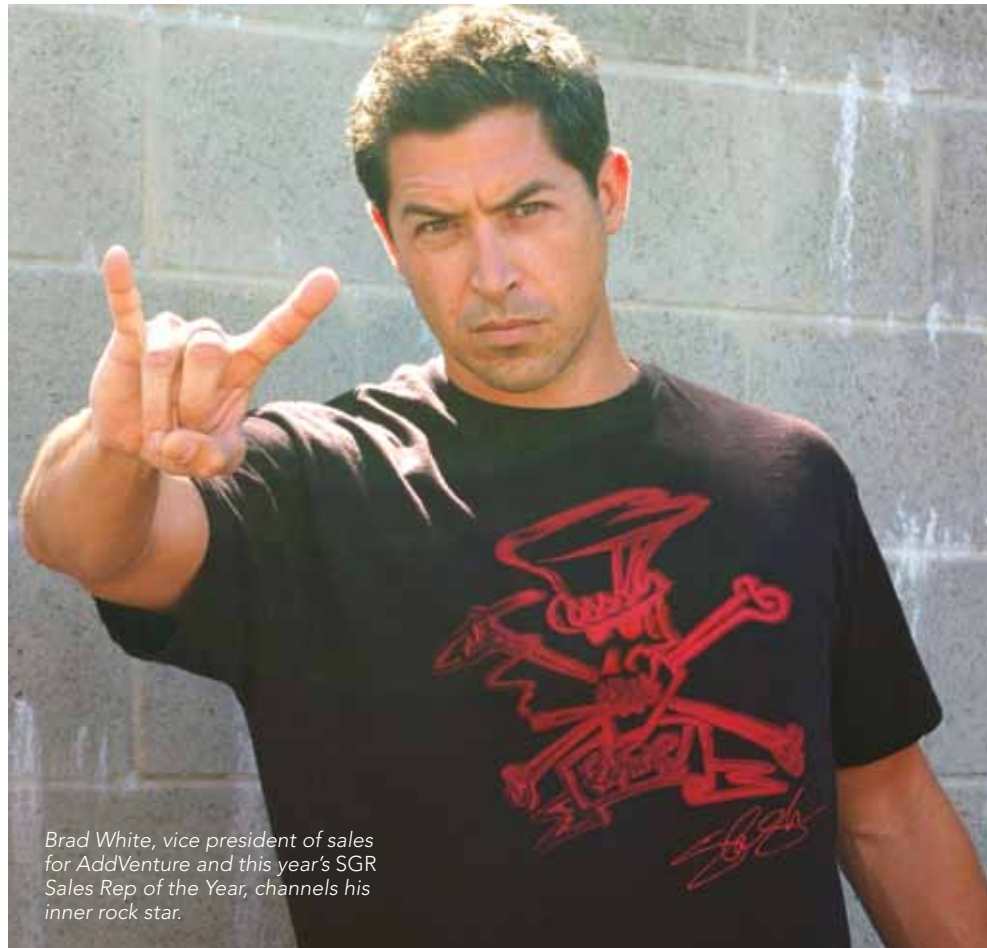


Brad White, AddVenture Products Inc.

Wildly creative, insanely plugged into online media and totally connected to his client base, Brad White was chosen by an overwhelming number of distributors as *SGR's* first-ever Supplier Sales Rep of the Year. Read on to find out why he inspires such devotion among his clients.

BY MICHELE BELL



Brad White, vice president of sales for AddVenture and this year's SGR Sales Rep of the Year, channels his inner rock star.

Famed gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson once said, "Crazies always recognize each other." Never has that be more true than in the case of Brad White – someone so professional and performance-driven, yet authentically off-the-wall and unconventional, his clients gravitate to him, and believe him to be the one thing every salesperson aspires to be: *indispensable*.

What's abundantly clear, due to the sheer volume of distributor feedback he garnered to be named *SGR's* Supplier Sales Rep of the Year, is that he's prodigiously creative and unfailingly accessible to each of his many clients.

"I always feel like he's more committed to me than just making the next sale," says Sarah Clasen, principal of Beaverton, OR-based distributor Kinetic Group (*asi/242452*). "He's the person I reach out to when I'm having a bad day and he always takes the time to talk to me – he exudes such positive energy, he could be a motivational speaker."

Right-Hand Man

"I don't sell to you; I sell with you' – that's my motto to my clients," says White. "What I want to know is, what's my client

all about? Who are their clients? And what are their goals? If I can understand and analyze the goals and needs of my clients' clients I can come up with the right promotion. You can't be afraid to take some risks. Some things are going to work and some things aren't, but you keep trying. I always think of Ray Kroc – he founded McDonalds when he was 52 years old."

Innately cool, instinctively innovative and impossibly high-energy, White, the vice president of sales for AddVenture – the five-star ESP-rated, San Diego, CA-based supplier company that prints and compresses T-shirts – has been in the industry for 13 years, and with the company for the duration. AddVenture's top salesperson every year, never doing less than \$1 million in sales, he also oversees a sales team of 10 and personally handles national accounts.

"Brad is creative and knows how to help me drum up business," says Josh Ebrahemi, a partner at Culver City, CA-based *Counselor* Top 40 distributor Jack Nadel Int'l (*asi/279600*) and one of its consistent top sellers. "He's a relationship man, as I am, and I can call him and tell him what I need and he takes it from there. He'll send me amazing virtual samples in just hours, get me new ideas and work within my budget. He's basically the perfect vendor."

White typically puts in an 11-hour day, which consists of some

social media, “just to get some kind of a buzz going” and then he looks at what orders are in the pipeline. “I spend a lot of time on order management – trying to close deals – and I make calls for two hours, doing major outreach to my clients, keeping in touch with everyone,” he says.

An avid user of social media like Facebook and Twitter, White started his own blog, www.whitethreads.com, in May of this year and it already gets 5,000 hits per month, much to his astonishment. Recently, he’s begun making funny, tongue-in-cheek, yet keenly informative videos on YouTube. In short, White is one savvy social networker and self-promoter.

“When you first start in social media you assume that no one will care – I know I did,” White admits. “I was like, OK, I’m going to write this blog about T-shirts and branding and culture and marketing and sales but maybe no one’s going to read it, and maybe even if they did, they wouldn’t see me as a resource. Tens of thousands of views later, I was wrong.” Has it paid off? In spades.

“Brad is the king of social media, YouTube and blogging,” says Tonia Allen Gould, president/CEO of Camarillo, CA-based distributor Tag! The Creative Source (*asi/341358*). “He found me on Twitter, contacted me and asked for a chance. From that moment on, he has formulated and follows an ongoing synergic plan to develop a long-term partnership with my company. When I ask for something, I can consider it done. Truly, after 15 years in the business, it takes an awful lot to impress me. There

order second,” White is quick to point out. “Orders come and go, but relationships last.”

Brice Dick, owner of BrandAid, a division of Neenah, WI-based *Counselor* Top 40 distributor Adventures in Advertising (*asi/109480*), knows that firsthand. “There’s no other rep I communicate with to brainstorm ideas the way I can with Brad, who’s always there to do a virtual sample of a client’s artwork and everything in between,” Dick says. “He’s also a great social networker, and goes the extra mile and then some – all supplier reps should take a lesson from Brad when it comes to building a strong supplier-to-client relationship. They say you only get two of the three services in business: cost, price or quality. With Brad you get all three and some great ideas to boot – he does it all.”

White self-deprecatingly maintains that his biggest strength is realizing he doesn’t know everything and constantly seeking advice from people “smarter and better” than him. “There’s a lot of them,” he says, laughing.

But Kori Carr, account executive for Costa Mesa, CA-based distributor Clean Fun Promotional Marketing (*asi/162979*), is unwavering in her support of White. “Besides always coming up with great ideas to present to my clients, Brad taught me how to network more effectively, opening up new avenues of selling to help increase my business,” she says. “His willingness to do whatever it takes to close a deal is a breath of fresh air.”

And White’s gold-standard advice for other supplier reps?

“Brad taught me how to network more effectively, opening up new avenues of selling to help increase my business.”

KORI CARR, CLEAN FUN PROMOTIONAL MARKETING (*ASI/162979*)

isn’t a single other supplier professional, working in sales, who impresses me more than Brad.”

White estimates that he spends about an hour a day on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, and that it takes him about three hours to write his weekly blog. “People are over-thinking social media,” he insists. Websites are your online presence – they’re a hub for your clients and they’re a big digital billboard. Social media is that big digital billboard, but it includes your culture, your network, continual real-time updates and it’s free – and everyone can participate.”

At 37 years old, White’s in the middle generation – not totally dependent on technology like a tween but not hesitant to use it like some baby boomers – so he’s comfortable both networking online and hitting the pavement to make sales calls in person. “I want to bring standard business practices and social connectivity into the way I operate,” White says. “I make a lot of phone calls but I also reach out to a lot of people on social networks. I don’t think you can have a ton of success doing any one thing.”

The Swiss Army Knife of Sales

“My big strength is that I focus on the relationship first and the

Diversify your account base, and do it now. “If you rely on only a few customers you’re in a lot of trouble on a lot of levels, because you have to do everything they tell you to do, even when it’s not in your best interest to save the relationship,” he says. “And if something happens to that person or that department or that company, you’re left with nothing. I think a lot of folks in our industry in the last couple of years were doing real well because they were taking orders from their big, big client. And when their big client stopped taking orders, they didn’t know how to go cold-calling. They didn’t know how to drum up business. They didn’t know how to be creative.”

And how does he plan on keeping up the momentum of his sales success? “*Kaizen*,” he says, cryptically. “It’s a Japanese term for ‘continuous improvement.’ That concept keeps me moving forward, keeps me learning more, keeps me finding new challenges. That mindset pushes me to achieve more and makes me content with the journey – because the journey never ends.”

See an exclusive interview with Brad White, where he discusses his sales strategy.



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SUPPLIER SALES REP OF THE YEAR

First Runner-Up

Missy Kilpatrick, Castelli



Spending between 60 to 80 hours per week selling at a hyper-speed pace, Castelli's Missy Kilpatrick is what you'd call a *working* executive vice president. Never one to loll behind a desk, she oversees Castelli's business in the U.S. and Canada, and is single-handedly responsible for about 90% of the company's sales.

How does Kilpatrick do it? As you'd expect from someone who's been with a company that manufactures planners and journals for 17 years, it's all about time management and organizing.

"Missy is always available to me to brainstorm on a project and comes up with a true marketing approach and solutions," says Caryn Stoll, president of distributor Freestyle Marketing (*asi/198342*) in Scottsdale, AZ. "When I have a client that's looking to create something unique, Missy always goes above and beyond to find the right piece that will fit within the client's marketing objective and budget. She listens like a partner, and we come to win-win solutions that make me want to continue to work with Castelli time and time again."

Kilpatrick says that in the midst of a tough economy, she's been fielding more requests from clients to act as their de facto marketing person, being the go-to gal for creativity in their promotions. "Distributors seem more willing to listen to our ideas now than they were in the past," she says. "They want to blow their clients away with something that will substantiate the money that they're going to spend, and they're asking for our help."

Recalling a particularly complex order, Donna Cassini, director of national accounts for *Counselor* Top 40 distributor Staples Promotional Products (*asi/120601*) in Shawnee Mission, KS, says Kilpatrick worked with her contacts overseas relentlessly. "We needed different parts for our customer's diary collection – some of which were not available in the U.S.," says Cassini. "Missy turned proofs quickly and adjusted rapidly to changes and new requests. She made it possible for us to shine so that our client came away pleased with their diary collection."

As testament to what a sharp salesperson she is, Kilpatrick has the unique conundrum of making the case for the relevance her products – diaries and planners – in the age of digital technology (portable and otherwise), where they can seem obsolete.

"My biggest challenge is the education process of our product and overcoming all the objections," Kilpatrick acknowledges. "I ask my clients, 'Do you really sit down in a meeting and write notes in your phone?' No. You can write in your

"Missy helped me grow my business, generating well over \$4 million in sales."

ALIETTE GONZALEZ,
STAPLES PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS (*ASI/120601*)

planner immediately without waiting for a program to load. You can use your planner on a plane during takeoff and landing. No one ever needed a user manual to start up their planner. And people get that when it's explained to them. What's interesting is that some of our biggest customers are computer companies, like Microsoft and Dell."

For newer supplier salespeople, Kilpatrick says to remember the basic rule: Success in sales all comes down to great customer service. "A customer is a customer is a customer no matter where you are," she says. "You can pretty much identify good customer service right off the bat, wherever you are – you go into a retail store, you go to a fast-food place, and you can tell if that person's on the ball or not. And I think it's the same in our industry. Clients want to be hand-held, to be smiled at and talked to in a nice, friendly, warm manner. And that's how you're going to get your most positive reaction."

"Because of her, our sales with Castelli have increased dramatically this past year and they are now a preferred supplier with us," says Rick Greene, regional vice president of *Counselor* Top 40 distributor HALO/Lee Wayne (*asi/356000*) in Sterling, IL.

Not surprisingly, Kilpatrick suggests getting to know your distributor clients as people, not just business partners. "I think distributors now more than ever want to work with suppliers that they have relationships with," she says. "I think getting those relationships nurtured is a must."

Aliette Gonzalez concurs. "Through Missy's support and partnership, she has helped me grow my business, generating well over \$4 million in sales," says the senior account executive for Staples. "Her knowledge and customer service have helped me enhance my own customer service, allowing me to execute program after program in a seamless manner to my customers."

But a critical lesson she learned early on, Kilpatrick says, is that the next big sale can come from any distributor – not just the big guys. "It's the mom-and-pop businesses that can also produce huge orders," she cautions. "So everybody has to be treated in the same in that regard."

In the industry for nearly 20 years, Kilpatrick is definitely a lifer. "I can't even imagine another industry that's this great, she says. "The good things way outweigh the bad."

Second Runner-Up

Mike Pratt, Broder



An industry veteran with over 21 years in the ad specialty marketplace, Mike Pratt, territory manager for Alpha/Broder/NES in the North Carolina and Southern Virginia areas, has had plenty of time to make his mark with clients and colleagues.

“We are passionate about Mike,” says Jean Moore, co-owner of Fayetteville, NC-based distributor

Moore Exposure (*asi/276255*). “My whole team goes out of its way to order from NES because of his incredible customer service. He responds to every inquiry within the hour.”

Moore points out that Pratt is first among the few supplier reps that she would put in front of her customers. “In fact, we had him spend the whole day at our grand opening talking to our customers and friends about corporate apparel,” she says. “Mike genuinely enjoys helping me win business and always has a solution to help me present the best cost/quality solution. He makes a point to learn our niche markets and our strategic selling position, so his suggestions always jive with what our customers expect.”

Pratt, who has been with Alpha/Broder/NES for eight years and is the recipient of Broder’s President’s Club award for the past three years, oversees a multi-million dollar sales base. He maintains that in this challenging economy, there are definitive strategies that can be utilized to help clients sell more efficiently. “Make them aware of opportunities that will appeal to their end-user customers,” he advises. “Provide promotional aids, samples and sales materials to stimulate customer interest and educate them about product to improve their ability to sell intelligently.”

When asked about his biggest strengths, Pratt says that first and foremost, he knows who his customers are and the markets they serve. Additionally, he says, “Keeping my product knowledge up allows me to offer good information for my customers to aid them in selling and provides me with credibility so that customers can look to me for advice and have confidence in my responses. Also, my years of experience have allowed me to accumulate a wealth of knowledge about product, customers and market conditions, both good and bad. This is invaluable in helping customers make decisions about their needs.”

Danny Rosin, president of Morrisville, NC-based distributor BrandFuel (*asi/145025*), concurs. “Mike always does what he says he’s going to do, helps us brainstorm marketing initiatives and sees them through,” Rosin says. “He’s a great teacher – he has no hesitation when asked to help with training our



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if you just listen.”

MIKE PRATT, ALPHA/BRODER/NES

staff on apparel fabrics and styles, which requires a great deal of thought, preparation and effort on his part.”

When asked about his advice for a new supplier rep starting out, Pratt has three words to impart: Listen, listen, listen. “Listen to your distributor customers, find out who they are and what they need,” he says. “Listen to end-users – they know what they want and need for their business or industry. Listen to your peers – there’s enough information and experience floating around to fill an encyclopedia and it’s all free, if you just listen.”

Looking forward, Pratt says that if nothing else, the recent economic crisis has taught him that he can’t predict the future. “However, I believe that five years down the road the economy will have come full circle and we will be in a solid growth economy, albeit with a considerably more cautious approach to all decision making,” he says. “I would like to think that I’ll still be a part of this dynamic industry at that point in the future.”

Both on a personal level and for the industry in general, Pratt believes that the biggest challenge is restoring confidence to the marketplace. “Justifiably, everyone is very cautious about each and every decision that they make,” he says. “Every effort I can make to demonstrate the value of successfully promoting business, to help grow our way out of the current difficulties, will be a personal success for me and my distributors.”  

Michèle Bell is editor of Supplier Global Resource and senior editor of its sister publication, Counselor magazine.

SGR Supplier Sales Rep of the Year Finalists

- Ray Jimenez, sales manager, Golden Pacific
- Joel Kaufmann, Midwest regional sales manager, Polyconcept North America
- Kim Myers, sales rep, Bodek and Rhodes