

# THE POWER 50

*Counselor* reveals its list of the most powerful and influential people in the industry today. Ranked from one to 50, everybody on this list has left an indelible mark on the promotional products market – and will continue to for years to come.



*By Karen Akers, Michele Bell, Joan Chaykin, Andy Coben, Betsy Cummings, Joe Haley, Matt Histand and Amara Rockar*

Power can come from many sources. It can come from money. It can come from success. It can come from leadership. But one thing is for sure: You know it when you see it. All of the people on this list certainly have at least one of these qualities. Most, of course, have all of them.

In this list, our first annual ranking of the *Power 50*, you'll find those who wield the most influence in the promotional products industry. There are people who work for supplier companies, people who work for distributor companies and some people who work at companies that don't operate directly in the industry at all. These individuals are setting the tone for this marketplace today and moving

forward. They're the ones others emulate, the people who invest big dollars in the industry and executives who are changing how business is done.

In a word, they all have power. Each, of course, is using that power in different ways. But make no mistake, every person on this list has some impact on how everybody in the industry operates.

- 1 Philippe Varnier/Michael Bernstein – Polyconcept
- 2 Paul Lage – Norwood Promotional Products
- 3 Gene Geiger/Jo-an Lantz – Geiger
- 4 Marty Lott – SanMar
- 5 Jack Teague – Bic Graphic USA
- 6 David Woods – Adventures in Advertising
- 7 Greg Muzzillo/Vera Muzzillo – Proforma
- 8 Marc Simon – Halo Branded Solutions
- 9 Thomas Myers – Broder Bros.
- 10 Glen Taylor – Taylor Corporation
- 11 David McCreight – Lands' End
- 12 Keith Walters – Ennis
- 13 Jack Ma – Alibaba

- 14 Paul Gittemeier/Rick Remick – Tic Toc/Group II
- 15 Yves Alexandre – Investcorp
- 16 Dennis Multack – Corporate Express Promotional Marketing
- 17 Dov Charney – American Apparel
- 18 Eric Bensussen/Jay Deutsch – Bensussen-Deutsch & Associates
- 19 Kevin Lyons-Tarr – 4Imprint Inc.
- 20 Peter Woo – Hong Kong Trade & Development Council
- 21 Jim Halverson – 3M Promotional Markets
- 22 Ed Conard – Bain Capital
- 23 Peter Seidler – Seidler Equity
- 24 Herbert Ip – Kenfair
- 25 Jim Schroer – Carlson Marketing Group

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**PHILIPPE VARNIER**

Chairman/Polyconcept

**MICHAEL BERNSTEIN**CEO/Polyconcept North America;  
Vice Chairman/Polyconcept

**Back story:** Joining Polyconcept in 1978 at the age of 22 in an entry level position, Philippe Varnier worked his way up to the position he holds today. In 1992, Michael Bernstein joined Leed's Business Accessories (*asi/66887*), the company co-founded by his father, as a member of the product development team. In 2000, Leed's simplified its name and was acquired by Global Promo Group (GPG), an investment corporation. In 2005, Investcorp, the company that owns Polyconcept, acquired GPG; Polyconcept then bought GPG and Leed's. In the past 18 months, Polyconcept and Leed's have been the talk of the industry, the entity to watch; Varnier and Bernstein, this year's *Counselor* International Persons of the Year, are its bold, dynamic leaders who are running the table while others are just waiting to play.

**Leveraging the yin & yang:** Michael Bernstein's forte and skill-set has always been innovative design, retail-influenced marketing and creating a powerfully persuasive brand message that's defining not only Leed's, but now the international powerhouse that is Polyconcept. Paris, France-based Philippe Varnier has a mind like a steel trap, albeit a stylishly-designed one. He does not miss a beat, a trick or a peripheral conversation, and seems to know exactly who everyone is in his company, what their talents are, what project they're working on and what kind of tool they're using to do it. He's continually inventing new business strategies to keep the company on the forefront.

**Satisfaction over size:** When Polyconcept bought Leed's last year, that was one thing; when it announced this year that it had acquired Bullet Line (*asi/42424*), the industry really took notice. Since then, Varnier, Bernstein and their management team have been fine-tuning the strengths of each component of the company, readying it for goals like bringing three-



*Michael Bernstein, left, and Philippe Varnier*

day turnaround time to the European market, and expanding and streamlining their processes and operations to be a do-it-all source for clients. While many in the industry speculate that more acquisitions are inevitable because they perceive Polyconcept to be on a shopping spree, both Varnier and Bernstein remain characteristically unfazed. "I'm not so interested in the size of the company," Varnier says, "as I am by what the network of quality companies we've put together can do for our customers."

**Why Steve Jobs should pay attention:** When told that rumors about Polyconcept buying a U.S. wearables company are percolating throughout the industry, Bernstein shakes his head, rolls his eyes and says, laughing: "Tell them we're buying Apple." — MB

26 Bob Lederer – Prime Resources  
27 Steve Maritz – Maritz Inc.  
28 Jim Adler – Myron  
29 Mark Barrocas – Wearguard-Crest  
30 Trevor Gnesin – Logomark  
31 Kurt Kaeser – Kaeser & Blair  
32 Ira Neaman – Vantage Apparel  
33 Janelle Nevins – Summit Marketing  
34 Craig Nadel – Jack Nadel International  
35 F. Dixon Brooke Jr. – EBSCO  
36 Chris Vernon – The Vernon Co.  
37 Larry Zavadil – American Solutions for Business  
38 Ray Titus – EmbroidMe/Sign-A-Rama

39 Jim Stutz – Cintas  
40 Steve Slagle, Paul Bellantone and John Satagaj – PPAI  
41 Sabine Geldermann – PSI  
42 Glen Holt/Jeff Meyer – Certified Marketing Consultants  
43 Dan Townes – Shepenco/Shelbyville Pencil  
44 Paul Spitzberg – Coach Inc.  
45 Mary Ann Farmer – MagnaTel  
46 Jonathan Isaacson – Gemline  
47 Roger Henry – American Identity  
48 Mary Kilburn/Barry Dobbs – DinoMar  
49 Ross Silverstein – iPromoteu  
50 Brandon Mackay – Snugz USA

## 2 PAUL LAGE

President,  
Norwood Promotional Products

**Back story:** Paul Lage took over as president of Norwood Promotional Products in June of this year. Prior to this position, he was global vice president of BIC Graphic USA, where his tenure included operational responsibilities for the largest promotional products division within the company. He also worked for industry supplier Gill Studios before starting his career at BIC.

**Tough task ahead:** If a list like the *Power 50* had been put together last year, Lage most likely would have been nowhere near the top, if on the list at all. Yet his move to Norwood has put him in a unique position. He now leads the second-largest supplier in the industry, but it's a company that has been faltering recently. Its sales fell 11% from \$380 million in 2004 to \$338 million in 2005. And Lage, for one, admits that the

company has made its fair share of mistakes. "We have lost a lot of trust from distributors in the industry," he says. "Lots of problems occurred over the past few years that we're now working on trying to fix." And it's that job of trying to turn around Norwood and fix the company's many issues that places Lage so high on this list. No, his company hasn't fared so well recently, but his task ahead makes him uniquely powerful. Many distributors want to do business with the many brands under the Norwood umbrella, but have lost some confidence in the overall organization. Can Lage bring them back?

**Small steps forward:** If a turnaround takes baby steps, then Lage has Norwood on the way to crawling. He has indeed identified some areas that need improvement at Norwood and is developing a plan to change them. One area is on-time delivery. Lage has made it his mission to



fulfill the needs of Norwood's customers by delivering all of their orders on time. While this had been a problem over the past few years, Lage says that Norwood has delivered products on time 99% for the past four months. Another

area to improve is communication, and Lage has implemented an advisory group of customers that Norwood is calling the Mighty8. It's made up of eight customers, all of varying sizes, and Norwood management is going to meet regularly with the group to identify current and potential problems. The effort is designed to find ways to improve the company as a whole.

"This is a true turnaround that we're doing here," Lage says. "We're progressing in some areas and there is a lot of upside, but our goal is to ultimately become the preferred quality and service provider for distributors in the industry. We haven't lived up to the task yet, but we will." — AC

## 3 GENE GEIGER

President

### JO-AN LANTZ

Executive Vice President, Geiger  
(asi/202900)

**Back story:** Gene Geiger joined his family's Lewiston, ME-based fourth generation distributorship in 1973 as vice president and general manager, becoming president in 1979. Jo-an Lantz started at the company 28 years ago at the age of 20 in the accounting department. He was *Counselor's* Person of the Year; she was its International Person of the Year. Under the guidance of Geiger and Lantz, the company ranked number eight on this year's *Counselor Top 40* list by increasing

its sales 10.6% — from \$125 million in 2004 to \$138.3 million in 2005. The company currently has 565 sales reps and 19 offices.

**Why they've thrived:** In a word, versatility. In addition to being one of the first to harness the power of technology, specifically

e-commerce, Geiger and Lantz continue to make some of the smartest, savviest acquisitions, most recently Forrester-Smith.

**The name that opens doors:** "On an intellectual sense, I get the concept of recognizing powerful people; emotionally, it's awkward. I am presumed to have power because my family name is that of a significantly sized organization in the industry that's been successful," Geiger says. "The power is reflective of the people I work



with. My power, to the extent that it exists, is the organization, not personal."

**When Jo-an came into her own:** Lantz remembers the exact moment when she began appearing on people's radar: "Mike Linderman, who was PPAI's chairman

of the board at the time, asked me to speak at a PPCEF fundraiser for Lou Weisbach," Lantz says. "I spoke about how I was the first college graduate in my family, and for whatever reason, people connected with it. Before that speech in Dallas, people saw me as the woman who worked with Gene; after that, no one looked at me blankly when I introduced myself. It's actually one of my biggest pet peeves: Those who don't give others the time of day until they're in a perceived position of power and authority." — MB



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**MARTY LOTT**Founder, SanMar  
(asi/84863)

**Back story:** In 1971 Lott launched SanMar as a college project. Thirty-five years later it's as strong as ever. For three years he toiled away in the basement of his father's building in downtown Seattle, then finally hired his first employee in 1974. Since then the company has exploded, growing to an organization with more than 600 employees, 600-plus products and 2.2 million square feet of warehouse space. "My influence is really over the culture," Lott says, which explains why his loyal employees have helped the firm grow to become the fifth largest in the industry.

**Why customers care:** SanMar has largely banked its reputation and business model on offering fantastic customer service. In fact, the company has been rated with more than 4.7 stars (out of five) by distributors in ASI's supplier ratings system. "There's no question that we are

known for customer service," Lott admits. A complicated training venture? Not really, he says. "One of my favorite expressions lately has been, 'Everything you need to know at SanMar you learned in kindergarten.'" That means honesty and consideration of others.

**Earliest industry epiphany:** Early on Lott realized just how fundamental great customer service is to owning the competitive advantage among promotional product suppliers. "I remember when I first got started, I was out selling, and I happened to be in Alaska. I'll never forget the sales call," he says. A client held up a smattering of shirts he'd ordered. The order was for yellow Hanes shirts. What he got was Hanes, Russell Athletic and Fruit of the Loom, in shades of yellow, gold and sunflower. They all looked different. The customer was irate. "I said, 'You accepted the order?' He said, 'Isn't that the way the industry works?' I said, 'No. If you order Hanes, you should get Hanes.'"



That was easy, he thought. If competitors were too slack to pay attention to brands and color differences, they deserved to lose business to a conscientious company like SanMar.

**Why his strategy is "nice":** "Being nice is actually more difficult to pull off," Lott says. "There's a lot of comments I hear in the industry that when a customer calls up a supplier it's as if they're bothering the person."

Not nice indeed. Call up SanMar, Lott promises, and they'll give you the royal treatment. That's the treatment he gives to his employees as well. Jeremy, his son, says Lott's gab sessions with the warehouse staff are legendary. "People say he's kind of a ghost," Jeremy says. One moment you think you're alone, the next Lott's at your side asking how your day is, if you need anything, if you have any concerns about the business. That top-down concern spreads out like a fog companywide. "Culturally," Jeremy says, "people take a cue from Marty." —BC

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**JACK TEAGUE**President, BIC Graphic USA  
(asi/40480)

**I'm not the man:** Right up front, Jack Teague wants to make sure everyone knows that he doesn't take credit for anything that will follow. To him it's all a team effort. "When an individual is recognized, it really is outside our culture," he says. "I stand tall with this recognition on behalf of all of the employees of the company. I am just one element of this large company."

This we-not-me mentality includes not taking credit for the fact that BIC Graphic USA has increased its sales figures each year but one since Teague took over. He also doesn't want any credit for the Solis By BIC line that includes magnets, sticky notes and mousepads, nor BIC's place as

category leader for writing instruments, the second biggest product category. So what does he own up to? "Some people would say that I am a strong leader, but that's their description and not mine."

**Back story:** This dedication and team-mindedness was cultivated during a 28-year career with BIC. He started as a sales rep and quickly became national sales manager on the retail side. He made his way to the promotional market as general manager of BIC Graphic, then president. Today he is also president of the BIC Graphic Group, overseeing promotional business around the world.

**A path to success:** Under Teague's



tenure, BIC introduced five-day service in the late 1980s and, most recently, 24-hour service, all built on a platform of dependability. BIC also produces a completely customizable pen with 15 different options, the aforementioned Solis line and 360-degree four-color imprinting.

"I'm lucky to work at such a well-recognized company," says Teague. "I'm also fortunate enough to work with a really great group of people. I think when you package our corporate brand name, the dedication of a very qualified work force and leadership that can get the most out of the talent that exists here, that's the only reason why I would be personally recognized." —MH

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**DAVID WOODS**

CEO, Adventures In Advertising

(asi/109480)

**Back story:** With his voluminous experience and impressive list of credentials, you'd never guess David Woods has only been in the industry for 15 years. He was hired by a New York venture capital firm to run Lee Wayne as its CEO. He was there for seven years and then moved over to Halo where he was named executive vice president. Woods left Halo to run his own consulting firm, taking the job of COO of PPAI. He was then approached by Dick Nelson, the founder of AIA and *Counselor's* Person of the Year in 2002, to join the company and align it with 4Imprint, under the umbrella of the publicly traded 4Imprint Group. Woods worked on the buyout of AIA from 4Imprint in July 2005 by the Ohio-based private equity firm Riverside Co.

**His influence:** AIA's sales for 2005 were \$128 million, up nearly \$10 million from \$118.5 million the previous year, capturing the number nine spot on this year's *Counselor Top 40* list. Under Woods' stewardship, the company is on track to have nearly 310 franchisees in its fold, and another year of increased sales.

**Better late than never:** His upbringing was hardscrabble, but he was "blessed with a great education," getting his MBA from the University of Michigan and attending a four-month business program at Harvard. In an industry wary of outsiders and those who aren't second- or third-generation "legacies," Woods joined the industry relatively late in his career at the age of 47. "I knew when I started in this business that people looked at me and thought, 'How long is this guy going to last?'" Woods says. "What they didn't realize is that I found



the industry exciting – I was impressed with the quality and creativity of the people and products. Listen, I decided a long time ago that I'm not going to do anything unless it's fun – and this industry is nothing if not fun." – MB

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**GREG MUZZILLO & VERA MUZZILLO**

Co-CEOs, Proforma

(asi/300094)

**Back story:** Greg founded the company in 1978 with a friend from college. He soon turned his business model to franchising to provide distributors with a strength-in-numbers purchasing power while allowing them to maintain their individual enterprises. The business model took off with dramatic increases in franchisees during the 1990s,



inspiring imitators. Then he met Vera. The two wed in 2000 with Vera later joining him at Proforma as co-CEO. The recipient of this year's *Counselor* Woman of Distinction Award, her financial expertise (cultivated over a decade in banking) combined with his marketing skills have made Proforma an even bigger success.

**A power couple:** The company's ad specialty annual revenue has grown from \$118 million to \$202 million in the past five years, and the organization now ranks as the third-largest distributor in the industry, according to *Counselor's Top 40* list. The Proforma franchisees have increased in both number and quality with over 600 franchisees and an average unit volume of \$550,000. Ever the driven couple, the Muzzillos continue to concentrate on future growth.

**Copycat:** If imitation is the sincerest

form of flattery, then Proforma has some extremely sincere competition. Early on, Greg noticed that a rival company was starting its own franchise and had copied some of Proforma's business model documents verbatim. "We could tell because they had the same typos," says Greg. – AR

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**MARC SIMON**

CEO, Halo Branded Solutions

(asi/218450)

**Back story:** Marc Simon officially joined Halo in a full-time capacity as CEO in 2001. Prior to that he was actually the company's legal counsel in the early 1990s. Simon earned Person of the Year honors from *Counselor* this year for his turnaround of Halo. He took the company into Chapter 11 bankruptcy six months after becoming CEO, and then he also oversaw the company's sale to HIG Capital in the middle of 2003.



**Shining moment:** Simon says that the purchase of Halo by HIG, and the subsequent exit from bankruptcy for the company, is when he knew that he had made it in the promotional product industry. "Once Halo returned to profitability and we partnered with HIG, then I knew we had a winning strategy that returned Halo to credibility," Simon says. "For me and for Halo, everything has built off of that moment. It conferred a new level of credibility for Halo within the industry."

**A solid future:** While Simon believes the future for Halo is bright, he also thinks that the next few years will be profitable for the industry as a whole. "I think the historical growth of the industry will continue to be sustained as advertising and marketing budgets are better focused towards reaching targeted customers," he says. – AC

## 9 THOMAS MYERS

CEO, Broder Bros.  
(asi/42090)



**Back story:** Thomas Myers was named CEO of Broder just over a year ago. Previously he served as executive vice president and director with Bain Capital, which bought the company in 2000.

**The biggest:** While Broder is the largest supplier in the industry based on annu-

al revenue, margins continue to be a challenge. "We are putting in place a system that will allow us to be the best supplier to the industry with larger distribution centers, a better Web site and better inventory," he says. "There are a lot of things you can do as a CEO to encourage action that will help the promotional products industry." And to Myers, profitability leads the way: "It's my north star." – *MH*

## 10 GLEN TAYLOR

Chairman,  
Taylor Corporation

**Back story:** The humble billionaire who grew up around farms always knew he'd be in leadership, but admits that at one point he thought that would be in education. The owner of the Minnesota

Timberwolves NBA basketball team is strikingly humble for his lofty position, declaring he's just a "regular guy."

**Why nice guys finish first:** The unassuming executive has used solid, Midwestern values to build an empire with subsidiaries in the gift and business communication industries from his start with wedding invite printer Carlson Craft (asi/43920), a company he bought in 1975.

**Taylor's toughness:** The seemingly approachable executive has parlayed his corporate vision and his call for corporate integrity into a rock solid industry player that also includes large distributors, such as Banyan Incentives, Taymark (asi/342382) and Amsterdam Printing (asi/121500). In fact, the group of companies ranks Taylor's industry holdings at number 13 on *Counselor's Top 40* distributor list. – *BC*

### THE METHODOLOGY

The first step in considering possible candidates for the *Power 50* was a solicitation of nominations. In that effort we received more than 300 potential names for this list. We then also considered the heads of the companies on the *Top 40* supplier and distributor lists, as well as others outside of the industry that we felt were important. In all, we began with a list nearly 400 people long. The next step was an initial whittling-down process. This cut our list to a more manageable 150 candidates. Each of these people were then measured on areas such as awards won, how successful the company they work at has been, how much that company has invested in the industry, how many times the person was mentioned or quoted in *Counselor* magazine and how many times the person's name pops up on Google searches. These rankings brought the list to the 50 people you see here. The rankings then took some of the same criteria into consideration, as well as multiple editorial meetings to determine the person's influence moving forward.



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**DAVID MCCREIGHT**

President, Lands' End Inc.

**Back story:** Sure they make cute, comfy shorts and chinos. But this seemingly innocuous apparel company out of Dodgeville, WI, has been the bane of existence for many of the industry's biggest suppliers. The company isn't an active industry member, yet it receives thousands of orders and inadvertently steals the business of plenty of industry players.

**What McCreight brings:** The former Disney Stores Worldwide executive knows products – and their power to motivate and promote. That knowledge makes him a formidable competitor in the industry (even if indirectly), along with his experience as a merchandising executive for the organization. – *BC*



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**KEITH WALTERS**Chairman, CEO and President, Ennis (*asi/52493*)

**Back story:** Most people know *Top 40* supplier Ennis for its production of business forms and other business products. But under the direction of Keith Walters, chairman, CEO and president of Ennis, the company expanded into the apparel sector as well. In 2004, it merged with wearables supplier Alstyle Apparel, while continuing to build its print business by acquiring Crabar/GBF. This year it expanded its presence even more through the purchase of Specialized Print Forms and Block Graphics.

**Fast success:** Thanks to these many acquisitions, Ennis' sales have been growing, and the company has quickly been moving up the *Top 40* ranks, earning the third spot on the most recent list. Amaz-

ingly, sales jumped from \$62 million in 2004 to \$300 million in 2005. Which leaves us with just one question: What is Walters going to do next? – *KA*

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**JACK MA**

Founder, Chairman and CEO, Alibaba

**Back story:** In 1995, a former Chinese teacher decides to register that nation's first Web-based company. He says his whole goal is to connect importers and exporters from around the world. Jump ahead a decade and Jack Ma, who taught himself English and tops out just under five feet, is the biggest thing going in Chinese e-commerce. Sometimes called the eBay of China, Alibaba.com has more than 4,500 employees, 45,000 promotional products and sales topping \$200 million (U.S.) a year. Not bad for a former school teacher.

**Why he thinks he's is a distributor's dream:** Ma and Alibaba are China-based. That means, he says, that Alibaba is looking over the shoulder of the factories, workers and quality managers at all times, and that means they can guarantee high quality production for less. "We capture video factory tours and train employees on how to do customer service in an online environment," Ma says.

**One to watch:** While he may have to battle the fears some North American distributors and suppliers have about failed shipments and faulty orders from Asia, Ma is setting a precedent that Chinese e-commerce is the wave of the future. "Promotional products is one of our core groups," Ma says. "The fact that promotional items are so central to our growth is a reflection of just how much of the promotional product manufacturing has shifted to China." – *BC*



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**PAUL GITTEMEIER**CEO, Tic Toc (*asi/158990*)**RICK REMICK**CEO, Group II Communications (*asi/215310*)

**Back story:** These two executives don't necessarily work hand in hand, but the two company leaders, whose firms are both owned by the world's largest media conglomerate, Omnicom Group Inc., seem to embrace the same philosophy: "It's not about taking orders," says Remick. Tic Toc and Group II didn't get to be the 12th and fourth largest distributors by taking orders. Instead, the industry heavyweights have become brand builders for their clients, offering as much guidance on "turn-key solutions to clients," Gittemeier says,

**THE DISTRIBUTORS**

Here are the distributor representatives on the *Power 50* list.

- (3) Gene Geiger/Jo-an Lantz
- (6) David Woods
- (7) Greg Muzzillo/Vera Muzzillo
- (8) Marc Simon
- (10) Glen Taylor
- (14) Paul Gittemeier/Rick Remick
- (16) Dennis Multack
- (18) Eric Bensussen/Jay Deutsch
- (19) Kevin Lyons-Tarr
- (28) Jim Adler
- (29) Mark Barrocas
- (31) Kurt Kaeser
- (33) Janelle Nevins
- (34) Craig Nadel
- (36) Chris Vernon
- (37) Larry Zavadil
- (38) Ray Titus
- (39) Jim Stutz
- (47) Roger Henry
- (49) Ross Silverstein

as they do on selecting the best product to drive client goals.

**Why the consumer is king:** Both say that Omnicom has nothing to do with building their client bases, but Remick admits his 25 years in the advertising business drove home “the importance of the consumer. Because [the promotional products] industry more and more is about how you build that relationship with the consumer.”

**We couldn't agree more:** Remick's right. And treating clients as partners with the end goal of driving consumer behavior makes the two firms that much smarter against competitors. – BC

## 15 YVES ALEXANDRE

Managing Director,  
Investcorp

**Back story:** The global investment firm, with more than \$32 billion in arranged investments, owns promotional product company Polyconcept, an industry giant that provides products to more than 10,000 ad specialty companies across Europe. The company has also made a huge leap into the North American market with recent acquisitions of Leed's and Bullet Line.

**The power of Polyconcept:** Alexandre points to the company's Asian supply business model as being a reason why Invest-

corp thinks the giant supplier is a sound investment. That and its reputation for client relationships. “Polyconcept's management has an exceptional track record of developing the business through product development and excellent customer service,” Alexandre says. – BC

## 16 DENNIS MULTACK

President, Corporate  
Express Promotional  
Marketing (asi/168786)



**Back story:** Dennis Multack joined Corporate Express in 1993 as vice president of sales, after a one-year stint with the now-defunct Penn Corp.

He was named president in 2000.

**Deflecting praise:** You'd think a president of the industry's top distributor would have a lot to brag about, but Multack is surprisingly low-key about his impact on Corporate Express' success. “I appreciate the honor,” he says, “but I view this as an acknowledgement of our company's culture of innovation and delivering results.”

**Professionalism is key:** Since Corporate Express debuted in the industry, Multack says the company's high-level of professionalism is what has had the biggest influence. And now the organization stands as the largest distributor in the industry. – MH

## 17 DOV CHARNEY

Owner, American Apparel  
(asi/35297)

**Back story:** Since taking the industry by storm in 1997, American Apparel's sales have grown by double-digits nearly every year, appearing on *Counselor's* list of *Top 40* suppliers since 2004



– this year coming in at number 11 with \$93 million in sales. The company, which initially offered one T-shirt style, now has 17,000 SKUs, and ships over 1 million garments per week to its clients in the promotional products market and 150 retail stores in 12 countries.

**The madness to his methods:** Equal parts P.T. Barnum's slick showman and Larry Flynt's porn-loving hustler, Dov Charney has taken his iconoclastic, made-in-the-U.S. wearables company and turned it into the one you can't help but watch with bewildered fascination because it's either going to go off the rails or be the apparel equivalent of Google. “One of the most important thinkers of our time is Robert Greene, who wrote *The 48 Laws of Power*,” Charney says. “His book maps out the dynamics of power and how human beings obtain it and react to it. In a very deep way, it explains how being generous caters to one's self interest, because when you're generous it increases your power.”

**Why he's on the list:** Charney has an uncanny ability to market himself and his company in a way that not only garners obscene amounts of press exposure, but positions the company and its offerings as status symbols of trendiness. If you know a fashionista or a trendy young hottie, chances are she's covered – barely – in American Apparel.

**Most self-aware quote:** “My father once said, ‘Each man rises to his point of incompetence.’ ... I'm always on the verge of that point.” – MB

## 18 ERIC BENSUSSEN & JAY DEUTSCH

President & CEO, Bensussen-  
Deutsch & Associates Inc. (asi/137616)

**Back story:** In 1984, Eric Bensussen and Jay Deutsch were sitting around watching a Seattle Seahawks game and wondered if they could get a team sweat-

### THE MONEY GUYS

Some say that money equals power, and in many ways we agree. Here are the members of the *Power 50* who work for private equity firms with major investments in the promotional product industry.

- (15) Yves Alexandre
- (22) Ed Conard
- (23) Peter Seidler



Eric Bensussen

shirt. When they found out no one was offering one, they decided to do something about it, and a sports marketing giant was born. Today the company is one of the 10 biggest distributorships in the industry with nearly \$145 million in sales.

#### Bobblehead bonanza:

BD&A has worked with teams from every major sport, along with Hollywood studios and *Fortune* 500 companies. Along the way they jump-started what is probably the most popular sports giveaway ever, the bobblehead. –MH



Jay Deutsch

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### KEVIN LYONS-TARR

President, 4Imprint Inc.  
(asi/197045)



**Back story:** Lyons-Tarr got his start at 4Imprint 16 years ago as a sales manager and has been at the direct market distributor ever since. “There aren’t too many positions in the company that I haven’t had at one point,”

#### THE OUTSIDERS

There are some people who don’t operate in the traditional industry, per se, but do have a major impact on the day-to-day operations of the marketplace. Here are the industry outsiders who affect how business within the industry is done.

- (11) David McCreight
- (13) Jack Ma
- (25) Jim Schroer
- (27) Steve Maritz

says Lyons-Tarr. In 2003, he transitioned from the position of company COO to that of president.

**A direct (marketing) approach:** “As direct marketers, we’ve always been a little different. It’s a non-traditional approach.” It’s one that people are increasingly comfortable with since the rise of the Internet. –AR

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### PETER WOO

Chairman, Hong Kong Trade & Development Council

**Back story:** As manufacturing increasingly moves overseas, organizations such as the Hong Kong Trade & Development Council are having a bigger effect on the happenings in the promotional products industry. In fact, the organization has been a major driver of price decreases within this marketplace.

**The sourcing source:** As chairman of the Hong Kong Trade & Development Council, Peter Woo leads an organization that helps companies across the globe find products to fulfill all needs. Woo, another *Power 50* billionaire, has headed the organization since October of 2000. Holding an MBA from Columbia University, Woo also serves on the international advisory boards of J.P. Morgan Chase & Co., National Westminster Bank Plc., and General Electric Company.

**A place to gather:** As the marketing and service hub for Hong Kong-based manufacturers, the HKTDC also produces many trade shows that offer industry suppliers and distributors direct access to goods at low costs. One such show, the Hong Kong Gifts & Premium Fair, held every spring in Hong Kong, offers industry practitioners one of the largest marketplaces for promotional products. In fact, this year’s show attracted nearly 4,000 exhibitors and more than 50,000 attendees. –AC

21

### JIM HALVERSON

Director of Special Markets,  
3M Promotional Markets

(asi/91240)



**Back story:** When you think 3M, you think Jim Halverson. He’s been with the company for 30 years – its entire time in the industry. “I still get excited after all these years,” he says. Of course, Halverson has also been busy – and quite successful – fending off some serious competitive threats.

**A pleasure to work with:** As the leader of the 3M division that ranks seventh on the *Counselor Top 40* supplier list, Halverson certainly has a lot of sway in the industry. This might be why he’s asked to take part in so many associations and industry events – that and his vast industry knowledge and international business expertise.

**They really like me:** Halverson is reluctant to confess to any industry influence but he can’t deny the steady invitations to weigh in on various topics. “I’m just happy for the chance to network and share opinions.” –MH

22

### ED CONARD

Managing Director,  
Bain Capital

**Back story:** The Harvard MBA has done much to help out the private equity firm that manages more than \$40 billion in assets, including the largest supplier in the industry, Broder Bros.

**Why Bain is in for the long haul:** The firm, started in 1984, has proven its staying power and wise investment strategies, managing to not only acquire dozens of properties but also see its firms like Broder Bros. sustain immense growth. –BC

23

**PETER SEIDLER**Founder,  
Seidler Equity

**Back story:** The 20-year financier is no stranger to making smart investment decisions. And he's made plenty within the promotional products industry. The company owns more than a half dozen successful suppliers, including Sweda Company LLC (*asi/90305*), Hog Wild LLC (*asi/61228*) and Magnet LLC (*asi/68520*). It's these investments which place Seidler in the top half of the *Power 50*.

**The brilliance of Seidler's strategy:** The company offers a handful of flexible equity transactions, making Seidler a much more attractive company to work with and trust. Those industry leaders who have worked with Seidler are more than pleased with the results. CEOs like Bill Korowitz of Magnet say Seidler offers support without reins – a key to the happiness of any partnership. – *BC*

24

**HERBERT IP**

Chairman, Kenfair International LTD

**Back story:** If the place to meet in the industry is at trade shows, then this organization is at the lead as far as international shows go. The group began operations in 1991 as a trade show company, but now acts as a full sourcing operation. The company operates *kenfair.com*, which is a full-fledged electronic sourcing Web site for international buyers.

**A trade show giant:** Currently, Kenfair manages a dozen international trade shows, many of which have a direct effect on the promotional products industry. In fact, many industry suppliers and distributors can be seen sourcing new products from Asian manufacturers at Kenfair shows such as Hong Kong Spring Fair, Asia Expo and Mega Show Part I and Part II. The com-

pany's flagship shows are the Hong Kong International Toys & Gifts Show and the Asian Gifts, Premiums and Household Products fair, which both make up Mega Show Part I, held in October in Hong Kong.

Ip is now even bringing his services closer to home. His organization launched Kenfair Asian Expo in Las Vegas in 2003. The fourth annual Las Vegas event was held this past August, and Ip lauded it as a convenient location for companies looking to source products manufactured in Asia. – *AC*

25

**JIM SCHROER**

President and CEO, Carlson Marketing Group



**Back story:** Having toiled for years in marketing at Chrysler and Ford, Schroer made the move to Carlson's loyalty marketing environment. With that move, he took a keen sense of how to motivate employees, customers and business partners from loyalty programs he oversaw at the nation's top car makers.

**Why Carlson and the industry are a match made in heaven:** "I think that [promotional products] and traditional incentives and incentive travel are converging into alternatives to motivate customers, employees and channel partners," Schroer says. Carlson is a likely company to identify that convergence and make the most of it, recognizing the intimate psychology behind promotional products and their ability to motivate individuals.

**Where Schroer's prowess wins out:** Other marketing companies may well know the power of the promotional product, but they don't necessarily have the mentality to pull it all together. "Everything you do in marketing, it's so much more complex than even five years ago,"

**THE SUPPLIERS**

Here are the supplier representatives on the *Power 50* list.

- (1) Philippe Varnier/  
Michael Bernstein
- (2) Paul Lage
- (4) Marty Lott
- (5) Jack Teague
- (9) Thomas Myers
- (12) Keith Walters
- (17) Dov Charney
- (21) Jim Halverson
- (26) Bob Lederer
- (30) Trevor Gnesin
- (32) Ira Neaman
- (35) F. Dixon Brooke Jr.
- (43) Dan Townes
- (44) Paul Spitzberg
- (45) Mary Ann Farmer
- (46) Jonathan Isaacson
- (50) Brandon Mackay

Schroer says. "And the marketing staff inside most clients is so small. They don't have the internal staff" to make marketing happen. – *BC*

26

**BOB LEDERER**Chairman, Prime Resources Corp. (*asi/79530*)

**Back story:** There's few in the industry today with more experience than Bob Lederer. He has been in the business as a supplier for 43 years – over 25 of them with his own company. Prime Resources has consistently made the ranks of *Counselor's Top 40* list for years.

**Past and present:** "It seems as if on the supplier end there's a tendency to consolidate – family businesses have dissipated," says Lederer. Bucking this trend, Prime Resources has stayed in the family with his

son Jeff serving as vice president of sales. "Distributors can relate to us more easily," Lederer says.

**Honors:** His achievements have not gone unnoticed. In 2001, Lederer was named Entrepreneur of the Year for Southwest Connecticut/New York Hudson Valley by Ernst & Young. He was also a member of the 1995 PPAI Board, served as SAAGNY board president from 1986 to 1987, and has the singular distinction of being named both *Counselor's* Person of the Year (1988) and International Person of the Year (2002). —AR

27

**STEVE MARITZ**

CEO, Maritz

**Back story:** Like its competitor Carlson Marketing, Maritz is legendary in the incentive and motivational marketing industry. The Fenton, MO, company started in 1894 and certainly knows a thing or two about longevity and making their programs work.

**How the 19th century is a springboard today:** The founders' enthusiasm is alive and well in Steve Maritz (it is, after all, his bloodline), who says the company's success rests on innovation. That involves looking at ways that incentives, loyalty programs and promotional products can dovetail more effectively.

**Why Maritz makes Maritz:** Talk to Steve for 30 seconds and it's abundantly clear that he doesn't just value incentives and promotional products, but he also understands the complicated psychology behind them. "If you ask people what they want" in terms of rewards, "you're really asking the wrong question," he says. "Not enough companies get it. Sometimes the solution is fairly simple, but often times it's not." —BC



28

**JIM ADLER**CEO, Myron Corp.  
(asi/278980)

**Back story:** As CEO of distributor Myron Corp. (asi/278980), Jim Adler has led a company that repeatedly ranks in the top half of *Counselor's Top 40* list. Employing more than 1,000 people, Myron sells to an extensive network of end-users in North America, Europe, Japan, Australia and other countries, with plans to extend further into Mexico and Asia. —KA

29

**MARK BARROCAS**President, Wearguard-Crest  
Company (asi/356061)

**Back story:** Mark Barrocas was president of two promotional apparel giants, AlphaShirt and later Broder Bros. As current president of Wear-Guard, one of the leading distributors in the industry, Barrocas says he is focused on helping to grow the business and stay aware of where the industry is heading.

**Why he is on the list:** Barrocas created the brand Devon & Jones for Alpha Shirt. He shares this memory to illustrate the influence of that successful brand launch: "I was on a plane, and the man next to me asked what business I was in. I told him I was in the business of selling apparel to businesses. He responded that he was wearing a Devon & Jones shirt and he thought it was a great shirt. As president, I could never be sure if my ideas resonated with the end-user. It was an affirmation to me that this was a success." Devon & Jones went on to become one of Alpha Shirt's top sellers.

**Humble opinion:** Asked if being named one of the *Power 50* has changed him, Barrocas replied, "I have a wife and

**THE EXPERTS**

Consider this group the people who affect how others operate, but themselves don't operate as traditional suppliers or distributors. They're the most powerful consultants, heads of associations and trade shows and industry experts.

- (20) Peter Woo
- (24) Herbert Ip
- (40) Steve Slagle/Paul Bellantone/  
John Satagaj
- (41) Sabine Geldermann
- (42) Glen Holt/Jeff Meyer
- (48) Mary Kilburn/Barry Dobbs

three kids. When I go home, I'm just a husband and dad that does the dishes." —JC

30

**TREVOR GNESIN**CEO, Logomark  
(asi/67866)

**Back story:** Trevor Gnesin emigrated to the U.S. from South Africa in 1992. He opened a distributorship that year but within three months was operating as a supplier. Among other things he was responsible for bringing the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) bracelets into the industry, redefined what a supplier catalog should look like and was named *Counselor's* International Person of the Year in 2005.

**Why he's on the list:** "My company has made a difference in the industry," Gnesin says. "We bring a lot of new technology and new ways of doing business to the industry. We had a tremendous impact on product lines that come from one type of company in the industry and in terms of marketing there are very few companies in the industry that come close to the way we market our product and our company." That



includes its extremely sizable catalog, and its five Logomark Design Centers, which provide a setting for distributors to bring clients in for product demonstrations and research.

**A serving of humble pie:** Not one to let being named to the *Power 50* go to his head, Gnesin says, "I've always done my thing. I am the same person now as I was 14 years ago, even 20 years ago. Does it make me feel more responsible to the industry? Certainly. Do I feel I need to do things more responsibly? Of course." – JH

31

**KURT KAESER**

CEO, Kaeser & Blair Inc.  
(asi/238600)

**Back story:** Kurt Kaeser grew up in the promotional products industry. He's the fourth generation Kaeser to work for *Top 40* distributor Kaeser & Blair Inc.



"I was exposed to the industry and this business my whole life," Kaeser says. He officially started full time at the company in 1983 and, in 1996, became the president of the company.

**The facts:** A perennial *Counselor Top 40* company, K&B has enjoyed impressive growth in the years that Kaeser has been at the helm. In the five-year period leading up to 2005, sales grew 33%.

**Network:** As the leader of one of the industry's oldest distributorships, some might think that Kaeser is riding on the success of those who came before him. But he has marked his time with the company by remaining very hands-on with K&B's network of dealers and continually improving dealer programs. He's most proud of "being a part of a successful company and team that's on the leading edge of powerful dealer programs like daily advanced direct deposits of commissions, greater commission rates, lucrative

recruiting programs and prevailing technology," he says. – KA

32

**IRA NEAMAN**

President, Vantage Apparel  
(asi/93390)



**Back story:** Armed with an MBA from Harvard and more than his fair share of moxie, Neaman started Vantage Custom Classics nearly 30 years ago from his

cramped apartment in New York City. In his first year in business, Vantage did \$60,000 in sales; in 2005, \$59 million.

**Surreal statistic:** The founders of three *Counselor Top 20* supplier companies all went to the same high school, Taylor Allderdice, in Pittsburgh: Neaman, Bullet Line's founder and CEO Jeff Kramer and Tommy Bernstein, who co-founded Leed's – which makes Taylor Allderdice the closest thing this industry has to a promotional products charter school.

**The fall and rise of Ira:** When he was named *Counselor's* Person of the Year in 2003 and gave his now-infamously incendiary speech at the *Counselor* banquet, Neaman shocked the industry both because of what he said – that selling channels are going to change in the future and everyone better get ready for a new distribution model – and the fact that he was the one saying it. Not known for being reactionary or reckless, Neaman is careful, measured and level-headed; the Bizarro Dov Charney. When both he and Vantage's sales figures suffered, Neaman circled the wagons, tightened his belt and rebounded this year with Vantage showing nearly 10% sales growth, and climbing back up the *Counselor Top 40* list to number 20. Most ironic? When considered in retrospect, 99% of what Neaman said then

in his acceptance speech turned out to be dead on the money.

**Why he's the wearables Yoda:** More than anything, Neaman is viewed as the industry's apparel aficionado, from back in the early '80s when he was the first person to present an education session to distributors on selling apparel. Regardless of the past few tumultuous years, Neaman is still the one distributors and supplier colleagues go to to be mentored and tutored on all things wearables. – MB

33

**JANELLE NEVINS**

President, Summit Marketing  
(asi/339129)

**Back story:** Janelle Nevins began her industry career in quite the nontraditional way. When she was a young school teacher on leave to



care for her baby son, she made a sales call to a local bottling company and walked away with an order for 50 lighters. Little did she know that first sale was only the beginning of a long and lucrative business relationship with one of the most recognizable brands in the world, Coca-Cola. "Over the years of working with Coca-Cola, I became the liaison from the field to the corporate headquarters and became a sounding board in regards to whether certain concepts could be executed within the local markets," Nevins said. "Today, many of those early acquaintances are my best friends and still within the Coca-Cola system."

**Awards and accolades:** In addition to her success with Coca-Cola, Nevins has garnered an impressive list of credentials over the years. Some of these achievements include: *Counselor's* Person of the Year, one of *Counselor's* 15 Women Pioneers in the Promotional Products

Industry, PPAI Board of Directors member, *Atlanta Business-to-Business* magazine's 30 Most Influential Female Executives and the Orville Smith Service Award for Continued Community Service from the University of Tennessee Alumni Association. Nevins is proud of being a founding member of PeerNet, a networking group for suppliers and distributors. She says, "I brag about the value of our medium every chance I get." —JC

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**CRAIG NADEL**

President/CEO, Jack Nadel International (*asi/279600*)



**Back story:** Having started in 1984 in an entry-level position at the Culver City, CA-based distributorship founded by his uncle, Jack, in 1953, Craig Nadel was given the reins of the company by its board of directors this past May, after his father, Marty, who was the company's president, passed away in April.

**Why he doesn't think he's list-worthy:** Admittedly not as "charismatic and

outgoing" as his father and uncle, Nadel feels awkward about being named as one of the industry's 50 most influential people because he maintains that like Gene Geiger, he benefits from the familial advantage of sharing his last name with that of such a long-standing and well-known company. "Jack and Marty are such well-regarded and larger-than-life figures in the industry ... and much more influential than I could ever be," Nadel says.

**Why we do:** While he may not be a legendary industry character, what Nadel does have is a wonkish knowledge of finance and operations, which helped propel the company's rise through the ranks of *Counselor's Top 40* list from \$54 million in 2001 to \$86 million in 2005 — a 60% increase. "I don't know how much power or influence I have," Nadel says. "But I can tell you that since I've become president of JNI, people seem to want to meet me, and everyone thinks my jokes are funnier." —MB

35

**F. DIXON BROOKE JR.**

President, EBSCO Industries

**Back story:** Promotional products is just one small part of the conglomerate that is EBSCO Industries, of which F. Dixon Brooke Jr. is president. The company, founded in 1944, consists of more than 40 businesses, including subscription provider for more than 300,000 title listings from more than 78,000 publishers worldwide.

**Industry growth:** EBSCO is increasingly committed to growing its involvement in the promotional products industry. While EBSCO already had ties to the promotional products industry as the parent company of supplier Vitronic/Four Seasons (*asi/93990*) and distributor EBSCO Promotional Products (*asi/185750*), it

increased its industry ties by adding Admanco and, more recently, Crown Products to its supplier subsidiaries. —KA

36

**CHRIS VERNON**

President, The Vernon Co. (*asi/351700*)



**Back story:** Chris Vernon has been with his family's company since 1989. He began his career at the *Top 40* company as an assistant to the vice president of product development and has consistently worked up the ranks. He was named president and chief operating officer of the firm in 1999 and still holds those positions today.

**Why he's Power 50 worthy:** Although Vernon himself says he was "surprised and flattered" to be listed on the *Power 50* ranking, he is somebody who is quite visible in the industry. He was on the Board of Directors of PPAI from 1998 to 2002, has served on multiple committees for the association, and now is vice chair of technology services for PPAI. Also, as the head of one of the largest and most successful distributorships in the industry, Vernon is in a position to affect how business gets done. "I'm just a normal guy who puts his pants on like everybody else," he humbly says. "My name is known in the industry, but I don't try to play the power card with anybody."

**A buyout target:** With success and power come offers. Vernon's company is also attractive to others. "I get almost a call per day from investors and others looking to buy our company," he says. "There are a lot of investment bankers and private equity firms looking to get into the industry. They see the growth of the market and see it as an attractive place to invest." —AC

**THE CONGLOMERATES**

Some of the *Power 50* run organizations that operate many individual industry companies. We consider these the conglomerates.

- (1) Philippe Varnier/Michael Bernstein
- (2) Paul Lage
- (8) Marc Simon
- (10) Glen Taylor
- (12) Keith Walters
- (35) F. Dixon Brooke Jr.
- (38) Ray Titus

## 37 LARRY ZAVADIL

Founder and President,  
American Solutions for  
Business (asi/120075)

**Backstory:** In 1981, Zavadil founded the company – then called American Business Forms – out of the basement of his home in Glenwood, MN. “I was trying to create an environment where you allow sales associates to deal with their clients when we took care of the back-end for them.” Following the rise of computers, the business had to shift into other opportunities, including promotional products. While promotions currently make up less than half of the company’s business and \$67 million annual revenue, Zavadil expects that the majority of American’s future new business will be in promotions.

**Innovations:** “We were the first in the industry to pay 75% profit to our sales associates,” says Zavadil. But American’s advancements didn’t end there. In 2000, Zavadil shifted the company over to an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). “It was a way to transfer the company and keep the culture,” he says. The changeover has allowed Zavadil to focus less on day-to-day operations and more on the overall vision of the company. –AR

## 38 RAY TITUS

Founder, EmbroidMe  
(asi/384186) and Sign-A-Rama



**Back story:** Following in the footsteps of his father – Roy Titus, founder of Minutemen Press in 1972 – Ray Titus helped found Sign-A-Rama in 1987. As the younger Titus says, both companies only “dabbled in promotional products.” It wasn’t until 2000, when he founded *Top 40* distributor Embroidme, that Ray Titus really jumped

into the promotional products industry. “There’s a natural tie-in between Embroidme and the promotional products business. Whether we’re doing shirts for a golf tournament and they need tees, or working with a school doing uniforms and they want to do a fundraiser, it really ties in naturally.”

**Fast money:** Since its start in 2000, Embroidme has quickly grown into a *Top 40* company, making the list for the first time in 2005. That year, sales had increased from \$26 million in 2003 to \$45 million in 2004. And impressive sales in 2005 ensured the franchise’s place in the most recent *Top 40*, with an increase of 51% over the previous year.

**Room to grow:** Starting out as one store in 2000, Embroidme added about 20 in that first year, 40 the next and has continued to grow. By the end of this year, Titus expects there to be close to 400 Embroidme franchises. “We have close to 100 deposits for more franchises right now. Over the next three years, we’re going to be doubling our size as an organization.” –KA

## 39 JIM STUTZ

Director of Promotional  
Products, Cintas Corp.  
(asi/162167)

**Back story:** Stutz has been with Cintas for 18 years. While promotional products are his specialty, he has experience in all parts of the company, from IT to marketing to e-business.

**Big-time service:** Under Stutz’s leadership, Cintas has unveiled a list of impressive features that make its “Customization on Demand” capacity an industry leader: one piece minimum on embroidered items, 72-hour turnaround time, 39,000 logo capacity and the inclusion of



brand-name apparel from companies such as Nike, Ping, Bobby Jones and Field & Stream.

**More than money:** “I am especially proud of our Cintas team and their commitment to customer satisfaction,” says Stutz. “Many times, a leader is simply defined in terms of revenue – but the revenue only comes if you are a leader in customer service and reliability.” –MH

## 40 STEVE SLAGLE, PAUL BELLANTONE, JOHN SATAGAJ

President, Vice President,  
General Counsel, PPAI



Steve Slagle

**Back story:** Together these three individuals help to set the tone and agenda for the Promotional Products Association International, which produces The Expo, a large industry trade show held at the beginning of each year in Las Vegas. As president of the organization, Steve Slagle, along with the association’s Board of Directors, frames the association’s strategic plan and its direction. Bellantone, vice president of marketing and membership, helps to market the association to the industry. And Satagaj, as general counsel, is the association’s chief government relations liaison. “Any recognition we receive,” Slagle says, “is shared with other individuals and our Board of Directors.”

**What the future holds:** Slagle sees further industry growth on the horizon. “The expansion into other markets for promotional products has been happening already, but I think it will continue to move even further in the coming years,” he says. “The embroidery industry, screen printers, document management industry – they’ve all identified promotional products as a way to expand. This presents

great new opportunities for our marketplace.” – AC

41

**SABINE GELDERMANN**

Director, PSI



**Back story:** After she graduated from the University of Mainz in Germany having studied economics and languages, Sabine Geldermann was offered a job as a trade show translator then a project assistant with Blenheim International, a show organizer that managed the PSI Show – the most well-known and respected trade show catering to the European promotional products marketplace – in Düsseldorf. When Blenheim merged with Miller Freeman, Geldermann was appointed event director for the show; when the behemoth that is Reed Exhibitions bought Miller Freeman, she rose to the position of director she holds today.

**By the numbers:** Though PSI runs three European shows every year – in Düsseldorf, Paris and Warsaw, the titan is Düsseldorf, held every January. To put it in perspective, the show attracted almost 18,000 attendees and housed 850 exhibitors who took up 645,834 square feet at last year’s show; PPAI’s Vegas show used 378,800 square feet. PSI Düsseldorf is, quite simply, the show to attend if you’re a player in the European market or realize that sales and marketing opportunities aren’t limited by borders. Geldermann is the blonde at the gate holding the keys to the kingdom, and for this reason, in 2003 she was named *Counselor’s* first female – and youngest ever – International Person of the Year.

**International ambassador:** Geldermann is whip-smart and has a vast knowledge of the European promotional products market. If you’ve embraced the fact

that the world is flat and are contemplating navigating the intricacies of the highly lucrative though immensely complex European promotional products industry, you’ll want Geldermann’s help steering the ship. – MB

42

**GLEN HOLT & JEFF MEYER**Founder/Partner & CEO,  
Certified Marketing Consultants

Glen Holt

**Back story:** Talk about industry experience. Glen Holt helped introduce Hazel to the industry and took the organization to \$40 million in 20 years. Jeff Meyer was CEO of \$138 million supplier, Bemrose USA, until its acquisition in 1998. Combined they have over 70 years of industry experience; “I don’t know if that makes us good,” says Meyer, “it just makes us old.”

**Welcoming crew:** Holt, former *Counselor* Person of the Year and Marvin Spike Lifetime Achievement Award winner, noticed the need for a consultant for companies joining the industry, as well as salespeople who wanted to start their own businesses. From that idea, CMC was born. It quickly built a strong reputation that was cemented when 3M contacted them for help. “Why would they call some single-operator consulting business to come and help them?” says Holt. “It was the first recognition of my reputation in the industry and that there were even more opportunities for big businesses who wanted to get into this industry. And we’ve helped many of them.”

**Mentoring an industry:** CMC is unique because it has industry-specific expertise found nowhere else, for



Jeff Meyer

everyone from mom-and-pops to large multinationals. “We help people into the industry, both on the supplier and distributor side,” says Meyer. “We help them grow their business, and when they are looking for an exit strategy, whether retiring or divesting of the investment, we help them sell their company. You can call us for about anything that has to do with this industry.” – MH

43

**DAN TOWNES**President, Shepenco/  
Shelbyville Pencil (asi/86850)

**Back story:** He took over his family’s third-generation Shelbyville, TN-based company in 1993, and gained a reputation in the industry for being an outspoken, though well-respected, leader by sitting on various industry boards and committees.

**“Oh captain, my captain” moment:** Like the enigmatic, “Carpe Diem”-espousing teacher in *Dead Poet’s Society*, Townes cajoles people out of their complacent comfort zones by the sheer potency of his personality, and says things others wish they could, but don’t have the *cojones* to. “You are the one whose opinions people listen to,” distributor Sully Sullivan, a well-known industry veteran, told him in 1985, when Townes was tapped to become president of YESAA (the Young Executives of the Specialty Advertising Association). “You are the one they look to as a leader.” In the 20-plus years since then, the list of people lining up for his sugar coat-free counsel has only become longer and more distinguished.

**Best quote alert:** Most blunt and honest about himself, the self-deprecating Townes cautions the industry that listening to him is like “taking military advice from Custer.” “Truly,” he says. “I’m more

comfortable being under the influence than wielding it.” – MB

44

### PAUL SPITZBERG

Vice President and General Manager of Special Markets, Coach Inc. (asi/45518)



**Back story:** After running his own marketing consulting and hotel operating company for 12 years, Spitzberg joined Coach in 1994. However, it took him several years to come around to the promotional products industry. “I remember I told [ASI Chairman] Norman Cohn to cease and desist and not put Coach’s name in the ASI Show program in the late 1990s,” says Spitzberg. After 9/11 when companies started cutting their marketing and advertising budgets, he quickly saw the light. “We saw an opportunity to sell more products and for promotional products companies to expand into incentives.”

**Why he’s powerful:** In addition to membership on the board of Northwestern University’s Forum for People, Performance, Management and Measurement and the board of the Incentive Federation, Spitzberg is the current president of the Incentive Marketing Association. Through these positions he has been able to bring other high-end brands into the incentive and promotions fold by advising them on when and where to allow their brands to be used. “I tell them to look at this as another marketplace to sell their products,” says Spitzberg.

**What’s next:** As president of IMA, he’s created an industry-wide task force to introduce a new model for trade shows. He says the changes “will enhance the experience for exhibitors and, more importantly, the attendees.” – AR

45

### MARY ANN FARMER

President and CEO, Magna-Tel Inc. (asi/68480)



**Back story:** “It’s been my life: Do the jobs that no one else wants to do,” says Mary Ann Farmer, who definitely isn’t talking about her role as president/CEO of industry supplier Magna-Tel Inc. Rather, Farmer is speaking of the path she took to get where she is today, which included tackling problems that others couldn’t fix in her early days at Magna-Tel, and sitting on committees that required real brain power. Throughout her career, Farmer has shirked more prominent roles to concentrate on the inner-workings of the industry instead. “When you look at the finances, you pretty much know what’s going on, and when you write the bylaws, that’s writing the rules,” she says. “Some people want to be in the limelight, and being in the finance area, you’re not—you’re in the back seat. But you have a lot of control in that area.”

**Tough decisions:** Along with her involvement in major committees, Farmer has earned respect in the industry with her straightforward attitude. “I’m not a go-along-to-get-along kind of person,” she says. “Even if it’s tough on me personally, I tend to try to do what I think is best, even though other people in the group may not like what I’m doing. Sometimes that’s pretty hard to do.”

**Girl power:** Farmer was also one of several women who worked together to help establish the Women’s Leadership Conference run by the Promotional Products Association International. “There were several of us women who worked together to get it going,” she says. “Get a group of women together and they all do their part and it goes pretty easily.” – KA

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### JONATHAN ISAACSON

President, Gemline

(asi/56070)

**Back story:** He’s the head of the 16th largest supplier in the industry and has a reputation for being forward thinking, off-the-charts smart and an innovator in client services.

**Why he’s one of the industry’s best-kept secrets:** Isaacson, the consummate humble man, says “I’m not sure you should look at Gemline as particularly powerful.” Yeah right. “Our thing is trying to help out customers in the best way” possible. Well, there’s a start at least, to giving himself his due.

**Why he should be haughty, not humble:** The company tries to break new ground regularly in a plethora of areas—from women-specific items to customer service to cutting-edge design. “It’s really not about Gemline but about solving the problem for the customer,” Isaacson demurs in typical modesty. Then a crack of conceit emerges: “But we have brought innovation in lots of different places. We were the first in the industry to do e-mail notification in terms of order acknowledgement. We’re really offering peace of mind.” – BC

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### ROGER HENRY

CEO, American Identity  
(asi/120601)



**Back story:** Roger Henry got his first taste of the industry with VF Apparel, but he made his mark with American Identity. He joined the company in 1980 as a regional sales manager and worked his way up to president/COO in 1995. Today, he is CEO and vice chairman.

**No illusions:** Henry is very candid about his inclusion to the *Power 50*: “It’s

because I'm the CEO of the largest program company in the industry." And he's partly right. American Identity services over 200 online stores, including many of the world's biggest companies. But it was also his leadership and insistence on the best service possible.

**Trailblazer:** Henry does take pride in his decision to pursue and stick with online technology. "The investments we made in the infancy of the technology wave set us in a position to provide the best services and the most effective way of delivering promotional products to large corporations." And with IBM as one of American Identity's clients, it's hard to argue otherwise. —MH

## 48 MARY KILBURN & BARRY DOBBS

Owners, DinoMar



**Back story:** Mary Kilburn and Barry Dobbs founded a multiline rep firm in 1994, having built up about 30 years of industry experience combined. A couple of years later, the husband and wife team began to focus on consulting and have been doing so ever since. Now their firm, DinoMar Inc., helps new suppliers and distributors successfully enter the promotional products marketplace as well as aiding already established companies.

**It's harder than it looks:** Among other things, one of DinoMar's services is helping newer companies learn the ins and outs of the sometimes convoluted promotional products industry. "One of the biggest problems that we see is that the perceived value to entry is very low in the industry," says Dobbs. "It seems to me that people don't understand what it takes [to be successful in this industry] so of course they spend a lot of money on marketing. We try to guide them as to where that money should

be spent in the most cost effective ways."

**Finding fun:** While the business of DinoMar sounds rather serious, Kilburn says that the many challenges make it fun. "Our market is so fractured, and because it's so populated with small entrepreneurial enterprises, it's fun," she says. "We end up doing all kinds of neat and different things just in reaction to what the customers need." —KA

## 49 ROSS SILVERSTEIN

President and CEO, iPromoteu (asi/232119)



**Back story:** Ross Silverstein founded iPromoteu in 2000 with one goal in mind: Make life easier for industry salespeople by providing back-office services and allowing them to spend more time selling. So far, the strategy has been quite successful. iPromoteu now has nearly 300 affiliates operating under its system, and the company expects to surpass \$31 million in sales this year. And, Silverstein was named *Counselor's* Entrepreneur of the Year in 2005.

**How he makes his mark:** Silverstein believes that he's had fast success in the industry because he's aggressive in how he markets his company. "I'm very visible in the industry," he says. "I'm persistent, tenacious and creative in how I promote and market iPromoteu. People in the industry know that I'm someone not to be dismissed lightly."

**What the future holds:** Silverstein, obviously, is a big believer in salespeople being able to operate their own distributor firms. In fact, some of his recruiting and marketing tactics have come into question. But his success thus far can't be denied.



Now he thinks more salespeople will look to open up their own shops. "I foresee an acceleration of industry reps transitioning to owning distributor firms," he says. —AC

## 50 BRANDON MACKAY

President, SnugZ USA Inc. (asi/88060)



**Back story:** Brandon Mackay began his career at SnugZ in 1995 in the supplier's shipping department. Along the way he climbed the proverbial ladder until he was appointed president of the company in January 2005, six months after the passing of the company founder Pat Hicks. He was at the helm when four employees purchased SnugZ in July 2005. Less than a year later the company won *Counselor's* Distributor Choice award for lanyards and was named the Supplier of the Year.

**It's a team thing:** The unassuming Mackay credits his success with the people who make up the SnugZ business family. "It's been a good year for SnugZ," he says. "We've won a lot of awards, accolades and achievements." As he gushes over the company's support system he gives vice president of sales and marketing Charley Johnson a special shout-out calling him his right hand man and the most crucial person to SnugZ's success.

**Setting the bar:** If we wanted to compare Mackay to someone it might be Peter Parker's (Spider-Man) uncle Ben. He once said "with great power comes great responsibility." In that vein, Mackay thinks that leaders within this industry have a heavy burden. "We should make a conscious effort to do the right thing," he says. "I think I make a conscious effort to make a difference. A lot of people work hard, but I eat, sleep, drink, not just SnugZ but how I can make SnugZ better." —JH ○