

Chairman's Letter



Imagine a Universal ID System

The technology leadership goal in the new Strategic Plan (see page 154) calls on our Association to be the technology leader and visionary for the promotional products industry. We began to exercise that leadership at The 1999 PPAI ExpoSM with the introduction of DiskCat[™], a marketing presentation tool. Now it's time to create the vision.

At our 1999 spring meeting, your board of directors approved forming two teams of industry veterans and visionaries. The first is charged with developing a universal identification system for all of the companies—members and non-members—participating in our industry. The second is a “standards council,” formed to identify the common terms and definitions for products, so that anyone wishing to search for products using the latest technology can be more successful more often.

Why take these steps now? If we believe that information about sources of supply, products, customers, employees, business trends, laws and so forth are

real assets to be safeguarded, but equitably and appropriately shared, we need a vision to manage those assets. In our Member Needs Assessment, our members clearly stated that they want PPAI to take a leadership position in the establishment of a universal identification system.

The variety of competing systems currently in use has forced both distributors and suppliers to choose one to the exclusion of the others, or to incorporate all, which results in confusion, unnecessary complexity and increased administrative and marketing costs for suppliers.

The lack of common terms and definitions for the tens of thousands of products in our industry has made it increasingly difficult for distributors to use the latest search devices to locate the right product at the right price for their clients. As the industry continues to expand, and the number of companies and products grows exponentially, these problems will only intensify.

Imagine a promotional products world in which all suppliers and distributors use a universally accepted identifier. Imagine a world in which a computer search for a sports bottle or roller pen at

a particular price turned up *all* of the available products in that category because a common language was used to name them. I have asked these two teams to envision that world, and help PPAI to create it.

It is the proper role of our industry trade association to develop and maintain clear standards for data on all companies participating in the marketplace, and to make the design of those standards open and accessible to everyone.

It's that simple.



BY MICHAEL WOODY, CAS

PPAI CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD