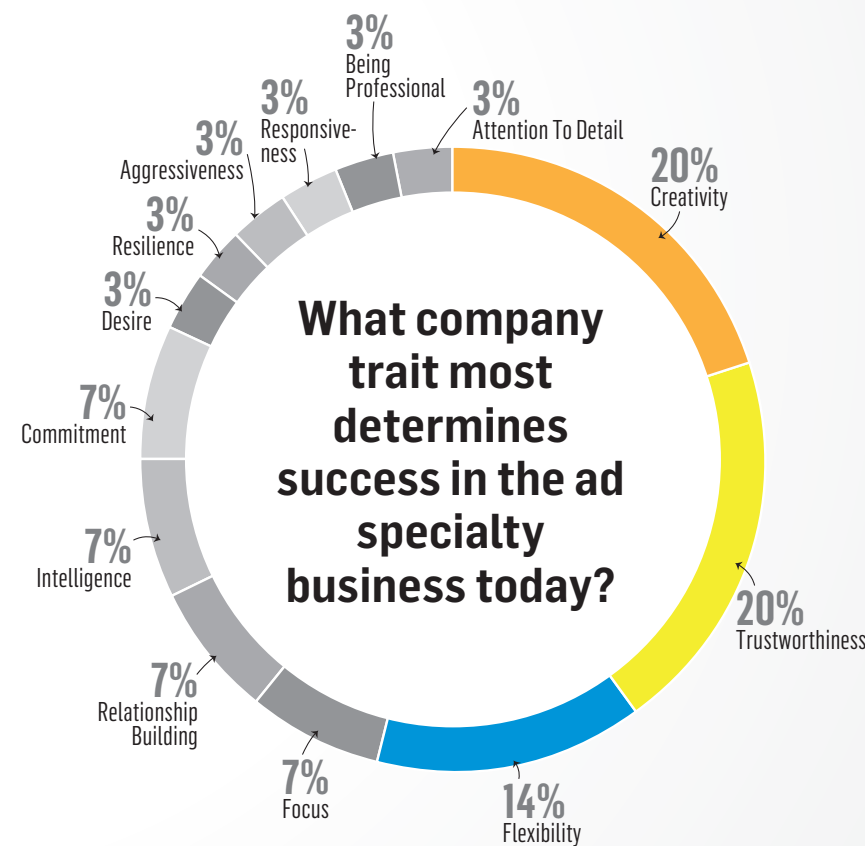
Others receiving votes: Tim Tebow, Mark Cuban, Colin Powell, Marissa Mayer, Condoleezza Rice, Indra Nooyi

What **book** are you reading right now?

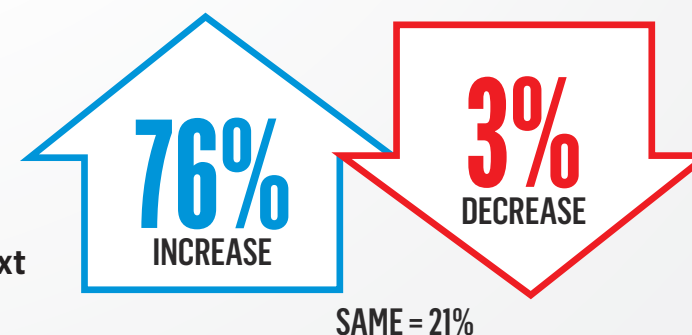
STEVE JOBS: A BIOGRAPHY **13%**



Other top responses: The Hunger Games, Moneyball, On China, Fifty Shades of Grey, Green Eggs And Ham



Do you plan to increase, decrease or keep your employee head count the same next year?



Finish This Sentence

In five years, social media will be ...

★ "for old folks and companies, too!"
– Bill Korowitz, The Magnet Group

★ "like hip-hop music. Still here and appealing to a wide audience."
– Craig Callaway, eCompanyStore

★ "old news."
– Paul Lage, Gill Studios

★ "more fragmented along the lines of people's interests."
– Joe Fleming, Hub Pen

★ "simply called media."
– Michael Bernstein, Polyconcept

★ "more properly valued and viewed as a success accessory."
– Greg Muzzillo, Proforma

★ "surpassed by yet another technological advance that we have not yet even dreamed up."
– Marc Simon, Halo Branded Solutions

★ "different and targeted. Rather than a shotgun approach, we will see more filters, privacy issues will be a factor, and we will see more circles or groups."
– Jo-an Lantz, Geiger

★ "overtaking our world!"
– Eric Rubin, Blue Generation

How many miles have you flown in 2012?

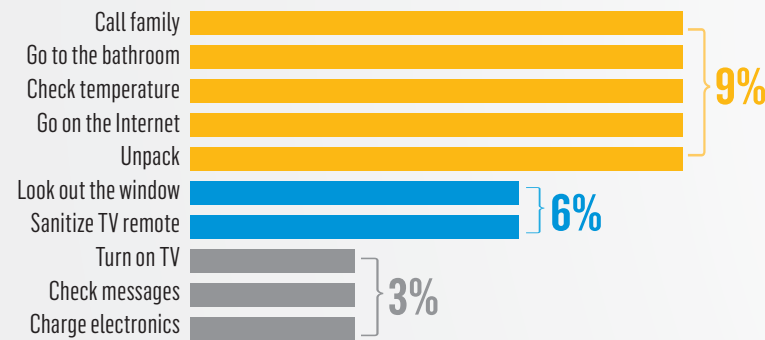
AVERAGE OF RESPONSES – 52,415 MILES



INDUSTRY HIGH –
125,000
BILL SCHMIDT, SR.

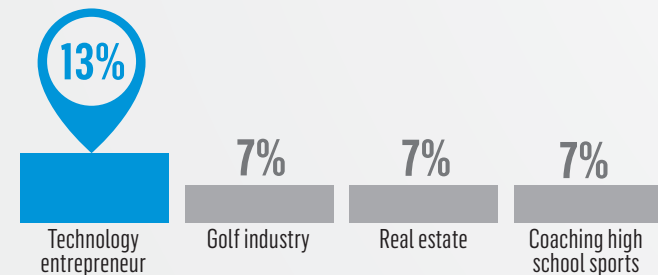


What's the first thing you do when you get into a hotel room?



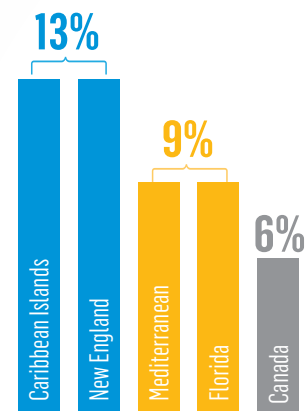
Other responses: exercise, check out supply of pillows and towels, locate the nearest department store to buy things forgot to pack

If you weren't in the ad specialty business, what would you be doing?



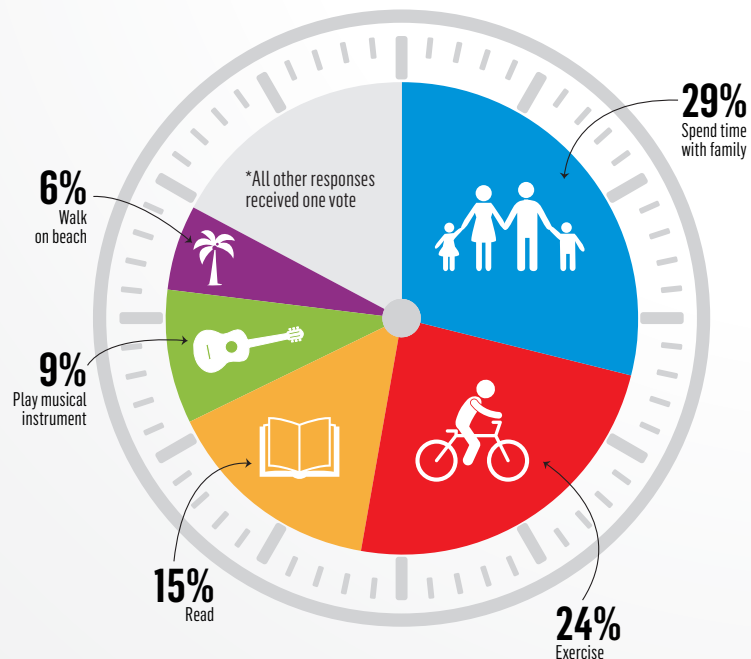
Other responses: wedding planner (Jennifer Tsai, Tri-Mountain), making wine (Derek Block, Touchstone), foreign news correspondent (Gene Geiger, Geiger)

Where was the last place you went on vacation?

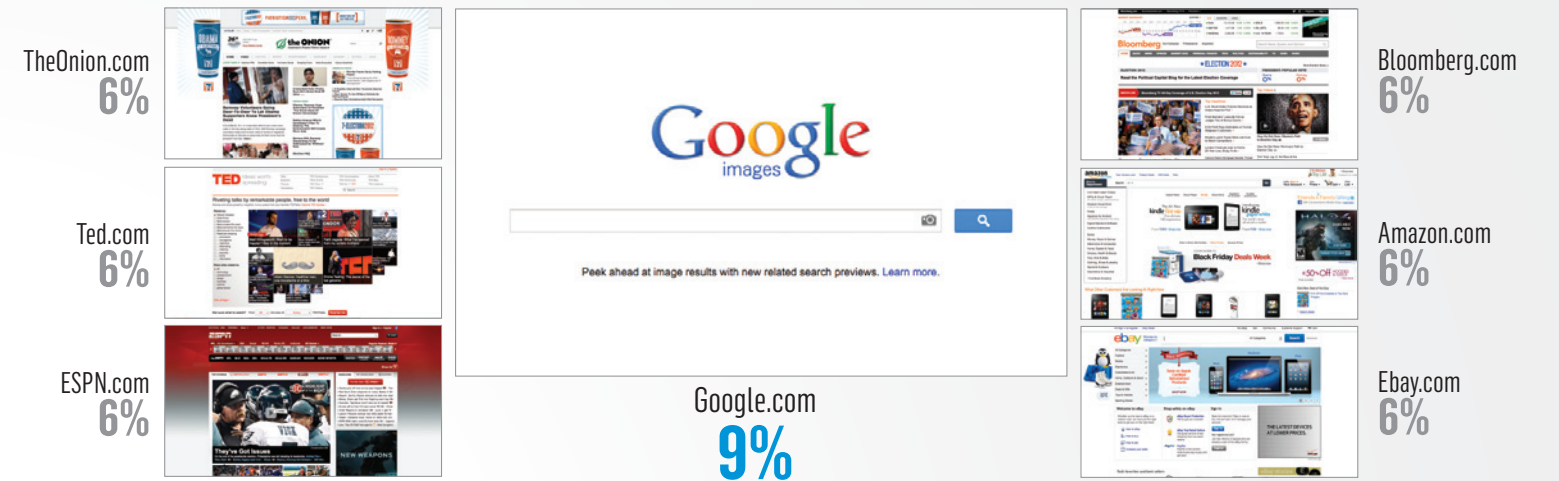


Other responses: Prague (Jeff Lederer, Prime Line), LegoLand (Kim Newell, Worldwide Lines), Maui (Bonni Shevin-Sandy, Dard Products), Istanbul (Dan Craig, Accolade Promotion Group)

What would you do with 30 minutes of free time?

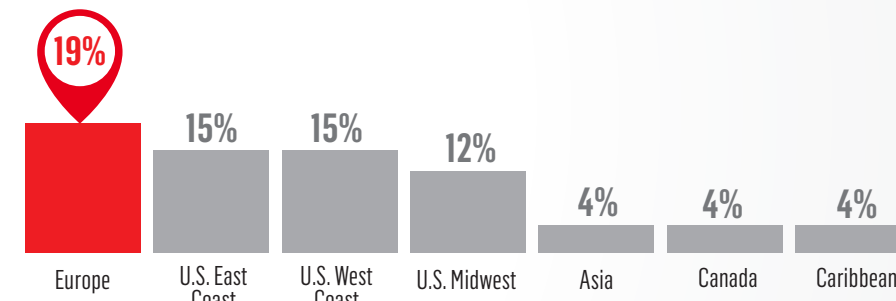


What is your favorite non-industry website?



Others receiving votes: PapaJohns.com, Deadspin.com, WeatherUnderground.com, pifexperience.org

Where is the best restaurant you've ever been to?



Personal Recommendations: Scalini in London (Trevor Gnesin, Logomark), Wild Ginger in Seattle (Jay Deutsch, BDA), Bukhara in New Delhi (David Nicholson, Polyconcept), Fourways Inn in Bermuda (Ross Silverstein, iPROMOTEu)

Which TV character is most like you?

