

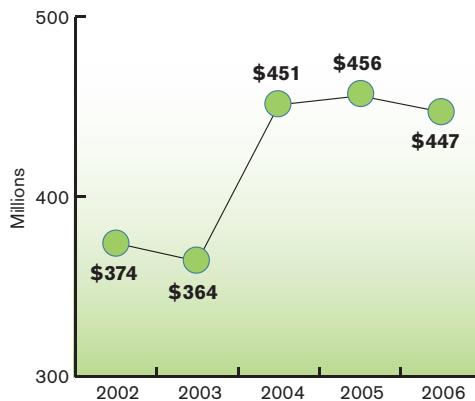
Supplier Top 40

(Last year's rank in parentheses)

1 Broder Bros. Co. (1) (asi/42090)

The giant of the ad specialty industry remains on top this year, even though its revenues fell from \$456 million in 2005 to \$447 million in 2006. In an effort to focus on cost controls, last year the apparel supplier – which consists of industry firms Broder, Alpha Shirt Co., and NES – consolidated some of its distribution centers to end up with eight bigger warehouses spread across the country.

*** 2006 results:** While the company's overall revenues decreased by about 2%, Broder is focused on results outside of revenue performance. "Though growing sales is important to us, it's actually not our top objective," says Girisha Chandraraj, vice president of marketing. "Our sales performance last year is a reflection of selling less of the plain, white T-shirts that you can buy anywhere."



*** New in 2006:** Broder launched new Web sites last year focused specifically on the business-to-business market. The company also expanded its inventory and shipping capabilities so it can now have as much product available to distributors within one day as possible.

*** Management changes:** Interim CEO Tom Myers became CEO and the company hired Girisha Chandraraj as its new vice president of marketing. Also, Matt O'Connor was promoted to vice president, managing the Broder sales force.

*** Top challenges:** "We are working to offer better availability of product so that what's in the catalog is what's in the warehouse, and to offer the best pricing day in and day out," Chandraraj says.

*** Outlook for 2007:** The company is expecting a big year in 2007 as it gets its distribution centers ramped up and enhances its offerings to the market. "We've had red-hot sales on our newest products," Chandraraj says.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Broder Bros. is based in Trevose, PA, about a mile from ASI's headquarters.

2 Polyconcept North America (N/A)

2006 was a busy year for Leed's parent company, Polyconcept North America, which acquired fellow Top 40 supplier Bullet Line (asi/42424) in August. While Leed's and Bul-

let Line each operate independently, both companies benefited from the purchase. "While each company goes to market independently, the synergies realized in the areas of overseas sourcing and product development are even greater than we anticipated," says Sam DiBiase, Leed's vice president of sales.

*** 2006 results:** For Leed's, sales increased \$44.2 million in 2006 to \$275.1 million, a jump of 19% over 2005's numbers. Bullet Line saw its sales jump for the third straight year, leaping from \$60.8 million in 2005 to \$68 million last year.

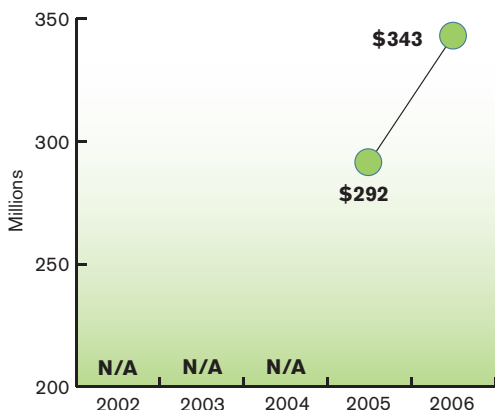
*** New in 2006:** Leed's added five new brands in 2006: Balmain, Stanley, Case Logic, Wenger and Laguiole. Bullet Line also refreshed its product line.

*** Top challenges:** "One of our top challenges in 2006, which continues into 2007, is our ability to educate our distributors regar-

ding all our products and services available, to best meet their needs," DiBiase says. "We need to be very efficient in delivering this message in a way that distributor account executives remember all that we bring to market."

*** Outlook for 2007:** Most signs look good for 2007, with most distributors reporting an active marketplace, DiBiase says. In addition, the company is hitting its goals for growth so far this year. One caveat: "The real unknown is how increased energy and a continued softening of the housing market will affect the overall economy in the second half of 2007," he says. But, despite the uncertainty, "we remain cautiously optimistic about the year."

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Bullet Line was the innovator of rush service in the industry.

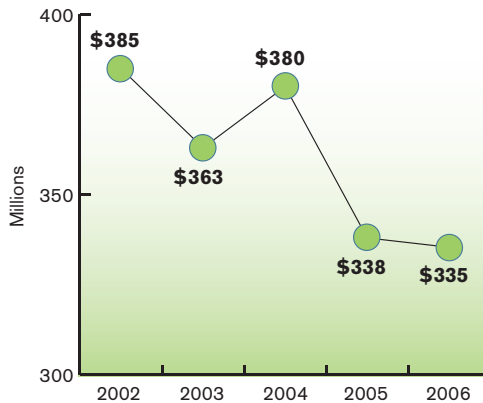


3 Norwood Promotional Products (2)

2006 was a year to right the ship for Norwood. After the company's revenues fell more than 11% between 2005 and 2006, Norwood began to turn itself around in 2006 and was down less than 1% from 2005.

*** 2006 results:** With 2006 revenues of \$335 million, Norwood ranks as the third-largest supplier in the ad specialty industry. "Over the past year we've gone a long way toward repairing relationships with our customers and with our own employees," says Paul Lage, Norwood's president. "We had to win the confidence of a lot of people back before we can really begin to build it all up again."

*** Personnel changes:** Paul Lage, formerly of BIC Graphic USA, was hired to be president of Norwood in June 2006. Also, Bill Steckel came on as chief financial officer and Jim Simone joined the organization as chief marketing officer.



*** New in 2006:** Upon joining the company, one of the first things Lage did was form a small advisory board of Norwood's distributor customers, called The Mighty 8. This group provides Norwood with feedback and offers direction on how it can improve its relationships with distributors. Also, the company consolidated its shipping and warehousing facilities, closing its last one in Los Angeles

the first month that Lage started. "There will be no more plant closings," he says.

*** Top challenges:** One of Lage's major initiatives is to emphasize and promote Norwood as a brand, as opposed to the 16 individual companies that the overall organization consists of. "It's tough to do because the individual names are rooted in the industry, but we have to get the Norwood brand to mean something to distributors," he says. To that end, the company is putting all of its divisions on the same phone, computer and software systems – each had operated independently previously.

*** Outlook for 2007:** "In the next three to five years, we'll be in every major category in the industry, and I think we have the potential to be a \$1 billion supplier," Lage says.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** The walls of Norwood's headquarters, based in Indianapolis, are decorated with dozens of original prints that were first created for the company's calendars.

4 Ennis Inc. (3) (asi/52493)

Ennis' growth in 2005 was spurred on by its acquisition of Alstyle Apparel (asi/34817). While Ennis is best known as a giant in the business-forms market, that category isn't what it used to be, says Zak Smith, marketing manager. "The traditional business forms side of the market continues to decline," he says.

*** 2006 results:** The apparel and promotional divisions represent steady growth, but business forms still account for the majority of Ennis' sales.

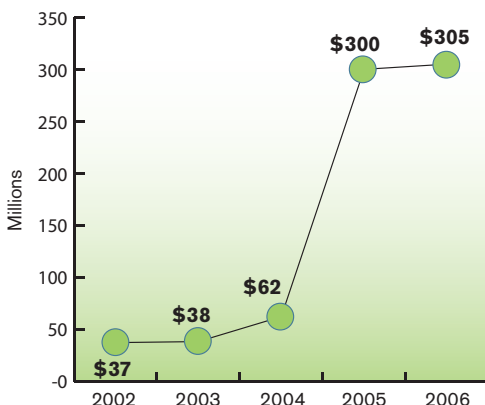
The slow growth in business forms resulted in a much slimmer 2% growth in 2006.

*** New in 2006:** Ennis added a few locations to its business forms business, but it was the addition of the Dunbrooke and Reebok lines that was most notable for industry distributors.

*** Top challenges:** Education remains the biggest challenge. As the company diversifies into other product avenues, distributors need to recognize the new face of Ennis. "From the printing standpoint, everyone knows us," says Smith. "But most people don't go past business forms to see that we do tags, labels, envelopes, promotional printing and now the apparel side as well."

*** Outlook for 2007:** Ennis will continue to pursue acquisitions in the print field whenever they fit the business model and make sense to its shareholders. They are also pushing for more cross-sell across products lines. "We want to educate promotional products distributors about print, and traditional forms distributors to sell more promotional product items," says Smith.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** The cover of the Alstyle 2006/2007 catalog featured male model, Tyler Denk, co-winner of *The Amazing Race 10*.

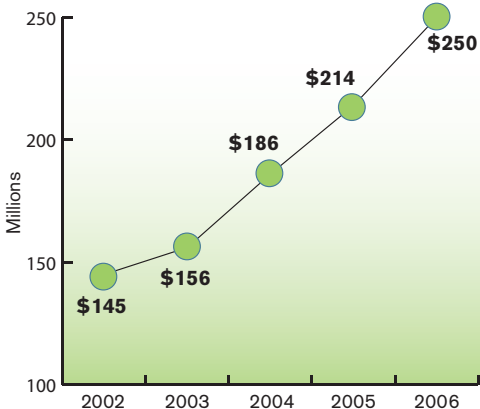


Five
Top 40
suppliers
experienced
negative
growth in
2006.

5 SanMar (5) (asi/84863)

Sticking to the basics of excellent customer service and fast turnaround on quality products led to another outstanding year for the apparel supplier.

*** 2006 results:** Sales in 2006 reached \$250 million, a 17% increase over 2005. "There are two vital questions heard daily by industry suppliers: 'Do you have the product in stock?' and 'How fast can you get it to me?'" SanMar's ability to answer 'Yes' and 'Faster than ever' led



to an increase in sales for 2006," says Marty Lott, president. To keep up with demand, in 2006 the company expanded its warehouse capacity by 20% overall and its one-day shipping territory by more than 5%.

*** New in 2006:** In January SanMar partnered with Nike Golf, added new products to its Port Authority, Sport-Tek, District Threads and CornerStone brands and introduced a new brand for infants and toddlers, Precious Cargo.

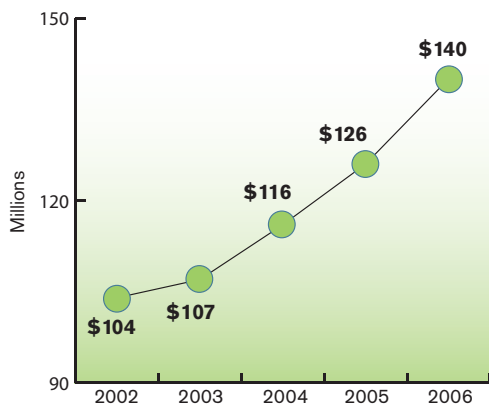
*** Top challenges:** Unseasonable weather and unpredictability of business in general were top challenges in 2006 and have continued into 2007, Lott says.

For example, the company was taking very large orders for down parkas and leather items in the spring. "Normally big leather sales come in fall – people really don't think of leather in May ... and people don't buy down parkas this time of year. But they're doing it," Lott says. "Obviously we had the inventory and were able to take the orders, but it's creating more scrambling to get our inventory back up to where we want it to be."

*** Outlook for 2007:** So far, 2007 is going well for SanMar. "Sales are up for 2007," Lott says.

7 Bodek and Rhodes (8) (asi/40788)

Sales again climbed substantially in 2006. The supplier has opened two new warehouses in the past two years. "Our pricing has never been more competitive than over the last few years," says Mary Ellen Hudicka, director of marketing. "We have huge product line increases and five new brands, including



Tommy Hilfiger. Our customer service has improved even more, with error level improvements of 25% to 35% in 2006."

*** 2006 results:** Sales increased from \$126 million in 2005 to \$140 million in 2006, an 11% jump. Bodek and Rhodes has seen annual increases of 3% or more since 2001.

*** New in 2006:** "We added a new distribution center in Norton, MA, and over 30 new styles to our private label, UltraClub, including many performance fabrics," says Hudicka, who adds there have been no changes in senior management in the past seven years.

*** Top challenges:** "Managing growth, increasing our product line 20% and increasing our sales staff by 20%," Hudicka says.

*** Outlook for 2007:** "We are meeting all our business projections and forecasts, including sales growth," Hudicka says. She adds that customer service reps are answering calls within 20 seconds 99% of the time, another goal of the company.

6 BIC Graphic USA (6) (asi/40480)

When people think of BIC, most will think of pens, but the writing instrument company has been expanding its offerings of other business essentials. And these additional product lines have helped drive sales for the company. "As we continue to add more product categories into our portfolio, those new categories are some of the key contributors to growth, as well as new products within existing categories," says Jason Miller, director of business development.

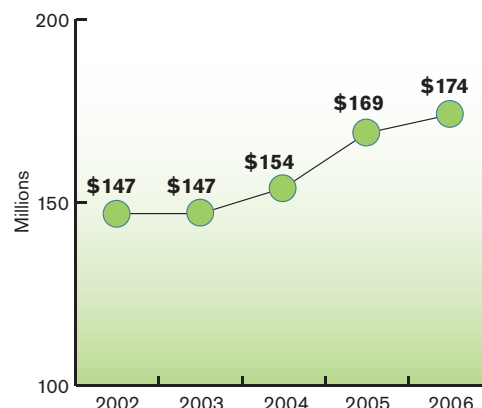
*** 2006 results:** BIC's sales grew 3% in 2006, to \$174 million. Some of this growth can be attributed to the expansion of the Solis category, which was added in 2004, as well as other new products, Miller says.

*** Personnel changes:** In early 2006, Paul Lage left his position of global vice president, which created opportunities for other employees within the organization and triggered some restructuring, Miller says.

*** New in 2006:** Notebooks and keyrings were among the new products offered by BIC in 2006. It also continued to add more writing instruments within its Solis category.

*** Top challenges:** Miller says that service and importing from China are two of BIC's biggest challenges right now "and they pretty much go part and parcel with one another," he says. "We have generally been a manufacturer, and as we migrate from manufacturing to manufacturing/importing it brings with it a whole new host of issues and challenges."

*** Outlook for 2007:** "We're optimistic that we will exceed last year's sales numbers," Miller says.



8 3M Promotional Markets Dept. (7) (asi/91240)

Though it does not break out its special markets division, this conglomerate posted 2006 revenues at more than \$22 billion. The company entered the market in 1983 with the oft-imitated Post-It note. It has introduced dozens of products over the past

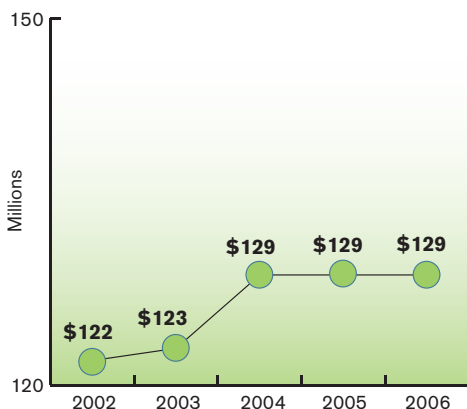
two decades, including note cubes, die-cut note pads, document flags and writing instruments.

*** 2006 results:** *Counselor's* estimate puts 3M flat for the year.

*** New in 2006:** The latest products from 3M feature combinations of products into one multifunction unit, such as a pen with flags. There is also a great move toward customization, says Deb Leptine, national sales manager. "We are working with our manufacturing to be more flexible to the needs of our customers by offering truly custom products."

*** Top challenges:** Customers were demanding a more personal touch from 3M in 2006. "The distributors want to see more face time, and that's one of the reasons we have hired a lot of multiline reps to reach more people more frequently," says Leptine.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** 3M stands for Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Co.



10 Staton (9) (asi/89380)

Despite a flat year, confidence in what the future holds could not be higher. "Our product offering is changing," says Lea Robinson, vice president of sales and marketing. "Our product line is more attractive to the ad specialty market than we have been in the past, and this additional business increases our sales."

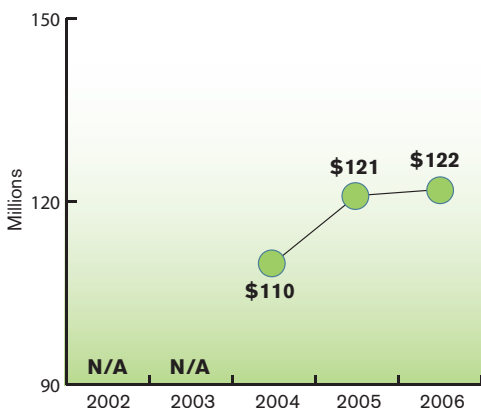
*** 2006 results:** After a 10% upswing from 2004-2005, sales slowed down for Staton, with a marginal increase to \$122 million last year from \$121 million in 2005, a jump of just 0.8%.

*** New in 2006:** Robinson says Staton introduced three new product lines last year: Arnold Palmer, NYNE and Pace Race wear. "In addition, we added Alo and Bella Baby to our existing Bella line," she says. "Sierra Pacific introduced their Business Ready concept, and that addition gives our customers access to the entire Sierra Pacific line."

*** Top challenges:** "To communicate to the industry that the best value for their dollar is Staton's personal service, availability of branded products and reliable delivery," Robinson says. "Bigger is not always better. 'Free' usually has a cost attached."

*** Outlook for 2007:** "Our sales are strong, and we are excited that our new commitment to the ad specialty market has given us new focus," Robinson says.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** The launch of Staton's new Web site earlier this year has increased Web business by over 20%, according to Robinson. "The site allows our customers to manage their account with just a click of their mouse," she says.



9 Ash City (10) (asi/37127)

A large introduction of new products, including new styles for wovens, outerwear, caps, polos and twills, is a key reason for Ash City's continued climb. "We truly try to be the frontrunners in design and materials, and attempt to offer what is being seen at retail in Europe and America," says Paul Kory, vice president of sales. That could be why the company's sales have been in the triple digits since 2004.

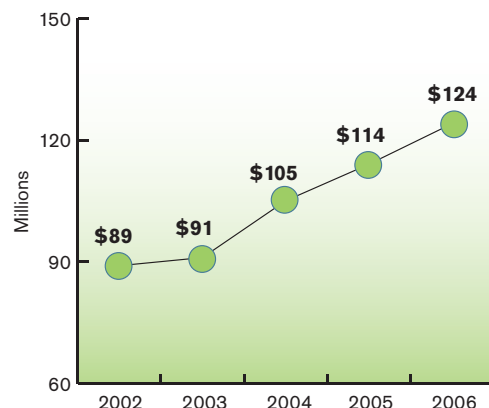
*** 2006 results:** Sales leapt from \$114 million in 2005 to \$124 million in 2006, an increase of nearly 9% that matches Ash City's sales boost from 2004-2005.

*** New in 2006:** The U.S. sales division was divided up between the newly-appointed vice presidents of sales: Kory, Mike Rozier and Chris Clark to help Ash City focus on its key national accounts. An improved "retail looking" catalog, direct marketing campaigns to its customer base and new materials – including bamboo polos – were also added, according to Kory.

*** Top challenges:** Correct product offering, the stability of the economy, the number of trade shows the company will attend, and the right inventory levels for new products are the company's primary concerns, according to Kory.

*** Outlook for 2007:** "Sales are up double digits, and distributors are reacting very positively to our new product introductions and the fashion forward product offering that we have in place," Kory says. "With the addition of our new distribution center in Kansas City opening in August, we expect to have a great third and fourth quarter."

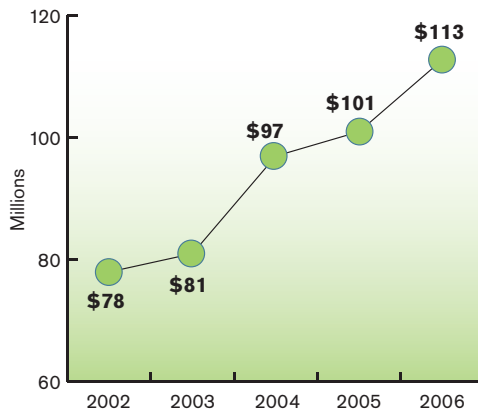
*** What the industry doesn't know:** Ash City manufactures all of its apparel and has five distinct product brands.



11 Sunscope (11) (asi/90075)

Sunscope keeps rising as the company has been able to keep current. "We launched our new 600-plus-page catalog that featured over 200 patented products," says Stephen Jackson, director of marketing. "We also increased our printing capabilities by adding wraparound multi-color mug silk screening machines, YAG laser engraving machines for personalization and printing machines for our new line of personalized paper products."

*** New in 2006:** Sunscope added Jackson as director of marketing and Darryl Hanks as its southern states sales manager. It also hired



additional customer service reps and implemented new processing software. As a result,

average order turnaround time decreased by 32 hours, according to Jackson.

*** Top challenges:** Locating available warehouse space for its massive increase of stocked catalog inventory was job one for Sunscope last year. "Our 120,000-square-foot Los Angeles facility was not large enough," Jackson says. "We have already raised the walls of our annex, which provides an additional 65,000 square feet of space dedicated to warehousing catalog products to support the day-to-day ASI business."

*** Outlook for 2007:** Business looks "exceptionally promising," says Jackson. "Sunscope's first-quarter revenue has increased by 28% compared to the same period in 2006."

12 American Apparel (13) (asi/35297)

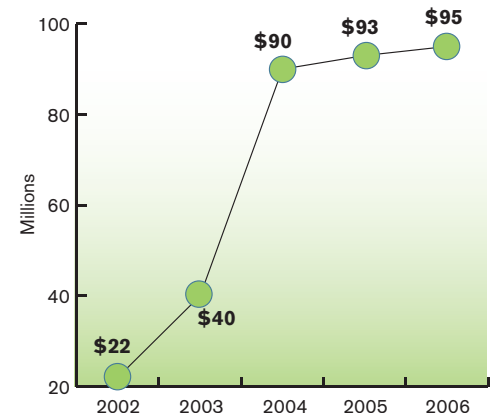
American Apparel made headlines last year when it was purchased by Endeavor Acquisition Corp. The company will be taken public later this year with founder and CEO Dov Charney at the helm. In 2006, sales increased only 2%.

American Apparel has maintained a slow but steady upward trend. "We lost a couple of major programs and experienced inventory issues throughout the course of the year due to growth," says Mark Smalley, director of marketing. "And end-users purchased competitor garments cheaper overseas."

*** 2006 results:** Despite the setbacks and the financial resources it has invested in expansion of plants and products, American Apparel's sales grew from \$93 million in 2005 to \$95 million in 2006.

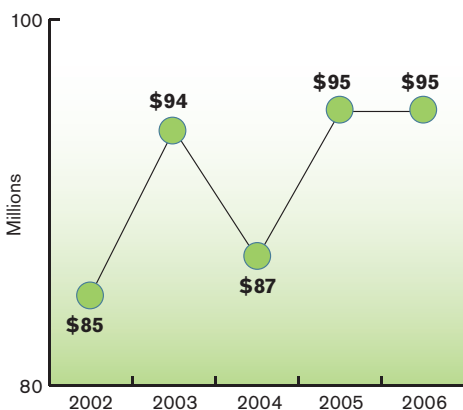
*** New in 2006:** The company expanded its product offering with the introduction of flex fleece (a polyester/cotton blend), a 50/50 polyester/cotton jersey, along with a track shirt and summer shirt family.

*** Top challenges:** Managing inventory due to retail growth, growth in retail store locations, and growth with retail-exclusive styles (the latter two are the basis behind last year's inventory issues, according to Smalley).



*** Outlook for 2007:** American Apparel is up 20% at the wholesale level compared to the middle of 2006, according to Smalley.

13 River's End Trading (12) (asi/82588)



Company sales were flat in 2006. Sales for each division were greatly mixed, says Lori Anderson, marketing manager, with some up and others flat or down for the year.

*** 2006 results:** Anderson says activewear sales were one of the weak-performing segments but points to some changes that should have a positive effect on next year's performance. "Certainly the reason why private label and retail brands are up is because we added some pretty exciting new retail brands, with Nike, Tommy Hilfiger and Lacoste," she says. "There was a big need for that in the industry, and that's where we saw some good gains."

*** New in 2006:** In addition to the retail brand, Dri Duck was added to its offerings. River's End also addressed one of its supply-chain concerns by consolidating two facilities in Denver and Anaheim, CA. "We opened a new location in Reno, NV, to help serve our customers better through improved shipping rates," says Anderson.

*** Outlook for 2007:** "We feel that we've got the perfect business model: retail brands, private label and activewear," says Anderson. "We have the right mix."

14 S&S Activewear (N/A) (asi/84358)

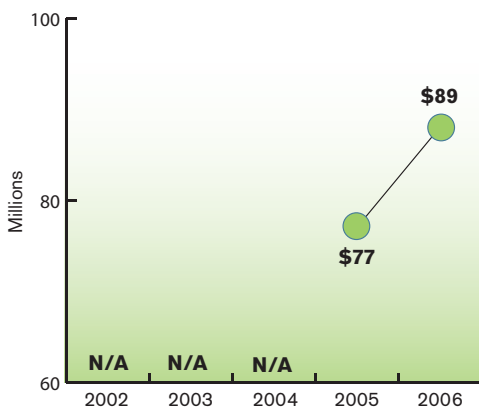
This apparel supplier debuts on the *Top 40* with \$88.8 million in sales, a 14% increase in revenues from 2005. It has previously been quiet in the market, but has ramped-up its marketing presence. "We were so focused on our business and our growth previously," says Margaret Crow, marketing director for S&S, "but we see an advantage of now being out front in the industry."

2006 results: S&S is now the ninth-largest apparel supplier in the industry. Crow attributes the company's success to a couple of factors: "We're constantly focused on our inventory levels and making sure we have enough product on-hand to meet increasing demand," she says. "We also

increased the number of trade shows we exhibit at and the amount of advertising that we've done in the market."

*** New in 2006:** S&S moved into a new 450,000 square foot warehouse and distribution center in Bolingbrook, IL. The space practically doubles the size of the company's previous warehouse.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Every spring for the past nine years, S&S has held its own trade show in its warehouse. It's called the S&S Open House. This year's event attracted more than 2,000 attendees.



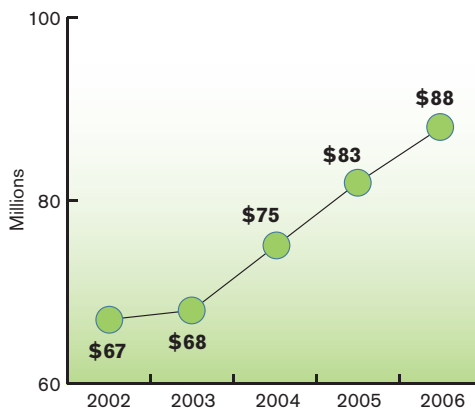
15 Gemline (16) (asi/56070)

"We attribute our growth in 2006 to our continued ability to execute our core strategy of providing customers with innovative, retail-inspired products, value-added services and deep inventories," says Stuart Babb, director of marketing and product management. "More and more customers are taking advantage of our Global Solutions division for direct-import and custom products."

*** 2006 results:** Gemline did \$88.1 million in sales in 2006, up from \$83 million in 2005, a 6% increase. The company's sales have increased by nearly 30% since 2003.

*** New in 2006:** A leading industry supplier of bags, gifts and business accessories, Gemline is always looking for new, innovative products and services that fill a niche in the marketplace, according to Babb. This includes developing a multi-category product offering designed just for women, expanding its gift category product offering, and introducing enhancements to its Fast Track program.

*** Top challenges:** "In such a global economy, one of the top challenges experienced by most suppliers is managing the dynamic



and continually changing overseas marketplace," Babb says. "Gemline is extremely fortunate to have an experienced team in place both in the U.S. and overseas." The company has also put a lot of effort into being an industry leader when it comes to regulatory, social and customer-specific compliance issues, according to Babb.

*** Outlook for 2007:** "Based on the first quarter, we expect 2007 to be another good year," Babb says.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Gemline will celebrate its 50th anniversary in January.

16 Sweda Co. LLC (15) (asi/90305)

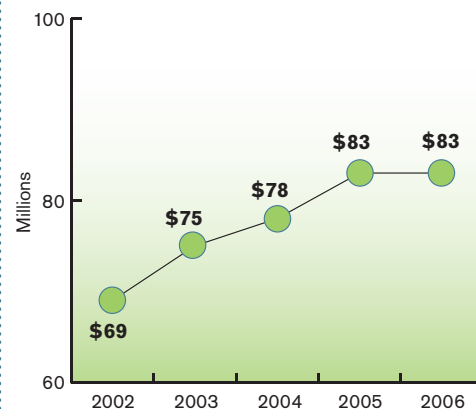
"Last year was a significant transition time at Sweda," says Joseph Schembri, vice president of sales and marketing. "Every one of our top management position changed."

*** New in 2006:** Jim Hagan was named president, with Schembri taking his former role. The company also created the new position of vice president of merchandising, as well as naming a new chief operating officer and vice president of finance.

*** Top challenges:** There's been a major push for improving turnaround times, and that has meant several adjustments on Sweda's part. One of the biggest has been depending on domestic production to close the gap.

*** Outlook for 2007:** "We just came off a record first quarter," says Schembri. "A lot of the things we are starting to put in place are starting to pay off. For example, we had gone from 18-24 months with our full-line catalog to now producing one every year, plus other supplemental releases. Moving forward, we are going to be in a much better position in 2007 than we were in 2006 in terms of following our business plan and living up to our mission."

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Sweda is known for electronics and watches, but its top-selling product categories are writing instruments and drinkware.



17 The Magnet Group (17) (asi/68520)

Magnet had another strong year in 2006. It added several new lines, including an aggressive launch of a new line of upscale bags from The Bag Factory, as well as the creation of Innovations by Magnet LLC (asi/62663), a line of magnetic home and office peripherals with a focus on debut designs and trend-sensitive products.

*** 2006 results:** Magnet was up 5% over last year for a total of \$81.7 million in sales. The reason for the growth can be attributed to three things, says Bob Tidwell, vice president of sales:

Continued steady growth from Magnet's core brand, The Bag Factory's new line and impressive growth from Benchmark's crystal line.

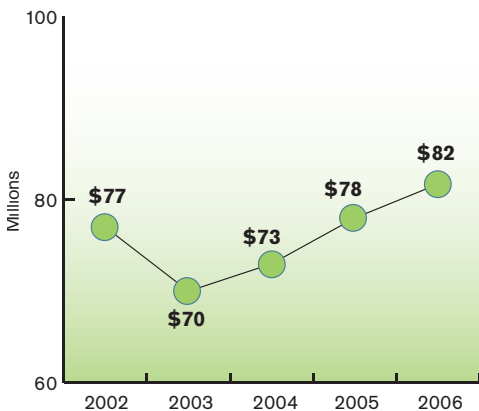
*** New in 2006:** The biggest change last year was the beefing up of the company's inside sales team. "They work just like our outside sales reps but they work strictly over the telephone and handle our medium-to-small accounts," says Tidwell. "I think that has had a huge impact on our business."

*** Top challenges:** "A company our size, with as many lines as we have, focusing our resources is always a challenge," says Tidwell. "Our brands are seasonal, so we shift gears a lot. Benchmark is huge in the late third and

fourth quarters and The Bag Factory is a spring and summer brand. I think it's placing the right emphasis on the right line at the right time."

*** Outlook for 2007:** "We've got a lot more of our year ahead of us so it's hard to tell," says Tidwell. "All of our indicators are very positive at this time. I'm cautiously optimistic."

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Magnet started in the founder's garage, and his first big move was into an old car wash.



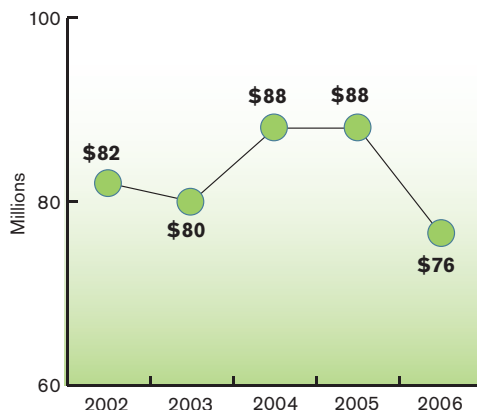
Hit Promotional Products experienced the most revenue growth in 2006 with a **25%** jump.

18 Corvest Promotional Products (14)

It has been another year of change for Corvest, as it announced on April 30 that the three suppliers under the Corvest umbrella (Adva-Lite, Toppers and It's All Greek To Me) had been acquired by a subsidiary of Cerberus Capital Management, a private investment firm headquartered in New York City. The acquisition will allow Corvest to regain momentum following its Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing earlier this year. "Cerberus is a first-class operation with a reputation for innovative thinking and inter-company collaboration," says Mark Holland, vice president of marketing for Corvest. "We believe that this mindset, combined with the new capital structure, positions all the Corvest brands for an extremely successful future."

*** 2006 results:** After consecutive \$88 million sales years, Corvest slid to \$76.4 million in 2006, a drop of 13%. Corvest's peak year was \$91 million in 2001.

*** New in 2006:** Corvest's challenges



didn't prevent it from launching more than 400 new items, says Holland. "We developed and launched new Web sites for each line and increased the size of our field sales force and customer service staff."

*** Top challenges:** Restart the upward trend in sales that Corvest hasn't enjoyed since 2004 – along with maintaining its staff of about 350 in its offices in Florida, California and New Jersey.

*** Outlook for 2007:** Corvest is in prime position to turn things around quickly, according to Holland. "We are tracking positively from last year."

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Adva-Lite (asi/32145), a supplier of flashlights, writing instruments, drinkware and tools, is a 2005 and 2006 *Counselor* Distributor Choice Award winner.

19 Tri-Mountain/Mountain Gear (18) (asi/92125)

After business dropped in 2005 for Tri-Mountain following Hurricane Katrina, sales have resumed an upward trend. "Sales were up between 2005 and 2006 because of our new collection and different incentive packages offered to customers," says Danny Tsai, director of marketing. In fact, sales hit an all-time high last year for the West Coast company.

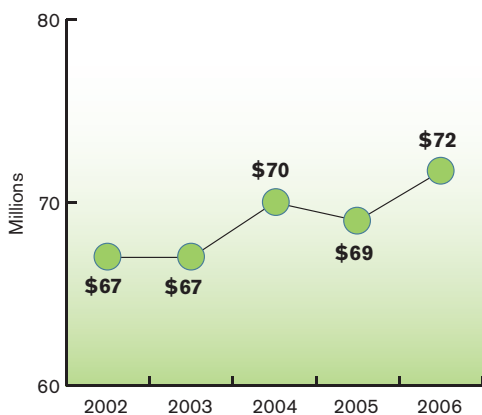
*** 2006 results:** A jump from \$68.7 million in 2005 to \$71.7 million in 2006 – an increase of over 4% – is Tri-Mountain's biggest single-year leap since 2001-2002.

*** New in 2006:** Tsai says Tri-Mountain put new sales representation in place in the southeast U.S. In addition, the supplier introduced a new product line that includes a new silk camp shirt collection in Tri-Mountain Gold. "We also added women's tall sizing, a first in the industry," he says.

*** Top challenges:** Tsai hopes his new sales reps will help Tri-Mountain to further saturate the American market. "Increasing market share and developing ways for distributors to consider us first when buying apparel" are top priorities, he says.

*** Outlook for 2007:** "We plan to launch a brand-new Web site that features distributor sales tools, user-friendly navigation and a new online ordering system," Tsai says.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Tri-Mountain is a family-run business and has been since it opened in 1994. "And our first employees we hired in each department are still in the Tri-Mountain family," Tsai says.

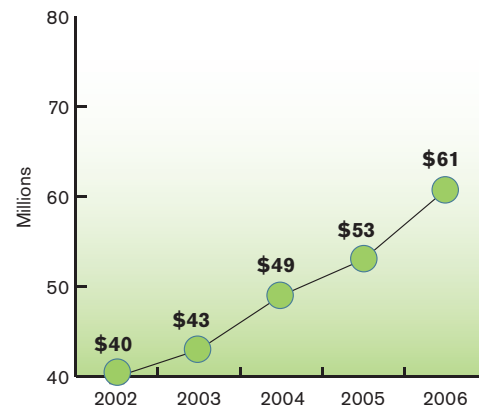


20 Sanford Business-to-Business (26) (asi/84833)

Sanford has increased its annual North American sales by 41% in the past three years. "Double-digit sales growth was fueled by the introduction of several new and innovative products," says Lisa O'Leary, marketing director, "and by the steady growth across distributor partners selling Sanford products."

*** 2006 results:** Sanford's sales in North America rose significantly again in 2006, up to \$60.7 million from \$53 million in 2005, a leap of nearly 15%.

*** New in 2006:** Sanford introduced 25 new items via entirely new products and line enhancements, making it "poised in 2006 to meet all writing instrument needs," according to O'Leary. The introduction of several new sampling vehicles, such as kits, special self-promotion offers and sample packs, provided distributors with the selling tools needed for a professional sales presentation to their consumers.



*** Top challenges:** "Always a top priority is to continually try to enhance our customer service experience," O'Leary says.

*** Outlook for 2007:** "We are projecting double-digit growth," she says.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** "Many distributors still find it surprising that we are the sole manufacturer and marketer of Paper Mate, Sharpie permanent markets, Sharpie Accent highlighters and EXPO dry-erase products."

21 ProFill Holdings (21)

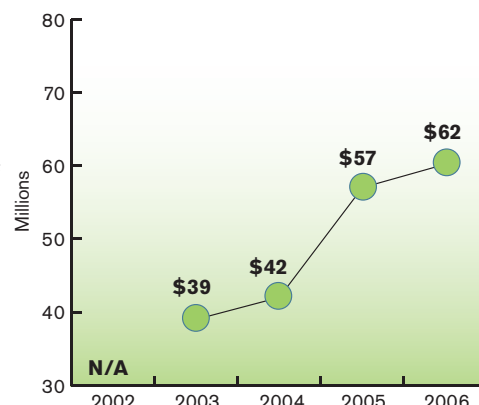
In 2005 ProFill Holdings acquired Georgia Tees, so 2006 was the first full year under the acquisition. "Anytime you assimilate two companies together, you are bringing two management teams together. There were changes, but we were able to leverage all the strengths of both companies toward our advantage," says Rick Mouty, ProFill CEO.

*** 2006 results:** Sales were up 5% in 2006, reaching \$60.2 million. This increase was mainly attributed to ProFill's focus on the basics. "While other wearables suppliers have concentrated on fashion, ProFill has stayed focused on and benefited tremendously from the exploding popularity of T-shirts and fleece," Mouty says.

*** New in 2006:** In 2006, the company reintroduced its Tultex brand in a line of combed ring spun tees and fleece. It also purchased Dayton, OH-based apparel wholesaler Sol Shultz and Co. midyear, consolidating it into ProFill's Cincinnati facility.

*** Top challenges:** "Changing the buying habits of the prospective customer – for us that means getting a distributor to take notice of the simplicity, service and convenience we have built around sourcing decorated wearables," Mouty says.

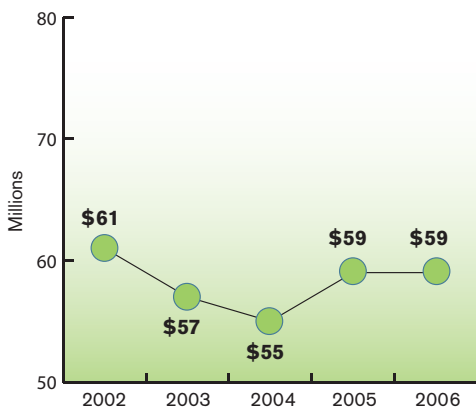
*** Outlook for 2007:** ProFill's outlook for 2007 "is the best we have ever seen," Mouty says. This positive view is driven by the popularity of the recently reintroduced Tultex brand in 2006.



22 Vantage Apparel (20) (asi/93390)

After its peak at \$69 million in sales in 2001, Vantage has hovered under the \$60 million mark each year since 2002 – though sales have seen a slight increase in the last two years. The reason for the standstill? “Vantage traded an increase in units versus an offset of lower sell prices in 2006,” according to Ira Neaman, president.

*** 2006 results:** Sales inched up from



\$59 million in 2005 to \$59.4 million in 2006 – an increase of just under 1%.

*** New in 2007:** Vantage added a successful veteran of the industry to its team in Fran Ford, who was named western regional and new-business sales director this year. Ford is cofounder of Ford-Howsmon LLC, a business consultant group that provides management and advisory services to industry clients.

*** Top challenges:** Comprehensive sales and marketing to a rapidly growing distributor base, according to Neaman.

*** Outlook for 2007:** Continued strength and significant growth in unit volume, says Neaman, who adds that Vantage has recently added two new lines: Verve (youth-inspired apparel) and Vansport (performance apparel), and has added digital printing.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Neaman says Vantage is the largest contract embroiderer in the U.S. and the fastest-growing screen printer.

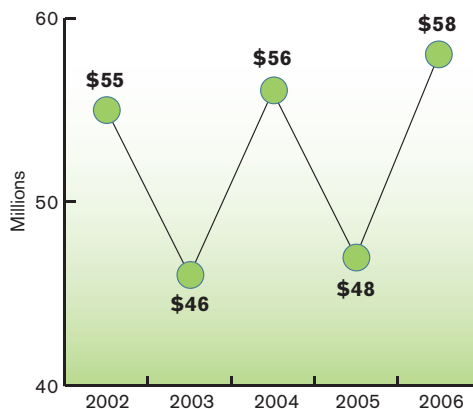
23 Gill Studios Inc. (27) (asi/56950)

A supplier that emphasizes political-based sales, Gill Studios thrived once again during last year's election cycle. The company's sales yo-yo each year – down during odd-numbered years (non-election years) and up during even-numbered ones. “Political-related sales were very strong in 2006,” says Tom Carrico, president, “and many other products were helped by the stronger economy.”

*** 2006 results:** Gill saw its typical 20-25% bounce during the 2006 election cycle, as sales increased from \$47.5 million in 2005 to \$58.4 million in 2006. However, last year's sales were an all-time high.

*** New in 2006:** “We expanded our digital printing capabilities, and continued to improve our service levels, such as adding online proofing services,” Carrico says.

*** Top challenges:** An election off-year isn't the only hurdle, as significant raw



material cost increases in petroleum and steel-related products are a concern, says Carrico.

*** Outlook for 2007:** “The political business is not nearly as strong in an odd-numbered year, so we are emphasizing other products,” Carrico says.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Forrest P. Gill, founder of Gill Studios, developed the first self-sticking bumper sticker.

24 Cutter & Buck (22) (asi/47965)

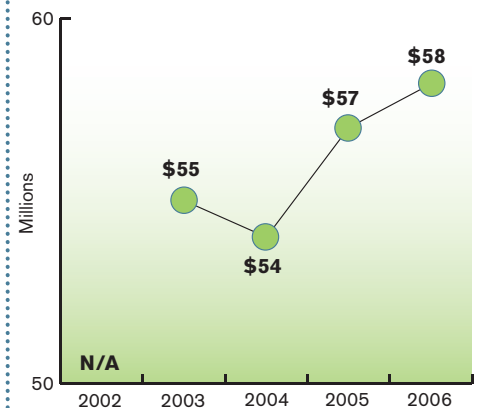
Cutter & Buck was recently purchased by European apparel giant New Wave Group AB, with net sales of \$512 billion in 2006. The purchase should strengthen Cutter & Buck's inventory, distribution and service. It will also likely increase its style offerings over the next several years. In addition, the company this year continued to navigate the high-end golf apparel markets in the promotional arena while maintaining a loyal customer base in the green grass market. “We stuck to our formula,” says Brian Thompson, vice president and general manager. “We kept the brand prestigious and continued to do all the things that have been working well for us.”

*** 2006 results:** Thompson attributes the modest 2% increase to three things: the introduction of an opening price-point performance piqué knit, expanded performance wear offerings and a host of upgraded women's styles.

*** New in 2006:** The biggest change in 2006 was the appointment of industry veteran Jeff Smith as corporate national sales manager.

*** Outlook for 2007:** “It looks fantastic,” says Thompson. “I really think 2007 will be our biggest year ever in corporate wearables.”

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Cutter & Buck will be adding several new lines from its new owners in 2007.



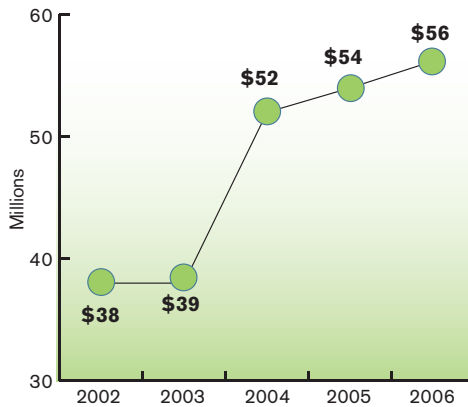
25 Lanco Corp. (25) (asi/66224)

After a monumental 33% jump in sales from 2003 (\$39 million) to 2004 (\$52 million), Lanco has come back to Earth but continues to rise steadily. Why the continued upswing? "I would have to say it's been our changes in customer service, more quality time with our customers," says Brian Landow, president. "And we have really expanded our product line."

*** 2006 results:** A jump of about \$2 million for the second year in a row: up from \$53.9 million in 2005 to \$56.2 million last year, a 4% bump.

*** New in 2006:** Lanco has committed itself to bulking up in every area of business, personnel-wise. "We have strengthened our middle management level and we also have increased our training in every department," Landow says.

*** Top challenges:** Improving said training



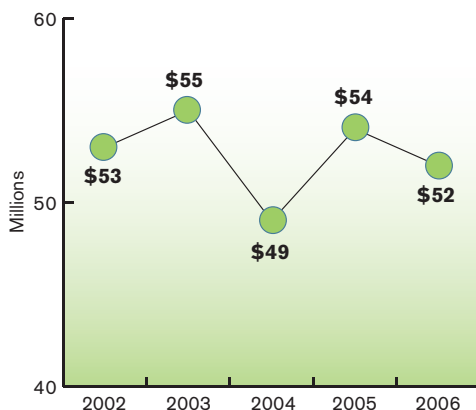
programs, according to Landow, along with maintaining growth efficiency. Lanco's North American sales have risen by nearly 59% since 2001.

*** Outlook for 2007:** Landow estimates another 2004 for Lanco. "Our growth for this year will be 25% to 30%," he says.

27 PremiumWear Inc. (24) (asi/79393)

In 2006, PremiumWear was still feeling the effects of its September 2005 acquisition by The John Forsyth Co. from former parent Deluxe Corp. But, while sales were down, profits were up, and the company continued to strengthen its position as a single-source vendor offering products and decoration.

*** 2006 results:** 2006 saw sales decline by 4%, from \$54 million in 2005 to \$52 million in 2006. This is solely attributed to PremiumWear ending an unprofitable business relationship with former parent company Deluxe, says Tim Klouda, president. "It was decided that for



2006 we would not continue to service the Deluxe promotional products business. As a result of this decision, our volume was down for 2005, but our profit was up," he says.

*** New in 2006:** PremiumWear added a director of East Coast sales, Thom Goodyke.

*** Top challenges:** In addition to the issues that always stem from an ownership change, PremiumWear's biggest challenge has been getting out its message of being a single source for apparel. "Today, we probably only decorate one out of every two shirt orders that come in here. When I started, it was probably 10% to 15% of our business. So we've grown it, but we just want to continually push that message."

*** Outlook for 2007:** The new year has been one of steady growth for PremiumWear, with sales already outpacing 2006's by 10%.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Roots of PremiumWear go all the way back to 1886, when Edward Tuttle and Frank Page founded the Northwestern Knitting Co., which eventually was renamed Munsingwear Corp. Additionally, Munsingwear created the famous Penguin logo golf shirts in 1955, which PremiumWear brought into the advertising specialty industry in 1996.

26 PromoResource One Inc. (23)

PromoResource has remained flat over the past several years, hovering around the \$55 million mark in North American sales since 2003. That didn't change much last year. "In 2006 we did not have as much success with new product sales," says Steve Holm, president of Adimage Promotional Group (asi/31969). "In past years, polycarbonate bottles, pedometers and other new stainless items fueled our sales growth. Cost increases from our suppliers forced us to increase prices, which also impacted sales. Our large quote activity was down as well, as we suspect some customers may be going direct to Asia to source product."

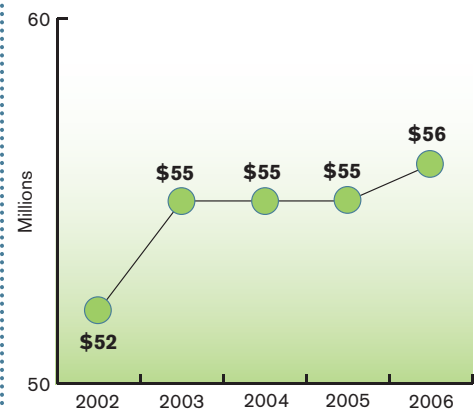
*** 2006 results:** The company's sales rose ever so slightly in 2006 to \$56 million, up from \$55.3 million in 2005 (a 1% increase).

*** New in 2006:** "We added many new products across all sales lines and increased the amount of e-mail promotions we do," Holm says. "We also added new representation to the south central United States."

*** Top challenges:** Continuing to develop new, innovative products and processes, along with balancing investment in inventory with customer demand, according to Holm.

*** Outlook for 2007:** "Sales are flat to 2006," Holm says.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** PromoResource is comprised of seven supplier companies, all under the umbrella of Taylor Corp.



28 Virginia T's (29) (asi/93917)

Virginia T's has nearly doubled its annual sales since premiering on the *Top 40* in 2002. New product lines and a commitment to supply higher-end product lines are the major reasons, according to Jay Frink, president.

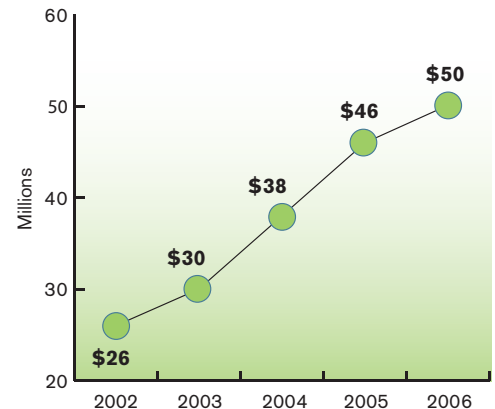
*** 2006 results:** Sales soared another 10% for Virginia T's in 2006, from \$45.5 million in 2005 to \$50.1 million last year. Surprisingly, this is the smallest jump for the company since 2002; sales increased by at least 12% from 2002 to 2005.

*** New in 2006:** "We added IZOD, Hilton Apparel, WickID and OOBIE," Frink says.

*** Top challenges:** "We have a broad range of product categories in our offering, yet we are still known for supplying the basics," Frink says.

*** Outlook for 2007:** "The outlook for this year is good," Frink says. "We are expecting another year of growth."

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Despite its monumental growth in the 21st century, Frink says that Virginia T's "will continue to cater to individual needs without regard to the size of the account."

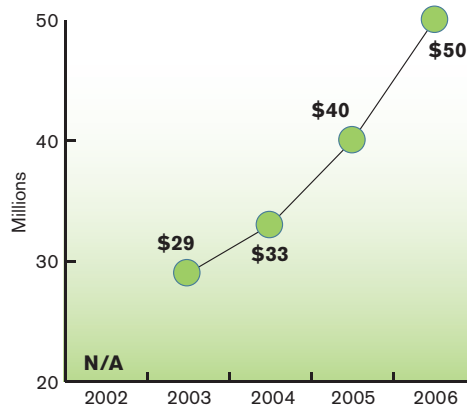


29 Hit Promotional Products (34) (asi/61125)

"Sales were up in 2006 for several reasons, including the addition of 180 new products," says Bill Schmidt, Jr., president, who adds that a large investment in inventory in the company's top-selling products was a driving factor in another record-breaking year.

*** 2006 results:** Just your run-of-the-mill, modest 25% jump in sales last year for Hit Promotional Products, up to \$50 million in 2006 from \$40 million in 2005.

*** New in 2006:** C.J. Schmidt was pro-



moted to vice president of sales. "We also completed our new 40,000-square-foot

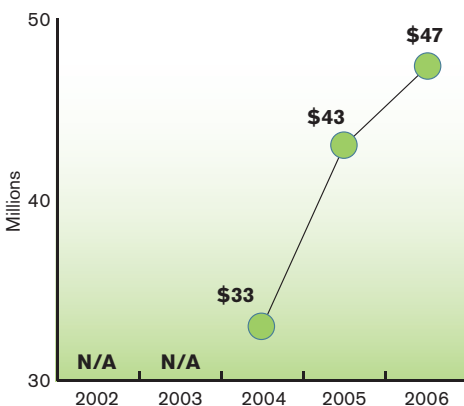
state-of-the-art warehouse and added a second shift," Schmidt says. The company also entered into laser engraving with a substantial investment in three laser machines.

*** Top challenges:** "The major challenges are the ability to attract qualified and capable new employees for both production and customer service," Schmidt says, "and adapting to a much more difficult pricing and production environment in China, where we source the majority of our product."

*** Outlook for 2007:** "We are off to an excellent start, with sales up 28% from last year," Schmidt says.

30 Groline (32) (asi/58295)

Things are looking green for Groline in more ways than one. Record earnings helped the company move up two spots on the charts. And with the current trend towards all things green and environmentally conscious, Groline continues to gain ground. "What we offer is related to the environment, and they're low-cost items," says Herbert Piller, president.



*** 2006 results:** The environment helped Groline realize an 11% increase in sales over last year's figures, and earn \$47.3 million selling an assortment of trees, flowers and plants.

*** New in 2006:** Groline added several new products last year, including aloe vera, feng shui bamboo, bulbs and bookmarks embedded with seeds. The company also began offering tree-planting kits that have a longer life span than standard live trees.

*** Top challenges:** While green marketing is growing, the challenge is still trying to educate distributors more used to selling mugs and pens than live trees and plants. "It's such a different product that we have to give them a sample and explain," says Piller.

*** Outlook for 2007:** "If we had an expensive item I would be worried, because the economy might flatten out or companies don't have as much money to spend this year," says Piller. "But when you can give away an item that can help the environment and costs only 99 cents, I don't worry."

*** What the industry doesn't know:** A sizable portion of Groline's workforce works from home fulfilling orders, including a number of disabled workers.

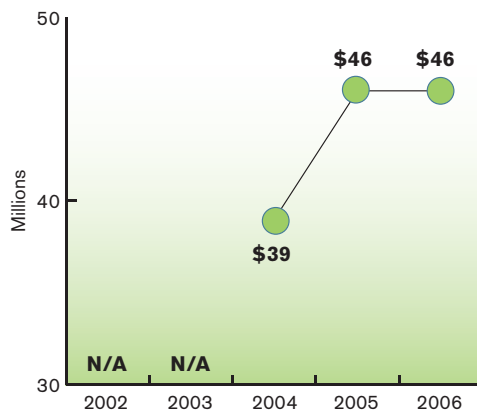
31 Plasticad/Arthur Blank (28) (asi/78690)

Just as the numbers for the *Top 40* were being finalized, Arthur Blank was purchased by American Banknote, a global supplier of secure documents, services and systems with international operations on six continents. Top management, including President Stuart Blank, is staying on to manage the North American operations.

*** 2006 results:** After a year of impressive growth of \$7 million in 2005 to \$46 million in total sales, the company was flat for the year.

*** New in 2006:** The biggest news in 2006 was the introduction of the environmentally friendly CornCard. The new gift card is made from corn and is identical in look and feel to a traditional petroleum-based card.

*** Top challenges:** "The development of new and innovative products," such as the CornCard, which helped to anchor sales in the first quarter," says Suzanne d'Amonville, market development specialist.



*** Outlook for 2007:** "Production capacity will increase 20% due to the ability to ship product from a new facility in Nashville, TN," says d'Amonville. The purchase will also nearly double American Banknote's U.S. operations and make Arthur Blank the sole provider of its plastic card operations in North America.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Arthur Blank was created in 1934 to produce plastic wallet inserts and menu covers from reclaimed X-ray film.

32 Dard Products Inc. (33) (asi/48500)

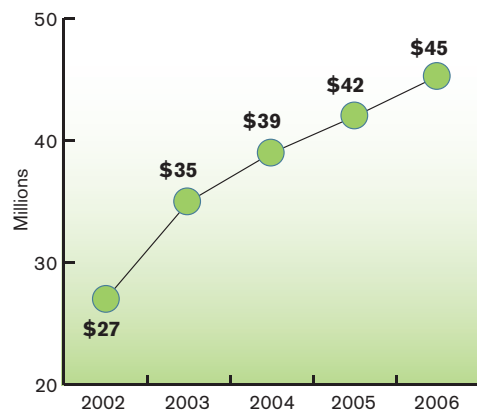
In 2006, Dard set up a new system to better handle customer service calls, and it increased its advertising and trade show attendance as well. An expanded warehouse and off-site showroom were other additions that helped Dard bring its selection of products to distributors in 2006.

*** 2006 results:** For Dard, sales in 2006 increased \$3.2 million to \$45.3 million, an 8% jump over 2005. The company's increased marketing efforts, as well as a new customer service system headed up by its new general manager, helped lead to the gain, says Cary Shevin, president. In addition, the company started to have two full shifts and an additional late carrier pickup, allowing Dard the opportunity "to get out every possible rush order," Shevin says.

*** New in 2006:** Dard added a new general manager, who implemented a new customer service system. In addition, it added an off-site showroom and another full shift to produce orders faster.

*** Top challenges:** Dard's challenges in the past year stemmed mainly from the implementation of a new computer system. "When you add a new computer system there's normally some confusion, training, and adjusting," Shevin says.

*** Outlook for 2007:** 2007 sales are beating 2006 sales, Shevin says.



33 Barton Nelson Inc. (31) (asi/38670)

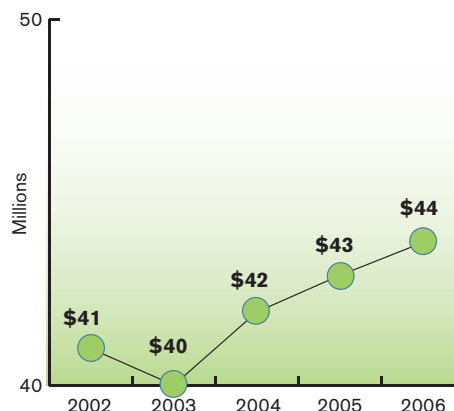
Sales have moved slowly but steadily upward for this family-owned and -operated company. But there is more good news beneath the surface. "In 2006, Barton Nelson increased sales over 3%, while our order count and product volume was up over 15%," says Gabe Nelson, vice president of sales. "This gap is explained by a strong trend where our clientele are switching from industry standard notepad sizes to more economical sizes. For example, it has become more common for a distributor to order a 4 1/4" by 5 3/4" adhesive notepad as opposed to a 4" by 6" note. The perceived value of the notepads are equal, but we can provide the 4 1/4" by 5 3/4" adhesive notepad at a significantly lower price."

*** 2006 results:** This is the third straight year that sales have risen for Barton Nelson.

*** New in 2006:** "We expanded our product line in several categories: magnets, flag dispensers and plastic-molded combo pads," says Nelson, who was appointed to VP of sales just last year.

*** Outlook for 2007:** "We're off to an excellent start in 2007, and we are ahead of where we were at in 2006 by a nice margin," Nelson says. "I foresee our business continuing to grow through the year."

*** What the industry doesn't know:** There are currently nine second-generation and six third-generation family members working for the company.

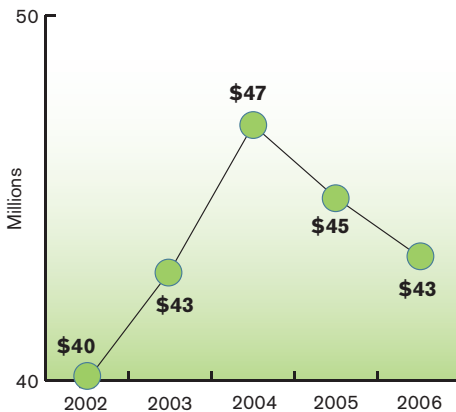


34 Prime Line (30) (asi/79530)

Rebranding was the name of the game at Prime in 2006. The company developed a new logo, catalog and a larger product mix. It also focused on training and expanding its sales force, with a greater concentration on selling deeper with existing clients. “We did surveys, we did blogs and we got feedback from distributors about products and the company as a whole,” says Jeff Lederer, executive vice president. “We found that what makes the distributor and us money are products that are all about form, function and fun.”

✳ **2006 results:** Prime’s sales were down 4% from last year, from \$45.3 million to \$43.3 million. The drop was not a surprise, says Lederer. Prime’s focus on remaking itself to be more competitive in the future required sacrifice that management knew was worth any short-term losses.

✳ **New in 2006:** Everything was new in 2006. Prime increased its sales force by



40% while improving its training of current and new employees. It added a bag and drinkware line – its fastest-growing line – to improve its overall product offering. “We purposely add to our product mix to make it more broad,” says Lederer. “The goal was to make it more difficult to copy us through the sheer breadth of our line.”

✳ **Top challenges:** “Keeping focused on what we were doing,” says Lederer. “We had

to remind ourselves that we were doing the right thing now for growth in the future.”

✳ **Outlook for 2007:** Prime is way ahead of last year with product categories’ sales up across the board and order counts up 10% to 40% every day.

✳ **What the industry doesn’t know:** Prime first introduced the robot calculator to the industry.

**New to the
supplier list
this year:
S&S Activewear &
Piller Industries.**

35 Starline (35) (asi/89320)

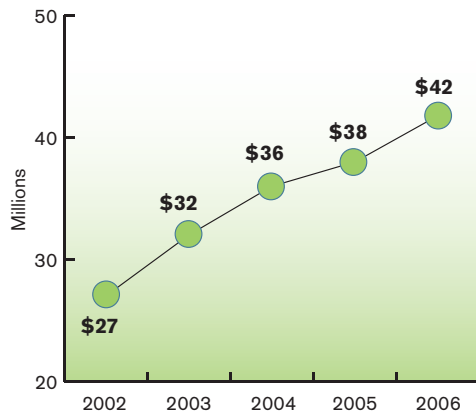
Starline made its first appearance in the *Top 40* in 2002. A balanced combination of factory and multi-representation in North America, using in-market senior sales management, is the key ingredient to the company's continued upswing, according to Daniel Norris, president. "Our new product introductions in January, April and July were well-received," he says. "Starline introduced a multilevel responsive customer service team dedicated to quickly providing our client with a live, knowledgeable representative, minimizing auto-attendant and voicemail"

*** 2006 results:** Starline's 2006 sales were up to \$42 million in 2006, from \$38 million in 2005, an increase of nearly 11% and its biggest jump in three years.

*** New in 2006:** The company introduced three factory sales reps and a regional vice president in the Northeast U.S. in the middle of the year, and added a three-person factory rep sales team in Quebec. "We leveraged our service and print capabilities to introduce a more price-point-complete bag line in 2006," Norris says.

*** Top challenges now:** Since Starline's profits have grown 250% since 2000, it is building an infrastructure capable of supporting a \$75 million sales organization without losing person-to-person relationships, according to Norris.

*** Outlook for 2007:** "The first quarter was a couple of points under forecast, with the second quarter starting above forecast," Norris says. "We expect to finish 2007 with good growth."

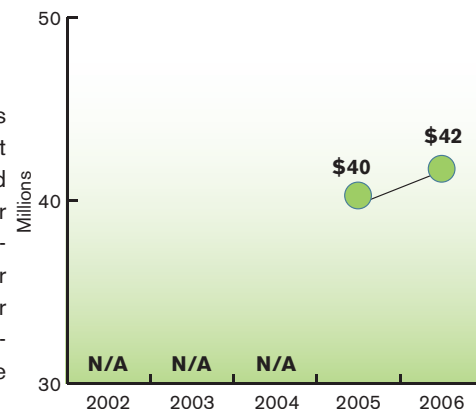


36 Piller Industries Inc. (N/A) (asi/78120)

Piller Industries joins two other companies owned by Herbert Piller on the *Top 40* list this year. The company produces framed and matted recognition awards that differ from year to year. Stamps are the most predominant theme, but on the higher end Piller offers such unique items as framed meteor fragments, ancient coins, antique stock certificates and a limited number of genuine 350-year-old swords.

*** 2006 results:** Piller earned \$41.6 million in 2005 to land on the list at number 36. Extensive magazine advertising was the reason for its success.

*** New in 2006:** A new year means new products and new concepts for Piller Industries. "Every year we add a whole lot of new items to the line, so when distributors show our catalog to a customer, they won't see the same thing," says Piller. "If you don't go out



of your way and offer completely new things, people are going to be disappointed."

*** Top challenges:** Attracting the attention of distributors unfamiliar with the line is always a challenge, says Piller: "We have to get the word out by going to trade shows and doing advertising."

*** Outlook for 2007:** Piller estimates the line will do 15% to 20% better next year.

37 Senator USA (36) (asi/86390)

Senator's sales force increased from five to 16 with the effect of 10% growth over last year. "It's been going really well having the face time and personal touch," says Jill Randolph, product marketing manager. "Also since expanding the number of inside sales reps we have been contacting smaller accounts and that's been really successful as well."

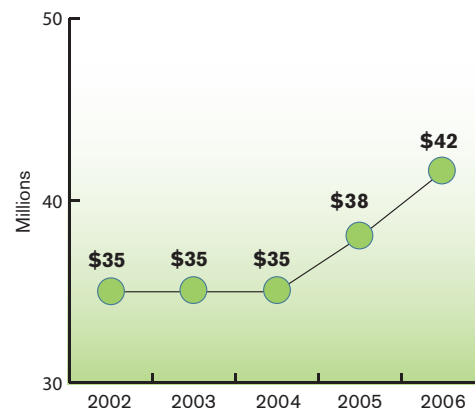
*** 2006 results:** Senator reduced its print advertising budget in 2006 because it felt the ads were underperforming. It instead focused on doing flyers, hand delivered sample kits and sales contests with its larger clients.

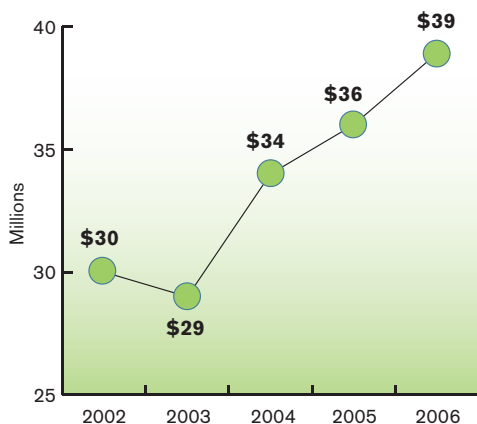
*** New in 2006:** Senator hired a new COO, customer service manager and cost accountant, but the biggest change was from Randolph, who introduced a new trade show booth, as well as new catalogs and Web site designs and flyer program.

*** Top challenges:** "We are an 87-year-old company and huge in Europe," says Randolph. "But we are not selling at retail so we don't have that household name recognition. Our biggest challenge is getting our name out there more."

*** Outlook for 2007:** A whole host of new changes are coming this year, including a new line, existing line extensions and, most important, a line of office products such as pen holders and note pads.

*** What the industry doesn't know:** Senator offers 17 original, patented designs, as well as six different international design award-winning pens.





38 Stouse (37)
(asi/89910)

"New-customer acquisition is very important to our goals for growth," says Michael Stoeck, president of Stouse. The Midwest supplier has seen North American business increase by 34% since 2003. "Stouse has demonstrated a consistent pattern of growth throughout its history."

* **2006 results:** Sales rose from \$35.7 million in 2005 to \$38.9 million last year, a 9% hike. That beats out the still-impressive 6% jump Stouse achieved from 2004-2005.

* **New in 2006:** "We expanded our product offering with an increase in full-color digitally printed products, which were well-received in the marketplace," Stoeck says. "That expansion, combined with a growth in political product sales thanks to the

even-numbered year, played a role in our success."

* **Top challenges:** "Our delivery times are fast, but we still can't ship it yesterday, so the challenge remains." Stoeck adds that limiting price increases following the increase in raw material costs is a top priority.

* **Outlook for 2007:** "Stouse expects consistent growth, though probably not as high a percentage as in 2006, in part due to the absence of political sales in an odd-numbered year," Stoeck says.

* **What the industry doesn't know:** Nearly one-third of the Stouse staff has been with the company for at least 10 years.

This year's
Top 40 suppliers
collectively
brought in
\$4.2 billion
in revenue.

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Picture Perfect (#705)
A refrigerator magnet & photo holder
to display and protect
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THE PEARL TOTE

iCase
eyeglasses/iPod/cell

BONDED LEATHER
Commuter Companion

The Pearl Tote (#724)
A pearl white cosmetic bag
accented with designer pastel
Nylon bands.

i Case (#255)
A protective case for your
glasses with an extra pocket
for an iPod or cell phone.

The Commuter Companion (#130)
Store credit cards, keys, cash,
ID and travel pass all in one
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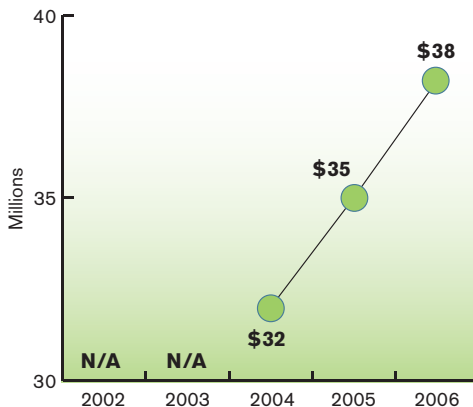
39 Gold Bond (38) (asi/57653)

Gold Bond is rising in the industry, appearing in the *Top 40* for the third year in a row. “We worked to bring in new and exciting products, and it worked for us,” says Mark Godsey, president. Those products include an exclusive golf line, the addition of polycarbonate bottles to its drinkware line, and fresh additions to the pen line.

✦ **2006 results:** Another \$3 million in sales this year. After a leap from \$32 million in 2004 to \$35 million in 2005, Gold Bond jumped to \$38 million last year – an 8% increase.

✦ **New in 2006:** Godsey points to the company’s new marketing efforts under the direction of James Canning. “James took a more proactive approach to advertising and expanded the number of publications we used,” Godsey says.

✦ **Top challenges:** “Sales were down in our pen line in 2005,” Godsey says, “and an effort was made to freshen the line with new



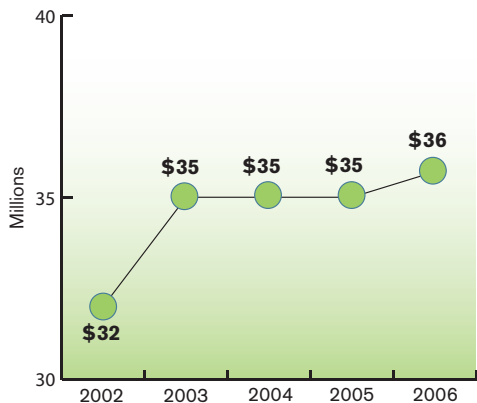
colors and styles.” He adds that Gold Bond discontinued outdated pens and purchased three new pen presses. “In addition to adding new items to our line, we took a look at our printing process for drinkware, and made the investment to bring in equipment that allows us to print up to four colors on our polycarbonate bottles,” he says.

✦ **Outlook for 2007:** The company met sales growth projections in the first four

months of 2007, according to Godsey, who says the first two months are traditionally slow, with a strong rebound in March, when the company’s season really begins.

✦ **What the industry doesn’t know:** Of Gold Bond’s 303 employees, the average length of service is six years, and over 21% have been with the company between 10 and 34 years. “There is a lot of experience within these walls,” Godsey says.

Off the supplier list this year:
Vitronic Promotional Group.



40 Noteworthy (39)
(asi/74360)

* **2006 results:** This family business had a relatively flat revenue year, growing its revenues from \$35.1 million in 2005 to \$35.7 million in 2006. Carol Constantino, president of Noteworthy, attributes the small increase to the purchase of new machinery. "This allowed us," she says, "to expand our product line and improve lead times."

* **Personnel changes:** Constantino says part of the reason for her company's long-term success has been low turnover. "Our employees are treated as important family members," she says. "Matt, the first artist that we hired in 1962, is still a loyal, dedicated and productive member of our art department."

* **Top challenges:** Constantino points to the rigors of keeping up with strict manufacturing guidelines and procedures as the company's biggest challenge going

forward. "It's important to position ourselves to be proactive to the environmental issues concerning plastics," she says. "As a manufacturer, we have to be able to stay compliant with every state's regulations."

* **Outlook for 2007:** This year is looking "very promising," according to Constantino.

* **What the industry doesn't know:** Noteworthy owns an Indian Museum. It has a collection of more than 60,000 artifacts that pay tribute to the Indians from Mohawk Valley. "It's the largest privately owned collection of Mohawk items," Constantino says.

The Top 40 suppliers average a revenue increase of **5.75%.**

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