



# Why We Can't Ignore the Burgeoning European Market

by Michael Woody,  
The Quill Co.

**W**hen I first began traveling throughout Europe's promotional products market, I quickly came to the conclusion that the European market has a great deal of potential. With a GDP roughly the size of the U.S., the presence of progressive advertising media, and a solid understanding of promotional products, I sensed it presented a unique long-term opportunity. The European market seemed to be as poised for dramatic growth as the U.S. market was 30 years ago.

In retrospect, this was a typically American point of view—naive, arrogant, condescending and dead wrong. A deeper immersion in that market has led me to a much different conclusion—the European market for promotional products is thriving today. It is highly developed, oftentimes more creative than the U.S. market, and will continue its growth and development whether or not our U.S. industry decides to participate.

For example, in one particular European country there is a well-established association for promotional products dealers (distributors, in U.S. parlance). To illustrate their perceived importance to the marketing mix in that country, dealers are included in an advertising reference catalog that includes agencies, photographers and copywriters. The average dealer in that market will attend two international trade shows each year—the PSI show in Dusseldorf and the Hong Kong

premium and gift show (curiously, the Dallas show is not on the list). They tend to import many products, sometimes imprinting the items with their own in-house imprinting equipment to maximize service to the client.

Even some medium-size dealers create beautiful four-color gift catalogs that illustrate a range of products from inexpensive key tags to the finest lead crystal glassware. These catalogs usually have more than 100 pages and, in some instances, are produced twice each year. And these dealers do not ignore the possibility of selling into other European countries; they embrace it.

Buyers in that market tend to order more expensive promotional items than in the U.S. The graphic design quality of the artwork is highly advanced, and the buyer expects the quality of the imprint to meet or exceed the quality of the design. Last year, a dealer from this European country sent my supplier firm one of our two most graphically

creative orders.

The country? Norway, with a population of five million and only one major urban center, Oslo. And if you think a U.S. supplier cannot possibly do a significant amount of business in a market that size, I have personal experience that proves otherwise.

There is not space enough in this column to address the state of the market in other European countries; but if a market the size of Norway is this developed, you can imagine the level of promotional products expertise in larger markets like Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Spain.

All of the above points to a European promotional products market that is mature, sophisticated and expanding, with

a decidedly global mindset. So we, as an industry that is still focused almost exclusively on North America, can perhaps afford to choose between selling or not selling into Europe. But we cannot afford to ignore it. **PPB**

*Michael Woody is vice president of sales and marketing for The Quill Company, a Providence, Rhode Island-based supplier, and a member of the PPA board of directors.*

**The European market for promotional products is thriving today. It is highly developed, oftentimes more creative than the U.S. market, and will continue its growth and development whether or not our U.S. industry decides to participate.**