ROOKIES on the Rise

Age is but a number. The sentiment rings true for these 35-and-under go-getters. They have worked hard to create their success - and these young dynamos are here to stay.

oung. Successful. Empowered. By charting their own course in business, young salespeople often find themselves in their dream job at an early age. The reps profiled here are smart, savvy and willing to shake up the status quo. We chose them based on their steady growth, hard work, positive attitudes and pure dedication. Here's how they did it.

BY JENNIFER VISHNEVSKY

Mike Welker

Coach/Adaptor/Believer in Love at First Sight

Age: 27

Title: Account Executive, Touchstone Merchandise Group (asi/345631)

Hobbies: I'm coaching soccer at my alma mater high school in Cincinnati.

Who do you look up to? My parents. My dad came from nothing and now he's a vice president of sales, and he always made time to hang out with us and attend our sports games. The VP of sales at Touchstone has also taught me how to be a true sales-

Where will you be in 15 years? I would love to stay in this industry. It allows you to work with anyone, from a local Girl Scout troop to a Fortune 50

His Story: It didn't lead him to sales, but Mike Welker's high school job was one of his most rewarding. While he was cleaning the pool at a water park in Cincinnati, he spotted a girl doing her swim test. "I saw her and knew that was who I was going to marry," he says. Married for two years now, he isn't planning



to go back to the water park, having always wanted to dive into sales. "My dad is a vice president of sales here in Cincinnati," he says.

It all started at State University, where he majored in marketing. In his senior year,

he was hired to work for Newell Rubbermaid and sold blinds to Lowe's, Home Depot and JC Penney. After a promotion, he worked for an office products division of the company. "I worked with them for a year and fell in love with the industry. It allowed me to use my marketing brain and instincts to help my clients at the time," he says.

But when the pharma code was enacted, Newell Rubbermaid used a "last one in, first one out" policy, and Welker was given about three months to find a new job. At 25, he decided to try the distributor side. "I knew the big players in the area and that Touchstone was the right place for me," he says, but there were no openings in sales. That didn't deter him.

He asked the sales manager if he could work for free for three months. "I wanted to prove I was a hard worker and I could bring in business; I just needed a shot," he says. Three months later, he was on staff. He secured a contract on day 88 with a major food brand his cousin worked for. "That has turned into a \$500,000-per-year drop-ship client with additional sales of \$250,000 for their online store," he says. He has done everything from gifts with purchase, online stores and mail-in prizes.

"I have 30 contacts there that have really given me all of their business. It's all about networking, asking for referrals and asking for leads. When I finally realized that I can bring value to these people, it wasn't, 'Hey, give me names so I can get a sale.' It was, 'Give me a name because I feel like I can help them,' Welker says. As a result of his tenacity, he will be well over \$1 million in sales this year. "My program business will be near \$300,000 by year-end, and my dropship sales will be near \$1.5 million. I have a firm plan in place, and I feel I will be a \$2 million salesperson for Touchstone by 2013," he says.



Jason McSweenev Designer/Dad/Cool Cucumber



Title: President, dream INK (asi/183364)

Hobbies: Bicycling, reading, sports and adventuring around Chicago.

Who do you look up to? My father started his own successful remodel-

ing company the year I was born, he's nice to a fault and he taught me the importance of keeping your word in business.

Where will you be in 15 years? Hopefully, I'll get some support staff in here. I see us offering everything through digital means

His Story: McSweeney has always been an artsy person, focusing on drawing, writing and reading as a kid. "I had my first son when I was 16, so I joined the workforce and ended up with a poster printer," he says. In printing, he dealt with every department, so he learned more about working with each client from concept to completion.

After 13 years of experience with a large retail printer, wholesale chains and ad agencies, McSweeney branched out on his own.

"I started dream INK nearly four years ago to offer better service and streamlined purchasing," he says. "I saw a real lack of promotional products in the printing industries."

Even though McSweeney hadn't been working on the sales side, he brought over 20-30 clients from his old jobs.

Now, his clients include engineers, investigators, insurance agents, doctors and fitness folk, along with local print shops who utilize him for his expertise in design and promotional product procurement. "I don't do a lot of cold calling. I'm not an aggressive sales guy. We're not making 100 calls and getting one business card order out of it," he says.

McSweeney's clients recognize that his style is unique. "One of my clients got bronchitis a few weeks ago. Her company had a few trade shows it was preparing for, and we had an order that was in limbo when she landed in the hospital. I made an executive decision and we got everything to her on the day she returned. We got a great e-mail from her saying that's why she loved working with us," he says.

In his first year, McSweeney sold about \$80,000. This year, he's projected for \$150,000.

Laurie O'Shea

New Mom/Liaison/Blog Enthusiast

Age: 27

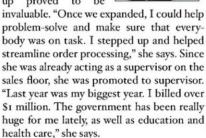
Title: Sales Department Manager, Motivators Inc. (asi/277780)

Hobbies: I don't have that much of a life now that I have an 8-month-old daughter. But I like reading, working out and cooking. Who do you look up to? I look up to our CEO here, Ken Laffer. He started knocking on doors and now he has a fancy office with a lot of employees. Also, Rachel Levin has taken the sales department to a place that has a lot of positive energy. I also look up to my husband. He is the manager of IT at Motivators; we met at the company. Where will you be in 15 years? I hope to be in a very similar place because I'm so happy right now. I have a great job and a

Her Story: With four promotions in five years, O'Shea is definitely doing something right. After graduating from college with a degree in communications, she heard about an opportunity to be a receptionist at Motivators, Inc. "The company started growing very quickly, so I was promoted into the sales department. There were only a few of us, but before we knew it, we were a huge online company," she says.

"I didn't come into sales 100% cold, since

I had learned a lot in the beginning. But, it took me six months to be completely comfortable with the industry," she says. Luckily, her experience from the ground up proved to be



One of her favorite recent projects was an order for Nordstrom. "They requested custom tape measures, which were black tape and silver text, that said 'Nordstrom fits America.' We ordered thousands and they went nationwide for all of the stores," she says.

O'Shea now manages both the inbound and outbound sales teams. She is the liaison between departments to implement new ideas. "We just hired three new people, so I've been training them. I make sure that everyone is constantly blogging, which is huge for us," she says.

Brande Brown

Title: National Account Manager, Goldner Associates (asi/209800)

Hobbies: I am an avid cupcake baker. I also ride a Harley.

Who do you look up to?

I look up to successful businesswomen who can handle being a good mom and a work life.

Where will you be in 15 years? I would like to teach other young people coming up in the industry. This is a great industry - I can't stress that enough.

Her Story: At age 23, Brown got her start as a sales rep in the gift and home décor business. "I was working with retailers who were selling stuffed animals," she says. One of her accounts started ask-

ing about custom plush items. With an associate's degree in digital design and prepress graphics, she already had a great knowledge base. "One question

led to another, and I started doing research on custom products for my customers since they were asking me for things other than stuffed animals," she says.

Eight years ago. Brown decided to start her own company with a friend and brought in about \$200,000 each year in sales. She came across Goldner Associates in 2007 and now works with SeaWorld, Disney and Alere, a medical company. "Holiday Inn Club Vacations is my biggest account. I have spent the last two years building a uniform program for them. That has been a beast, but we have developed an online ordering system for them," she says.

Last year, Brown booked about \$350,000 in sales. This year, she's projected for \$500,000. However, it's not all about the work. "As a mom, it's the most fantastic life I could ask for. I work really hard on certain days of the

week, but then the reward is I can go see my son in a school function on a Tuesday at 10 in the morning," she says.

One of her memprojects was for National Swimsuit Day SeaWorld. "I worked with a major retailer to come up with giveaway items that could be used at the retail level," she says.

While she works with about 25 clients, SeaWorld is one of her favorites. That may have something to do with her childhood dream of being a dolphin trainer.



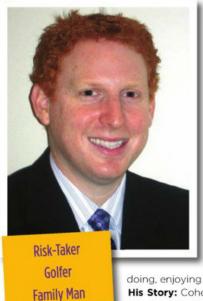
Animal Lover Harley Rider

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THE NEXT BIG THING



Jamie Cohen



Title: Director of Business Development, Sonic Promos (asi/329865)

Hobbies: I like to be home every night at 5 for dinner. I like to play golf, but I can't do that every day of the week. I take my clients seriously, but you can take Friday afternoons off and enjoy your life.

Who do you look up to? My father and my grandfather - it's the patriarchal lineage in me. There's something subconscious about that.

Where will you be in 15 years? Living on a beach in Maui. Hopefully those lottery tickets worked! All jokes aside, I still see myself doing what I'm

doing, enjoying it and having fun.

His Story: Cohen, a Washington D.C. native, had aspirations to be a wide receiver for the Washington Redskins. But he began a career in sports

marketing, working in the field through college at Brandeis University and for the first four years out of school. The sports connection brought him success in promotional products.

His mother had a business in her basement, working in the industry on a minor scale, mostly for weddings and family events. "My father told me that I should do it for corporate stuff, there might be business out there. I had no clue about competition, but I started my own thing out of the basement," he says. He used his mom's ASI number by making himself an offshoot of her company.

In his first month, he got an order from the University of Maryland football team for their season's stadium giveaways. "It was 50,000 items, but I learned that it wasn't a huge margin. It made me about \$5,000 in the beginning. Looking back, it didn't make the most sense," he says.

Luckily, he used that order to get his feet wet and later was approached by Seth Weiner of Sonic Promos. They had mutual acquaintances and a few mutual clients. "We had lunch, and the rest

is history. He was looking to grow and knew that I needed to grow, so we merged up," he says. He's been with the company for about five years, with clients in finance, nonprofit,

advertising and sports.

Since his start six years ago, Cohen has been increasing his sales about 20% a year. "Last year, I sold \$400,000. I'm projected for \$550,000 this year," he says. As director of business development, he focuses the majority of his time on sales, but he's also looking for new opportunities for Sonic. "I'm successful because I deliver what I promise and I come up with cre-

ative ideas and concepts," he says. Now, as the father of two girls, he can also thank his wife of 10 years for his start in the business. "She's a teacher. That helped me get started because she has good benefits."

Fun fact: You might recognize Cohen from his younger days as a child model and actor.

Brian Swift

Planner/Networking Guru/Adventurer



Age: 34 Title: Owner, Swift Marketing and Distribution (asi/444507)

Hobbies: I work out, read and travel. I like doing adven-

Who do you look up to? I look up to the business principles of Reginald F. Lewis (deceased) and the spiritual principles of Bishop TD Jakes.

Where will you be in 15 years? Growing within our current corporate list and trying to expand and get more value for our clients.

His Story: As a finance graduate from Georgetown Uni-

versity, Swift planned to work in New York City for 10 years, make some money, and then bring business back home. "I called my dad, who is in the promotional products business, and asked if I could come home and learn what he does," he says. He quit his job in April 2001 to come home for six months to learn. "I was supposed to go back to New York, but then 9/11 happened," he says.

For the first few years, Swift focused on his dad's business, which is in promotional products, but especially as a supplier of paraphernalia to African-American Greek life (sororities and fraternities). They have a warehouse in St. Louis and an office in Atlanta, which he says is a thriving market. He has secured \$400,000 in sales for this year, but will be over \$500,000 by the end of 2011. He has also been a PPAI member since 2009 and sits on the board.

Through networking and associations, Swift has secured a great client list, including Macy's, Bloomingdales and CNN. Right now, he's working on a contract with ABM. "I'm hoping that will be a huge client for us, as they have 100,000 employees. We're getting together their company store to service their employees," he says.

Zachary Tyler

Runner/Traveler/Natural-Born Sales Star



Age: 26 Title: Executive Vice President, Creative Marketing Concepts (asi/170631)

Hobbies: I'm very physically active, so I run and work out a lot. I like to travel.

Who do you look up to? Mark Lillge has been an instrumental role model.

Where will you be in 15 years? I see this company as easily being a \$30-\$50 million distributorship in multiple locations.

His Story: Tyler quit high school at age 16 and decided to focus on selling. By the time he was 18, he was making

\$50,000 a year selling Kirby vacuums. It should come as no surprise that by age 26, he is beginning the buyout of CMCPromos, a \$4 million distributorship in downtown San Francisco with a 3,000-square-foot showroom.

Mark Lillge, the former owner of CMCPromos, is a family friend that Tyler has known since he was six. Knowing he wanted to work for Lillge one day, he started as a receptionist at CMCPromos seven years ago. He became sales manager in 2009 and saw sales grow 30% from 2009 to 2010. From 2010 to 2011 they grew 35%.

"I work with every major account that the company has. We are a 14-person company with approximately 2,000 clients. Our dominant sectors tend to be legal, health care and corporate America," he says.

So how does the staff respond to a 26-year-old executive vice president? "They know that I've been implementing attitude and behavioral changes. The sales force is a lot more ambitious," he says. "Our client retention rates are through the roof."

At age 26, there is still plenty more that Tyler plans to do with his company. The immediate goal is to continue what we've been doing and reach the \$10 million mark that I have set for about three years from now," he says.

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THE NEXT BIG THING



Thomas Rector



Political Advocate

Online Ace

Age: 33

Title: CEO, Rector Communications, Inc. (asi/305623)

Hobbies: I like to try something new. One year, I took karate lessons. This year, I taught myself to play the guitar.

Who do you look up to? My father-in-law has been a huge supporter. He's from the oldschool way of doing it, but he's good with suppliers. I look at the big guys in the industry and think, "What does it take for us to be strong enough to get the opportunities for those big accounts?'

Where will you be in 15 years? At some point, we'd like to open up some mini shops. The stuff we do now is virtual, so we'd like to

have locations where we recreate some of our systems.

His Story: His career path went from sports to nursing home administration to politics, but Rector has now found his calling in sales. Although he wanted to play basketball or tennis, he attended Ball State University and graduated with a

degree in nursing home administration. A few years later, he had the

opportunity to run for city council in Muncie, IN. "I was 23 at the time and had an offer to be a lobbyist for the Board of Realtors," he says.

Rector was involved in government affairs in college and was instrumental in uniting students with the city. "We did a lot of work with the city to include the students. I ran on the issue of focusing on the next generation," he says. Rector enjoyed politics, so he never went back to working in a nursing home. Then, it was time for another change. "My father-in-law brought me into the ad specialty industry after doing this for 27 years. He hooked me up with a few apparel accounts and showed me how it works. Once I could devote 100% of my time, I did it," he says.

Now, Rector is in his fourth year in the industry. He started his company as a way to pay for graduate school. Although he barely pushed \$80,000 in sales for the first couple of years, he has since paid for school in cash, as his business has tripled each year. After dissecting how the industry worked, he noticed that "very few were using technology, so I focused on online stores. I taught myself website development and e-commerce," he says. The company maintains 38 online stores and websites, has expanded into event merchandising and has developed a collegiate sales network, which Rector hopes to take nationwide in 2012. His company sold more in the

last month than he did in his first year of the business, and is now on track for about \$750,000 to

\$1 million for the year.

As far as the political side, Rector isn't ready to retire. "My involvement has helped me get a lot of potential clients. I'm working on Congressman Mike Pence's campaign for Indiana governor. And I'm hoping our current governor will run for president," he

And while his wife is finishing up her residency in anesthesiology, they both secretly name shots after their friends. Well, secret's

With political races and company stores galore, he still finds time for some fun. He once snuck backstage at a country music concert and hung out with Kenny Chesney, Rascal Flatts and NFL star Peyton Manning.

Matt Gledhill

Problem Solver/Speed Freak/Creative Thinker



Age: 30

Title: Brand specialist, Walker Advertising (asi/354440)

Hobbies: I like to fish, golf and play with

Who do you look up to? My grandfather was a world-renowned salesperson and very respected in this business.

Where will you be in 15 years? I'm a planner, but not long-term. I'd like to see myself always being in commissioned sales and focusing on my clients.

His Story: Gledhill calls himself a south Texas brat, but he's never had a military family. He has moved all over south Texas and then went to college in San Antonio. He at first wanted to be a veterinarian, but instead studied marketing.

Gledhill started at Walker Advertising in 2006 as an intern doing market research. As an assistant to its founder, he learned the roles of selling and honed his customer-relation skills. "The founder was very creative. He wasn't just selling product; he was selling the emotion that went along with it," he says.

Paying attention paid off: In 2010, he took top sales honors from a 20-year veteran through the cultivation of key accounts. When the founder of the company passed away three years ago, Gledhill began to manage his older accounts, as well as his own book business. Along the way, he learned a few key points about sales: "Having a successful business is all about owning up to mistakes. Everyone is going to have issues that come up, so I've learned to accept problems and deal with them immediately," he says.

Gledhill's strength is developing ideas for custom-made ways to promote his clients. He recently produced a can cooler made to look like a beer can for a major beer distributor. "There was an event sponsored by my client's competitor. My client went in there and handed out the cooler to people going into the event. When people got in, they were drinking beer inside the can cooler that was made to look like they were drinking my client's product," he says.

Gledhill also recognized that the beer company is very green and Earth-based, but it never really marketed itself that way. "I came up with an idea for a bottleneck hanger that was sold with six-packs. The hanger was made out of recycled material and made into seed paper, which could be planted," he says.

In 2010, Gledhill was voted president of the regional trade association CAPPA, which covers the San Antonio/Austin corridor and outlying area. He is also one of the top performers at the company, earning about \$850,000 last year with about 120 total clients. In his professional life, Gledhill is focusing on self-realization. "I like where I am right now in my career. Finding ways to lessen stress levels is what I'm going to be looking at the most, and focusing on family life," he says. The father of a three-year-old son and newborn daughter is also a speed freak (but not with his kids). "I've been pulled over about 40 times. My specialty is getting out of tickets," he says.



Robin Hartowicz



Drum Corps Groupie Sales Booster Bamboo Tender Age: 29

Title: Promotional Products Department Manager, Print Resources, Inc. (asi/299478)

Hobbies: I teach color guard for our local high school. I also enjoy movies and art events.

Who do you look up to? The owners of the company. When they were my age, they were starting this company. It's grown for 10 years and

changed with the times.

Ever since I've been here, they have gotten us through good and bad times.

Where will you be in 15 years? Hopefully I'll continue to grow this business. Eventually, I'd like

to break off and have my own business or use the knowledge I have to help other people advance.

Her Story: For Hartowicz, staying involved in the educational market has always been her solution for making the grade. She also once toured as part of the souvenir crew, where she worked in mobile retail sales. She decided to stay on the sales bandwagon and eventually found a sales opportunity at Print Resources, Inc. "They wanted someone who could grow the department," she says.

She had no problems growing her book of business. Aside from taking over an existing rep's accounts, she learned about the power of referrals. By mainly focusing on education and technology, Hartowicz has boosted sales almost 30% this year. On the education side, she works with area high schools on online stores stocked with new ideas and products in spiritwear.

One of the company's biggest tech clients is ExactTarget, an e-mail marketing company. "We do a lot of their printing, but we can marry the print side with promotional products," she says. One of the coolest projects was a tiered mailing that involved everything from

a live two-foot bamboo plant to a one-foot plant to a bamboo shoot. "We had to source it all, get it here, keep it alive and figure out how to package it. It got the most reaction," she says.

While earning two
degrees in organizational
communications, she toured
with a drum and bugle
corps in the
summers.

Steven Flaughers

Country Singer/Mascot/Mover and Shaker



Age: 34

Title: Owner, Proforma Eclectic Technical Systems (*asi/490897*) **Hobbies:** I'm the lead singer of a country music band in northeast Ohio. **Who do you look up to?** I still can't keep up with my dad's work ethic.
Fred Albrecht has also been a help.

Where will you be in 15 years? It seems like now that our franchise is finally paying off, we're going to have more marketing dollars to do cool stuff. His Story: After completing his degree at Kent State University, Flaughers was happily pursuing aviation in flight school. Then, 9/11 happened, and the airline industry suffered. Luckily, Flaughers was able to transfer his flight

credits to technology credits, so he got out of college and moved on.

Through networking, he began working for Delta Media Group selling website infrastructures to companies nationwide. "That was a job that opened my eyes. I always wanted to own a business, but the big picture finally hit me," he says. He had maintained a good relationship with someone at Proforma, who had recently bought a franchise with a partner. "In my senior year, they showed me what they did. I came on as an independent sales rep. My first few sales were with Kent State University, now my largest customer," he says. It helps that Flaughers was the mascot for Kent State and also the mascot for the Cleveland Gladiators arena football team.

In 2006, Flaughers wound up buying the company outright and focused on utilizing more technology and getting more business from social media. "I didn't have any extra money, so what were my free avenues of marketing? It was time to be unique," he says. After a rough transition, the company has pretty much paid off. "This year, we should finish at \$617,000. We have grown by at least \$100,000 for the past three years in a row."

One of his strongest markets is higher education, as he works with about 20 universities from Ohio to Florida. "We put together a system where we find a university we want to work with, and we utilize our referrals to get in there," he says.

One element of the company's growth is through buyouts. Flaughers explains: "We're finalizing the buyout of a promotional item company in West Virginia that will bring us two sales reps."

Nicole McNamee

Business Builder/Mom/Cheerleader



Age: 3

Title: Director of New Business Development, POP Solutions Group (asi/359180)

Hobbies: I enjoy running, exercising and playing with my four-year-old son. **Who do you look up to?** I have a few *Fortune* 500 accounts where the women are in very senior positions. They have families and their jobs seem so much more stressful than mine. I'm always amazed at how they manage their time.

Where will you be in 15 years? My husband and I have talked about buying a second home in Colorado. I hope we have that so I can work remotely from my patio there.

Her Story: As Smokey the dog, the mascot for the University of Tennessee, McNamee was well on her way to becoming a sales superstar. "I think getting people to cheer and support you was really my first introduction into sales. Now, I just do it without a costume," she says.

After working in finance for a local hospital, McNamee's boss told her that she should give marketing a try. "I was in grad school, so worst case, I'd come back to health care," she says. Through networking, she started working for POP Solutions Group, where she has worked for six years now. "I followed other salespeople for awhile. I used my connections from the health-care industry to book some business. I still work with them to this day," she says.

McNamee works with an impressive book of clients, with the majority of her work coming from a hospitality company account. "Last year, we did a little over \$1.2 million. This year, we're on track for \$1.5 million." she says.

She recently finished working on a trade show project for one of her clients who was looking for an engaging and interactive booth. "We did a red carpet theme and gave out our bling mugs. There were 2,500 attendees and we had 1,000 people stop by our booth," she says.

McNamee knows that 80% of effects come from 20% of causes, so if a client is not providing a return or ordering in higher volume, she cuts her losses and moves on.

THE NEXT BIG THING



Samuel Santiago

Volunteer

Globe Trekker

Entrepreneur

Title: President, Kreative Promotions, Inc. (asi/390090)

Hobbies: I do volunteer work and travel a lot. I've been to Europe several times.

Who do you look up to? Zig Ziglar understands what it means to motivate someone. Billy Graham essentially came from nothing to become America's evangelist.

Where will you be in 15 years? My company will be a multimillion-dollar marketing consultant using ad specialties to help promote brand awareness

His Story: More than 15 years ago, Santiago started as a part-time sales associate in a retail clothing store. He then pursued an opportunity as a store manager for the Radio Shack Corporation.

After a successful six-year run, he was offered his first outside sales position. "It was a straight-commission opportunity where I would park my car on

one end of a large strip plaza or commercial street and walk B-to-B offering a discount to, and promoting, a local day spa," he says. He was so successful that he was promoted to middle sales manager within one week of being hired. Next, it was onto Verizon Corporation, and a few years later, he began working as an account executive for Sprint-Nextel Corp, Sección Amarilla.

But, as the economy tumbled, Santiago and his wife considered going into business for themselves. He owned a Christian music DJ company, so he decided to advertise the business to a niche market. Unfortunately, they only booked two gigs in a year.

When Santiago's wife attended a home show in Raleigh. NC. she came across a Press-A-Print representative who was screen printing a T-shirt order. "She asked several questions, which led to us attending an information seminar." he says.

Santiago decided to partner with Printa Systems, out of the Seattle area. "I said good-bye to corporate America, sealed off our home garage and got right to work becoming the local T-shirt guy," he says. After about seven months selling T-shirts and pens, he and his wife traveled to their first ASI show. There. they attended a seminar, which convinced them it was time to become marketing advisers. "I had spent years training and working as a sales professional and an advertising consultant for some of the largest companies in the world, and now I was going to do precisely what I had done for them - for myself,"

A true newbie to

the industry, Kreative Promotions has really come

together in the last eight

months. Santiago's average

order quickly rose from

\$400 to over \$3,000.

One of his first clients was the Raleigh Rescue Mission, who called him looking for pens. "It turned out that since they help families in need, they hand out meals and a pen. I offered them tote bags, which would get greater visibility and wouldn't be disposed of like pens when they ran out of ink. We went from 200 pens to 7,500 bags," he says.

His company is now operating as a full-service consulting firm. "We now have a client list of more than 60 businesses," he says. The company is on target to finish 2011 at 150% above 2010's fiscal year.

Jennifer Vishnevsky is a staff writer for Advantages.

www.GoldenLionUSA.com





www.macpromotional.com