

Chairman's Letter



The Sound of One Hand Clapping

PPAI is a uniquely structured organization. Unlike many other associations, ours encompasses both the manufacturer/seller (supplier) and the customer (distributor). After 20 years in the industry, including five years of regional association service and four years on the PPAI board, I have learned the hard way that the tension between the sometimes conflicting priorities of suppliers and distributors makes it more difficult to resolve many of the thorny issues facing our industry and our businesses.

However, that tension also insures that when we sit down together to address those issues, they are resolved partly to the benefit of distributors, partly to the benefit of suppliers, and ultimately to the benefit of the marketplace. The strength and prosperity of this industry is built on the tradition that its nonprofit caretaker, PPAI, is directed by volunteer groups of individuals, representing both sides of

the aisle, each acting in the best interest of their own constituency and occasionally compromising for the greater good of the market as a whole.

If you consider this a prescription for gridlock, simply compare this arrangement to our own government in Washington. As Republicans or Democrats, we often argue strenuously against the other party's priorities. We bemoan the laborious process of bipartisan government and are wary of the compromises that are essential to the decision-making process. Yet, this seemingly unwieldy system of checks and balances, combined with the individualism and entrepreneurial spirit of the American people, has nurtured the development of the world's greatest representative democracy. The process may be messy, but you can't argue with the results.

A similar form of bipartisanship in the promotional products business has led to the development of a \$13-billion industry, a rapidly increasing level of sophistication and professionalism, and enduring partnerships between suppliers and distributors. Of course, we still face some daunting challenges, including the effects of technology and globalization. But those challenges are best

addressed by volunteer groups of suppliers and distributors, sitting down together and reaching accommodations that reflect the needs of both. In reaching those accommodations, the entire market is propelled forward.

Any program, service, event or issue resolved, solely based on the needs of either group separately may provoke applause, but it would be merely the sound of one hand clapping.



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OCTOBER 1999
PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS BUSINESS