

April 2014

Design Express

The graphic services newsletter for promotional products pros



SALES OF PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS INCREASED FOR 16 STRAIGHT QUARTERS

This month, the Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI) released its annual sales analysis for the promotional products industry. Sales for 2013 were \$20.5 billion, up 5.3 percent from 2012. Sales have increased for 16 straight quarters, according to ASI, and at twice the rate of the U.S. economy. Based on research firm eMarketer's estimates for media spend by category, promotional products are third among all advertising media, behind TV and digital.

Considering the sales numbers, it is no surprise that the *Counselor Confidence Index*, which measures distributor company health and optimism, improved to 113.2 in the fourth quarter. ASI's sales analysis found that distributors are also optimistic about sales for 2014. Almost three quarters of respondents feel sales in 2014 will be higher than in 2013.

Our take: The promotional products industry has grown consistently. From our perspective, the key seems to be diversification, whether that means offering end customers a wide range of products and/or services to meet their business needs. Likewise, we have grown with suppliers and distributors to support their vector art, embroidery digitizing and image editing needs and, in more recent years, their marketing materials and digital marketing.

[Read more from ASI.](#)

CORELDRAW IS A PREFERRED TOOL FOR VECTOR ARTWORK

An article by Thomas Moore, Jr., was published in *Impressions* about the advantages of CorelDRAW. The founder of Strawberry Stitch Co. noted: "At the center of our company's versatility was the ability to use CorelDRAW and versatility is a life raft to which you can cling in rough waters." Since 1999, Mr. Moore has discussed the need for embroiderers to learn the software to address quality issues.

Our take: Jay Busselle is an Affinity Express sales executive and former CorelDRAW trainer. He explains that there are three reasons why so many promotional products companies use CorelDRAW every day.

- The learning curve. Compared to other software, CorelDRAW is easier for new users who have little-to-no experience to master.
- Non-designers. Small- and medium-size business (SMB) owners and entrepreneurs need a graphic tool that will

APRIL STATISTICS

- [Ad Specialty Distributors increased their revenue by 5.3% in 2013](#)
- Research firm Gartner estimates mobile marketing will generate [\\$41.9 billion in ad revenues by 2017](#).
- Google and Facebook are driving growth of mobile ad sales claiming [75% of market gains last year](#).

INDUSTRY NEWS

Advantages Magazine:
[9 Predictions for Mobile Devices](#)

Counselor:
[Get interactive: Live Events Show Distributors the Importance of Interactive and Engaging Promotions](#)

Advantages Magazine:
[Businesses Investing More in Social Media](#)

INDUSTRY QUOTE

"Generally, I think business is finally rebounding from 2008 and 2009," says Rod Brown, managing director at [MadeToOrder](#). "We were up 12% for 2013 versus 2012."

Confirming this statement is a recent report released by [The Conference Board](#). The [current](#) report shows consumer confidence rising to 82.3 in March, an increase from February's 78.3 index. Lynn Franco, director of economic indicators reveals, "Consumer confidence advanced in January for a second consecutive month. All in all, confidence appears to be back on track and rising expectations suggest the economy will pick up some momentum in the months ahead."

allow them to communicate visually. CorelDRAW works well for people without formal design training.

- **Value.** For under \$500.00, business owners get a suite of artwork tools that includes 10,000 clipart and digital images, 2,000 high-resolution images, 1,000 OpenType fonts and much more.

We're experts in all industry software and tools so, if you don't have the time or capacity at your company to create all the needed vector art files, turn to Affinity Express for the highest quality, fast turn times, easy ordering and competitive prices. We'll produce orders in whatever format you need!

[Read more of the article.](#)

SMART CUSTOMER SERVICE TIPS FROM SMALL BUSINESSES

Success in the promotional products industry, as in so many others, is based on building strong relationships. Those relationships are strengthened with responsive customer service. In the Salesforce.com blog, we found 10 Smart Customer Service Tips from Small Business, by John Rote, vice president of customer experience for men's online fashion retailer Bonobos and John Pepper, founder and CEO of Boloco. A few of the key points:

1. Every customer deserves a response—even when they tell you something you don't want to hear.
2. You will learn a lot about your business from feedback on social media—and the listening happens all the time.
3. Pay attention—social media is driving customers to your website and might be resulting in more
4. More than one person can take part in a conversation—if everything goes through one team member, you'll miss the power of demonstrating to customers the focus of your company on their needs.

Our take: Customer service is about listening and human-to-human interaction. The best industry suppliers and distributors make business personal . . . and responsive!

[John and John have more great tips to consider.](#)

TARGETING SMBs HAS BIG POTENTIAL

According to Borrell Associates, the fight is on to capture the business of SMBs who collectively spend hundreds of billions of dollars on marketing. There is \$390 billion in never-before-counted online marketing service dollars.

The average U.S. business spends \$17,000 on online services, compared with \$6,800 in online advertising. Borrell Associates claims that this category consists of three items: online services, promotions and advertising. Of these three, the services portion is the largest and includes web presence, online public relations, online marketing support, online ad production and online consulting and research.

Our take: While promotional products is a consistently growing business, this report illustrates that SMBs are spending money on digital services and advertising. We've learned that small companies are loyal to the relationships they build with their local suppliers. In fact, they rank knowing "the sales rep I am dealing with personally" as one of the top three reasons they

UPCOMING INDUSTRY EVENTS

[PPAI Expo East](#)
May 20-21, 2014

[NBM B.I.G. Show](#)
June 12-14, 2014

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



Sheetal Shrivastava,
Senior Manager of Learning
and Development

Sheetal Shrivastava joined Affinity Express in December 2013 as the senior manager of learning and development (L&D). Sheetal is responsible for planning and managing all L&D initiatives at our Pune locations. On a daily basis, she helps to ensure the large team has the skills, training and motivation to provide the highest-quality designs for our clients.

As a child, Sheetal always dreamed of joining the armed forces and in 2002 she was commissioned to the Indian Army. During her service, Sheetal was awarded four service medals for her exemplary work and dedication. An avid athlete, she has a passion for snow skiing, white river rafting and kayaking. She also paints, dances and sings and has won several national and state level awards for these skills!

FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTION

How does Idea Custom Solutions handle high-volumes of orders for graphic production?

Ordering files from an outside provider should be quick and easy, so we developed an ordering system: Interactive Digital Entry Assistant (IDEA). IDEA is an internet-based workflow tool that allows you to place, revise, upload and store files. IDEA gives you the status of your order and even allows

buy from a local supplier. By already having a relationship with local businesses, you can have an advantage over other companies who want to bring digital services to your markets (Source: Enterprise Council on Small Business of the Sales, Marketing and Communications Practice, October 2010).

[Check out the report.](#)

you to store your work once you have completed it. The system truly is intuitive and very easy to navigate.

DESIGN SHOWCASE

Vector Artwork



Input



Output

Embroidery Digitizing



Input



Output

If you have any designs created by our team that you would like to share in this newsletter, send them to us at marketing@affinityexpress.com.



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