



Corbin Sapp, Ivars Sportswear Inc.
All-time high sales volume:
\$1.4 million



Libby DuBay, Jack Nadel Int'l.
All-time high sales volume:
\$1.35 million



Cindy Jorgenson, Brown & Bigelow
All-time high sales volume:
\$1.65 million



Kevin J. Scharnek, 14 West LLC
All-time high sales volume:
over \$5 million



Tony Pupo, Logogram Inc.
All-time high sales volume:
\$1.7 million



TIPS FROM SALES SUPERSTARS

Whether you're looking to hone your selling skills or just remind yourself of opportunities you may not have considered lately, check out these sales pointers from some of the best in the industry.

BY JEN ZORGER

How do you turn a request for 500 stick pens into a \$50,000 order? ▲ "Ask questions," says million-dollar-plus seller Cindy Jorgenson, interaction specialist for Brown & Bigelow (*asi/148500*). "Your clients don't know everything you can do for them, so unless you probe and get more detail, neither of you will know just how much potential business you can do together." ▲ Yes, Jorgenson really did transform a simple pen order into a huge program by probing and listening to her client. "Why? How? Where? What? Asking these questions taught me the pens were supplies for a 12-city training session with customers," she says. "By the time we were done, I had a \$50,000 order of custom three-ring binders, speakers' gifts, meeting signage, name badges, attendees' gifts, follow-up survey gifts, and, of course, the 500 stick pens."

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While she and other top sellers we interviewed cautioned that no single tip can launch you to the top of the sales charts ("I am a firm believer in the basics – offering spec samples, asking for referrals, and penetrating the account from the mail room to president's office," Jorgenson says), they share some of their best tricks of the trade here.

The Few vs. Many

"I think the key thing to anybody's success is really aligning yourself and becoming true to a group of suppliers in all categories," says Corbin Sapp, CEO of Ivars Sportswear Inc. (*asi/232263*), which did almost \$2 million in sales last year. "If you haven't aligned yourself with suppliers, then you're never going to reach the potential you could, because there are going to be situations where you need help – you need something rushed, you need a spec sample, you need a price – because you know you're competing."

Sapp says that too many salespeople fall into a habit of using whatever supplier has a special offer going on in any given week. That may help you get your client a good price that time, but it can come back to haunt you when you need a favor and you haven't established relationships with any of your suppliers. Ivars Sportswear, on the other hand, does most of their business with a very select group. "We



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– Libby DuBay, Jack Nadel Int'l. (*asi/279600*)

ALL-TIME HIGH SALES VOLUME: \$1.35 MILLION

could have ordered from 75 different clothing suppliers last year," Sapp says, "but I can tell you we probably didn't order clothing from more than 15. And of the 15, probably four made up 80% of the business."

This loyalty ensures they have supplier partners who are willing to help when it really counts. "Say we're using a supplier, and we do \$150,000 a year with them," Sapp says. "If I come to them with a 1,500-piece T-shirt order and I say, 'You've got to give me x' – if they know there's history there – that I'm going to order from them during the course of the year, and that I don't beat them up on every price – then guess what they're going to do? They're going to help me with that."

Face Time vs. MySpace Time

Quality vs. quantity was a recurring theme as we talked to million-dollar sellers, whether the topic was taking the time to understand a client's business and industry, following up frequently, or spending face time with them.

While technology like e-mail, cell phones and texting makes frequent contact easy, Libby DuBay, senior account manager at Jack Nadel Int'l. (*asi/279600*), says there's nothing like face-to-face contact to seal relationships. "The art of the personal relationship is still the superglue that keeps you from losing the order because they found it for a nickel less online or in an e-mail from someone else," she says. "Try to deliver the samples yourself, drop off bagels, take them to lunch or attend their event. You are your business's best asset, not just your pricing."

DuBay recommends getting involved with a project long before an order is placed by attending the client's internal brainstorming sessions. "Your resources and creativity far exceed what they can draw on,"

she says. "You can add new product ideas to their sessions that they didn't even realize existed. They actually get excited with fresh ideas, and it spontaneously ignites even bigger ideas from them."

Naturally, they'll then turn to you to make the ideas happen.

DuBay also points out that your role doesn't have to end when you deliver the product. "If they are having an annual event, be there, too," she says. "Let your client know you want to learn about the event, the recipients, even see the results in order to better help them in their planning next year."

You might even volunteer to help at the event, securing yourself as an integral part of it for years to

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Recession-Proof Sales

Our million-dollar sellers offered these suggestions to keep your sales steady:

1. WORK HARDER.

"The only way I know to maintain revenue and grow revenue in this economy is work harder," says Kevin J. Scharnek, president of 14 West LLC (*asi/197092*). Fortunately, he feels that we're in an industry where results are directly coordinated to effort. "Companies that grow in this marketplace are not getting lucky; they're working harder than others," he says.

Scharnek has been reminding his team to get in front of clients as much as they can, to be as proactive as possible, and to follow up on everything. "When we're in a strong economy, if you send out 10 quotes, maybe you follow up on four or five," he says. "But now you've got to follow up on 10."

2. HELP CLIENTS CHOOSE THE RIGHT CUTBACKS.

If clients face reduced marketing budgets, help them choose what to cut wisely. "I am advising my clients to pull budget money from employee perks," says Cindy Jorgenson, MAS, interaction specialist at Brown & Bigelow (*asi/148500*). "Honestly, in today's economy, people are lucky to have a job and a regular paycheck – so cut out some of the employee perks and use that money towards growing sales, marketing, client communications, etc."

Is this likely to cause bad feelings among employees? Not in this economic climate, especially if the employer explains the money will be used in ways that help secure jobs. "If you are honest with employees, they understand," Jorgenson says. "They are usually happy to

give up the quarterly lunch to have job stability."

3. FOLLOW UP ON LOST ORDERS.

Corbin Sapp, CEO of Ivars Sportswear Inc. (*asi/232263*), says that even on lost orders, follow-up is essential. Lately, he's seen competitors win orders away from his company by substituting a lower-quality product at a cheaper price, because the client doesn't always realize they're not

is permanent, so it's important to keep in touch with clients who have fallen on hard times. "Take a client whose budget is frozen to lunch, even when they are not buying," says Libby DuBay, senior account manager at Jack Nadel Int'l. (*asi/279600*). "If they get laid off, offer to be a reference when they are job hunting."

When times get better, these clients will remember your kindness.

For those whose promotional budgets have been reduced, DuBay recommends finding closeouts and clearance items. "Do not lower your margin on stock items or you will be stuck with that pricing structure when the economy returns," she adds.

5. THINK POSITIVE.

The sales team at Logogram Inc. (*asi/255247*) has sworn off political talk shows and news commentary programs. "The last thing we need when trying to sell is more negative news," says president/CEO Tony Pupo. "As sales professionals, we already know how tough business is without anyone in the media having to tell us."

The team also emphasizes the positive when talking to clients and prospects. "Rather than focusing on the negative – such as what they are not buying – we instead focus on their plans to stay in front of their clients and attract new prospects," Pupo says. "This refocus inspires our customers to share what they are doing – and many times what their strategic plans are for when the market turns around. You would be surprised how many times we have uncovered otherwise hidden opportunities by having these conversations."



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comparing apples to apples.

In those situations, he finds out what product the client bought and tells them what quote he would have given them for it. Because Ivars has lots of buying power and solid supplier relationships, they often beat the competitor's price.

"In the most recent case, the gentleman said, 'Well, that's my loss. I should have come back to you, because you could have saved me about \$1,500 on a \$9,000 order,'" Sapp says. That's a lesson that a straying customer isn't likely to forget.

4. BE THERE FOR DOWN-AND-OUT CLIENTS.

Neither success nor failure



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– Cindy Jorgenson, Brown & Bigelow (*asi/148500*)

ALL-TIME HIGH SALES VOLUME: \$1.65 MILLION

come. "Being there also gives you an insider opportunity to network with their clients or other event sponsors who see your successful work first-hand – the best type of referral," DuBay adds.

Easy Breezy Does It

When a client ordered 300 convention bags, along with pens, notepads, snack packs, lanyards, badges and fleece jackets for attendee gifts at a conference, the staff at Brown & Bigelow stuffed all of the merchandise into the bags and attached the name badges to the outside.

The team even matched jacket sizes to the correct recipients – and even when you don't have information for individual recipients, Jorgenson recommends organizing wearables as much as you can. "Separate the men's and ladies'; then box them by size for easy distribution," she says. "Your client doesn't want to dig through boxes trying to find the proper size shirt. It's very little extra effort on your end, but a huge time- and headache-saver for your client."

"Let's face it," Jorgenson says, "most people want to do as little as possible to complete the task. This includes your clients. Do the work and make it easy on them. If you do, you'll stand out from your competitors and earn the loyalty of your clients."

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“If you would call any one of my employees right now and ask them what is one thing that I push continuously, it’s getting tasks written in Outlook so we remember to follow up with a client or even a supplier.”

– Kevin J. Scharnek, 14 West LLC (*asi/197092*)

ALL-TIME HIGH SALES VOLUME: OVER \$5 MILLION

Keep Trying

Rejection comes in many forms. Your prospect may say they don’t have time to talk, that they’re happy with their current vendor or simply that they’re not interested. Or you may get no response at all.

“It takes, on average, seven of those before you get a meeting with a potential client,” says Kevin J. Scharnek, president of 14 West LLC (*asi/197092*). “And, on average, 80% of salespeople stop calling after the second ‘no.’”

As an example of how following up until it hurts can pay off, he tells the story of a prospect he was referred to through his accountant. The company was a start-up but had a significant budget tagged for marketing. “I was introduced to the CEO,” he says. “It took probably four or five phone calls before I was able to sit down with her over a cup of coffee. We had a great conversation, and I knew there were going to be opportunities down the road. But – I’m not exaggerating – I made probably five or six or seven more phone calls. She never called me back once.”

His luck finally changed when he happened to call the same morning she was meeting with an agency she’d hired to develop her marketing strategy. “She said to her agency, ‘I know promotional products are going to be a big part of our platform. Can you guys do me a favor? This guy has been all over me. I haven’t ever returned a phone call, but I’d like to give him an opportunity.’ And we won the business,” Scharnek says.

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ALL-TIME HIGH SALES VOLUME: \$1.7 MILLION

As far as prompting yourself to stay in touch frequently, there are various customer-relationship management (CRM) programs you can use, but Scharnek swears by Outlook. “If you would call any one of my employees right now and ask them what is one thing that I push continuously, it’s getting tasks written in Outlook so we remember to follow up with a client or even a supplier,” he says.

Walk the Walk

You’ve probably heard the saying, “Never trust a skinny cook.” Well, why would anyone trust an ad specialty pro who doesn’t use the medium extensively in their own marketing?

“Our marketing plans incorporate a healthy mix of self-promo items, so we are leading by example,” says Tony Pupo, president/CEO of Logogram Inc. (*asi/255247*), a company with annual sales exceeding \$5 million.

There are plenty of places where you can find creative examples of self-promos to emulate. Read case histories in *Advantages* and our sister magazines. Check advertising blogs to keep up with the coolest campaigns out there. And look at advertising award winner lists to see which promotions grabbed the most attention.

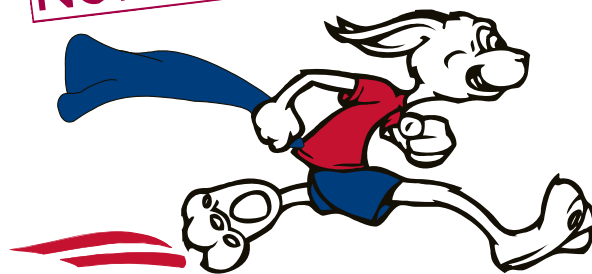
Most important, look at the glass as half full. “We always recommend to our customers that when the market tightens, they must continue to spend to attract new business and stay closer to their customers,” Pupo says. “So, we practice what we preach. We are continuing with our 2009 marketing plans to further build relationships with our key customer base while also substantially increasing cold calls and meetings with future customers.” ▲

Jen Zorger is senior associate editor of Advantages.



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