

## Distributor Salesperson of the Year

# Andy Olson

STAPLES PROMOTIONAL  
PRODUCTS  
(asi/120601)

By Christopher Ruvo

Andy Olson is a 21st century Mike Brady.

The father of six in a bustling blended family, Olson accomplishes with aplomb the near-miraculous balancing act of being a dedicated dad and a sales professional who annually orchestrates eight figures worth of deals.

Sure, he's busy, flying around the U.S. and Canada to meet with Fortune 500 clients, spending weekends running from soccer pitches to baseball fields for his kids' games. Still, he wouldn't have it any other way. "I'm a hard worker that wants to win in all aspects of life – business, husband, father and friend," Olson says.

Boy, is he ever doing that.

After billing about \$15 million in 2014, Olson might have been forgiven for pausing to admire the achievement. But he wasn't interested in slowing down. Instead, he put nose-to-grind and strove to beat the revenue tally in 2015 – a feat he achieved. "I want to increase my business for a seventh consecutive year," he says of his goals for 2016.

While Olson prefers to look ahead, his performance over the last 12 months is certainly worthy of being recognized as the Distributor Salesperson of the Year. Not only did Olson far surpass any other finalist in annual sales, he rose above the rest in almost every award criteria Advantages outlined. He more than doubled, for example, his next closest competitor in our online finalist voting, showing that customers, industry colleagues and coworkers consider him an elite rep.

"Andy's passion and drive for our business is simply outstanding," says Anne McKeough, vice president of global sales at Staples Promotional Products. "He travels throughout North America working creatively and strategically with his key clients to help them drive their business. He grows his sales year after year and collaborates closely with his key support team to make things happen every day."

A consummate family man, Olson's wife, Jenny, and their six kids

– ages 7 to 16 – are the fuel that drives him to be his best. "I don't want to let them down," he says. "Their happiness dictates my success."

Now in his 16th year in promotional product sales, the strategic account manager for Staples Promotional Products says there isn't a golden ticket to prosperity. Rather, his success is rooted in practicing consultative selling principles that make him a partner to clients.

"We talk to them about the initiatives and products they're working on, and we develop solutions based on their needs," says Olson, who works primarily with automotive and industrial companies. "It's about us helping to drive more sales their way."

This customer-first service has resulted in Olson earning a bevy of devoted clients. Even so, he eschews taking all the credit, saying the support team at Staples is integral to success. "It's a great group of people that enable me to build up these programs," he says.

While modest about his accomplishments, Olson has advice to offer industry sellers eager to increase their sales: "Surround yourself with top sales reps, and don't be afraid to ask them how they got there," he says. "Most would be pretty open about sharing."

It's also wise to build strong relationships with excellent suppliers, Olson believes. "It will reduce your workload. Your suppliers will give you ideas," he says. Fundamentally, reps must be reliable and accountable, always considering the long-term relationship. If an order goes awry, propose solutions, learn from the experience and communicate with the client how you'll prevent such issues in the future. "When customers see you're working hard to meet their needs," says Olson, "they're going to trust you with their next project."

Working hard is something to which Olson is no stranger. And that's fine, for this Nebraska native with a Kansas City soul is happy spending the rest of his professional life in the branded merchandise industry, supporting his family and helping clients prosper.

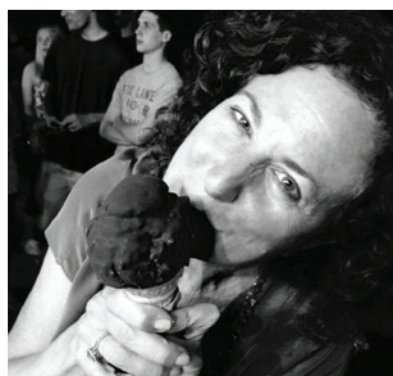
"I love what I do," says Olson. "I don't want to do anything else."

**"I am a hard worker that wants to win in all aspects of life – business, husband, father and friend."**

PHOTO:  
CARRIE ATKINS



# The Finalists



## Sandy Poster

Axis Promotions (asi/128263)

It started with a phone call to a client – someone she used to sell imported handbags to. It turned into Sandy Poster's most prestigious account. "I called Tony Hsieh's former business partner's wife," says Poster, a sales executive at Axis Promotions. "I didn't even know who she was related to, but she put me in touch with the right people at Zappos."

Today, years later, Poster provides Zappos with "a lot of employee gifts" and other promotional items, being constantly challenged by her client's push-the-envelope style. What Poster has learned along the way has helped her win business from many other firms that focus on company culture and employee happiness. Among those companies is Mid-Atlantic convenience store brand Wawa.

"Every year they hold a Value's Day to celebrate their 24,000 employees," Poster says. "For 2015, their theme was 'stepping into a great year.'" Poster and Axis were tasked with producing logoed socks for every Wawa employee, plus sublimated shoelaces that listed each of the brand's six core values. The socks and shoelaces were packaged in a little pouch and presented to employees with a card. "We did the order in a ridiculously short period of time," Poster says, "but it turned out really well."

Many projects that Poster has worked on seem to have turned out well of late. Her 2015 sales were up 25%. "After all these years, things are starting to click and I'm finally learning how to win larger deals," she says.

Her 2016 goals aren't focused on her own progress, but on helping her clients and the two-person team she manages at Axis improve. "I want to help them grow their businesses better," she says.

► **Sandy's best advice:** Never lose a chance to see a client in person. "When I get a pre-production sample, I always try to bring it to them."

## Rob Charlton

The Next Trend Designs (asi/283375)

In his last year of high school, when most seniors are caught up in prom, parties and planning for college, Rob Charlton was gearing up for something else – being an entrepreneur. At just 18 years old, Charlton was already selling logoed T-shirts, the promotional product that years later is still the staple of his growing operation. "I've been able to use the T-shirt, which is a very simple product in countless ways, to build and promote our customers' brands," he says.

Charlton founded his company, The Next Trend Designs Inc., 25 years ago above a pizza shop in Port Credit, ON. Today, the Canadian firm has blossomed into one of Canada's fastest growing distributorships, named to the 2015 PROFIT 500 list. The company has enjoyed five-year revenue growth of 89%, buoyed by Charlton's own seven-figure personal sales, which rank second among this year's salesperson of the year finalists.

"Rob is a remarkable and a natural salesperson," says Janine Taylor, Charlton's business partner. "I'm always fascinated with his big-thinking approach when it comes to

(continued on page 104)





developing his customer accounts. For Rob there are no boundaries in business and what is possible for his clients.”

What motivates Charlton to keep pushing for new ideas after three decades in the business? “I’m driven by the sheer need and desire to build something that will last, even after my time in the industry may be up,” he says.

But don’t expect Charlton to slow down any time soon. In 2016, Charlton is working to take his existing sales model and duplicate it in other

markets. His big advantage, though – and one of the reasons he vaulted to the forefront this year – is the heightened level of customization he can provide. “We’ve been busy expanding our proprietary line of products,” Charlton says. “We have also secured patents on several products already, and this will allow us to offer our customers something even more unique, often cost-effective and only available through our company.”

► **Rob’s best advice:** “Value yourself at the highest level” and learn specifics about your customers’ industries.

## Noel Garcia

Boundless ([asi/143717](http://asi/143717))

Noel Garcia has certainly found his sales niche. No, it’s not in the education sector, or in pitching wellness programs, or even creating campaigns for the burgeoning live events market. His big base is in the funeral home industry – and he’s proud of it. “It’s an area that’s been very strong,” he says.

That strength is driving Garcia’s numbers to new heights. In fact, over the last four years, his sales have jumped nearly 30%. “We can accommodate any request funeral homes make – whether it’s a pen, a mug or an umbrella,” he says. “We do a lot of urn kits, too, and coolers.”

With many funeral homes now focused on offering life celebrations instead of traditional services, Garcia is providing more and more items that identify with the deceased. “Maybe it’s a golf ball or a fishing lure,” he says. “It can relate to whatever they loved.”

With the support of his company, Boundless, Garcia can stand above



other reps in using technology to make programs more seamless. For example, an e-procurement integration with one of his largest customers allows Garcia to key on relationships. The client conversation, in other words, isn’t based up front on commodities and pricing. “We almost never discuss promotional products,” he says. “I’m trying instead to help them reach their goals and see big results. Most of my clients I’ve worked with for 10 to 15 years.”

When Garcia’s not out selling, he’s mentoring his sales support team – something he greatly enjoys. “For me, it’s important to be available to them and let them pick my brain,” he says. “They’re really high-caliber and I want to see them succeed.”

In the year ahead, Garcia’s plan for success is simple. “I used to write goals down, but by now I know what needs to be done,” he says. “My goal in life – that’s what matters most – and that’s helping my family stay happy and feeling secure.”

► **Noel’s best advice:** One of the smartest things you can do sometimes is pass on business. “You never want to get bogged down with stuff that doesn’t make you money.”

## Sandy Gonzalez

MadeToOrder ([asi/259540](http://asi/259540))

**Q: How would you describe yourself in one sentence?**

A: Driven!

**Q: What’s the most creative promotion you’ve done recently?**

A: I’m actually in the middle of one right now – it’s an internal campaign and we’re encouraging participants to express their vision on social media with specific tags. The company is going through major changes and this gives the employees a vehicle to express themselves and feel like they’re a part of the process.

**Q: How do you find new customers?**

A: I’m very fortunate to have been in the business long enough to get referrals.

**Q: What’s the greatest challenge you face in your job today?**

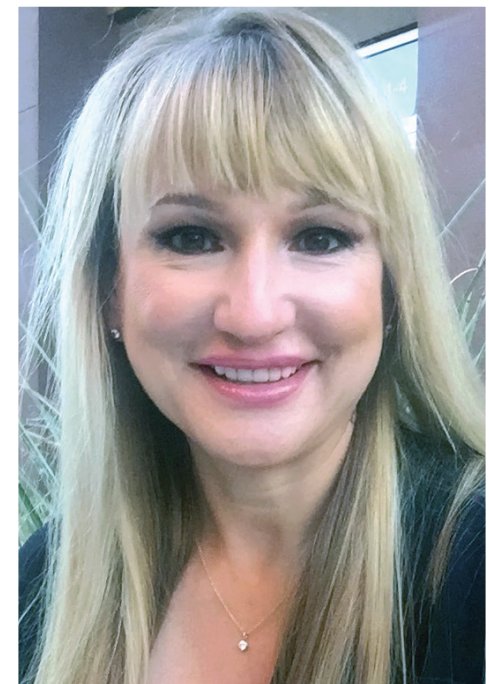
A: Time. Things move much faster now than they ever have before. Today’s customers are better informed. We have to be more creative and bring more value to the table in less time.

**Q: What’s a top market to sell to in 2016?**

A: Startups. I’m seeing so many new startups, and I think it’s very exciting to get in on the ground floor with new companies. I love the process of helping them create their look and really think about how they present their brand on our medium.

**Q: What’s the best sales advice you’ve ever gotten?**

A: To follow your passion. I do this daily. I think about this every time a customer asks for ideas on a project. I give them what they asked for, then I follow up with what I personally am loving and using.







**Gentry Harrington**  
Activate! Promotions + Marketing  
(asi/141964)

**Q: How would you describe yourself in one sentence?**  
A: I'm a competitive, enthusiastic manager and a dedicated husband and father.

**Q: What's the most creative promotion you've done recently?**  
A: We designed a multi-tiered sales promotion including my customer and three major consumer brands – Apple, Omaha Steaks and Best Buy. We created a personalized card carrier and fulfilled over 7,300 orders. It was profitable for us and, more importantly, the customer.

**Q: How do you find new customers?**  
A: I ask my current customers for referrals. Especially after we've done a great job.

**Q: What's the greatest challenge you face in your job today?**  
A: Working with a new generation of buyers – millennials. They're used to and comfortable with buying everything online. Communicating with this new group of buyers creates a whole new set of challenges.

**Q: What's a top market to sell to in 2016?**  
A: A trend we see is an increase in the implementation of online employee appreciation, motivation and recognition programs. Offering these programs does require specific expertise, so we recently purchased a company that specializes in this service.

**Q: What's the best sales advice you've ever gotten?**  
A: Never compete on price. Compete on quality, service, knowledge and the resources you bring to the table.

**Pete Thuss**  
Talbot (asi/341500)



**Q: How would you describe yourself in one sentence?**  
A: I'm a driven person that does what I have to do to get the job done, business or personal.

**Q: What's the most creative promotion you've done recently?**  
A: This past year I did a cross promotion with a local radio station on a reusable Solo cup for two large outdoor country music concerts. The co-branded cups made it to a lot of people, including a number of the stars that performed, as well as a DJ on Sirius XM.

**Q: How do you find new customers?**  
A: Generally, I find new clients through referrals from existing clients. I also use trade magazines in specific industries to target clients in

those sectors. Another way I've been successful is by using my contacts and introductions through LinkedIn.

**Q: What's the greatest challenge you face in your job today?**  
A: I would say it's continuing the balance of personal life and work life. I find the two are so interrelated as more and more clients become friends and friends become clients.

**Q: What's a top market to sell to in 2016?**  
A: I've had great success in the foodservice industry and am finding this is continuing to grow for me. In the past, not all foodservice outlets wore a uniform or coordinating clothing of some type. By offering an inexpensive solution to this, as well as branding continuity, it brings the image of the establishment up a notch.

**Q: What's the best sales advice you've ever gotten?**  
A: A late uncle of mine gave me some great advice and that was to never try to sell anybody anything. I've always taken that to heart and adopted my own motto: Inform the client of what's available and then help them make the right decision.

**Kelly Stone**  
The Idea Box, powered by Proforma (asi/300094)



**K**elly Stone literally had to start her ad specialty sales career from scratch. After she left Staples Promotional Products (asi/120601) about three years ago, she figured her future would be in selling protein bars, not promo products. "I was working with the celebrity chef Mr. Food and I really thought what we were selling would take off," Stone says. "But sales were slow and protein bars don't have a long shelf life, so momentum dwindled." A lesser salesperson might have felt sorry for herself, but not Stone. She couldn't tap into her old accounts, but she worked her network and quickly was selling promo items again. "I decided to go to work for myself and I partnered with Proforma," she says. "I started back in September of 2013, and in the last quarter of that year, I did \$400,000 in sales. For 2015, I did about \$1 million."

And Stone, who owns Florida-based The Idea Box, powered by Proforma, is just getting started. She recently won a large multimillion-dollar deal with a Fortune 500 transportation client. "We're doing online incentive platforms for them and we'll be providing print and promo products," she says. "They really wanted to go to a single source for their programs, and that's what we are."

Stone also considers herself a source for great ideas. One promo product that's won her considerable business of late is a customized rechargeable video brochure. "You open the flap and there's a video embedded in it," she says. "Different buttons can play different videos. One insurance client used the book for training modules – they did 700 pieces. It's really attention-grabbing."

Unsurprisingly, Stone expects 2016 to be her best year yet – but she won't rest on her recent success. "I'm going to get my new large customer up and running first," she says, "but the second half of the year I want to find another large client."

► **Kelly's best advice:** Trust your gut. "Make sure you always have a solution for a client."

**Christopher Kuranz**  
CSE (asi/155807)



**Q: How would you describe yourself in one sentence?**  
A: A high-energy people person.

**Q: What's the most creative promotion you've done recently?**  
A: At CSE, we send out some really creative direct mail pieces. My favorite campaign is our James Bond-themed mailer. Why was it so good? The piece has an iconic theme that everyone loves. It's very fun and creative, yet conveys CSE's message clearly and effectively.

**Q: How do you find new customers?**  
A: The most effective way to find new customers is through referrals. Building a strong network of connections is vital when it comes to

new business opportunities.

**Q: What's the greatest challenge you face in your job today?**  
A: These days, clients have a lot of resources at their fingertips. The Internet gives instantaneous feedback of product information and where to buy. This push for speed creates an obstacle of being able to proactively and quickly fill everyone's needs, whether that be for current clients or new business opportunities.

**Q: What's a top market to sell to in 2016?**  
A: With the presidential election coming up, there may be a temporary opportunity in that niche market for sales.

**Q: What's the best sales advice you've ever gotten?**  
A: Always tell the truth – you will have a lot less to remember.

**FINALIST FAVORITES**

**Pete Thuss**  
Book  
*Awaken the Giant Within*  
by Tony Robbins

**Christopher Kuranz**  
Hobby  
Cooking

**Kris Palmer**  
Singer  
Michael Jackson

**Sandy Gonzalez**  
Promo Product  
Tumi backpack

**Glen Jusczyk**  
Accomplishment  
Watching his daughter beat cancer

**Noel Garcia**  
Getaway  
Family trips to Colorado

**Rob Charlton**  
Sports Team  
Toronto Blue Jays

**Sandy Poster**  
Treat  
Ice cream

**Gentry Harrington**  
App  
Angry Birds Star Wars

**Kelly Stone**  
Exercise  
CrossFit



**The Advantages Distributor Salesperson of the Year, as well as award finalists, were determined by a panel of ASI editors using the following criteria: annual sales, online votes, prestige of clients and creativity in recent promotional campaigns.**

## Glen Jusczyk

AMGC Inc. (asi/548902)

It was April Fools' Day, but the doctor's news was as serious as it gets. Malia Jusczyk, just 2 ½ years old, was dying of cancer, a tumor pressing against her aorta and kidney. But Malia was a fighter. And after a harrowing ordeal that involved chemotherapy, tumor resection surgery, radiation, a stem cell transplant, kidney removal and more, she emerged free of the stage four neuroblastoma. Miraculously, the spirited young survivor – who was diagnosed in 2011 – has been in remission for years. “She's so full of life and happy, and she makes me that way,” says Glen Jusczyk, Malia's dad. “I work as hard as possible in the hopes she can experience life to the fullest.”

The hard work is paying off.

Jusczyk's massive success in promotional product sales has empowered him not only to support Malia, but to donate generously to the For Kids' Sake Foundation. His proudest professional achievement is being able to give more than \$10,000 worth of products to the pediatric cancer foundation, which he and his wife founded. “This year I want to increase my sales 20% and increase donations for fighting pediatric cancer to \$20,000,” says Jusczyk.

There is little doubt that he'll reach his goal, for he shares his daughter's will and drive – something that has fueled success in business and athletics. The finisher of 15 triathlons, Jusczyk played soccer professionally in Major League Soccer's minor league system. Through soccer, he got into the apparel business, starting a company in the late '90s. The operation flourished, expanding into hard good promotional products and employing a couple dozen people.

Still, by 2008, Jusczyk needed a change, and he sold the business to his partner. He didn't expect to re-enter ad specialties, but his daughter's illness changed that. “Selling promotional products gave me the flexibility I needed to work and be by my daughter's side,” he says. “I could be with her in the bed, sending emails and working on logos.”

Now an executive and thriving front-line seller at AMGC Inc., the firm he founded with a partner, Jusczyk is excited for all life holds for him, his daughter and the difference they can make. “The more I sell,” he says, “the more I can contribute to the foundation and support a great cause.”

► **Glen's best advice:** Find something that motivates and moves you. Let that inspire you to be your best and drive success.



## Kris Palmer

Grapevine Designs (asi/212829)

Kris Palmer may be a grandmother of seven, but she lives and works with the energy and ambition of the most eager new college graduates.

Indeed, her uncommon creativity and burning drive to succeed has propelled her into the upper echelon of industry sales professionals. An annual multimillion-dollar biller, this 16-year veteran of the ad specialty business has powered her career to enviable heights by continually providing solutions that drive ROI.

“It can be easy to fall into the trap of being an order taker,” Palmer says. “But we should never settle for mediocrity. The road to success is made with a lot of elbow grease. It's harder, but the rewards are much greater.”

Partnering with businesses in industries that range from aviation to financial, Palmer's an ace at building lucrative long-term relationships – an achievement she accomplishes by crafting branded initiatives based on a client's business, industry, differentiators and goals.

“When you take a consultative approach, the trust develops naturally, and when clients trust you implicitly, real partnerships form,” says Palmer, whose expansive portfolio of business includes everything from Web-based programs to servicing brick-and-mortar gift shops. “The support I get from our team at Grapevine is essential to making it happen.”

While professional success is important, Palmer says it's paramount to live balanced. Beyond remaining faithful to her rigorous exercise routine, she plans to equilibrate in 2016 through her growing family. “We have two more grandchildren on the way,” says Palmer. “I plan to enjoy the moment with my grandbabies.”

► **Kris' best advice:** Challenge yourself to be the best consultative seller you can be on every order.

## Supplier Sales Rep of the Year

# Jane Ryan

JETLINE (asi/63344)

By Michele Bell

After nearly 40 years in the industry, Jane Ryan has seen it all. The good, the bad and the sleazy, Ryan has encountered every bit of it and has emerged with her smarts, legendary wit and professionalism intact, as is evidenced by the abundance of ebullient distributor nominations she received to be named this year's SGR Supplier Sales Rep of the Year – an award for which 87 other sales reps were nominated. Now with Jetline for the last three years, Ryan, keeps exceeding goals and expectations – all with that laugh, which puts both “Ls” in LOL.

“I first met Jane at the ASI Show Orlando and I could tell right away she was passionate about her work,” says Lisa Schraw, director of operations for The Brandit Agency. “She knows her product line and loves to help me when I

“Every day is different with new challenges,” Ryan says, when asked what it is that keeps her motivated after nearly four decades in the business. “I love helping clients fill their needs, and it gives me such great satisfaction. When you're as passionate as I am about this industry, it doesn't feel like work – it's like helping a friend.”

But Ryan cautions new reps to the industry, and especially millennials who may not have extensive sales experience, not to make the same mistakes she did when starting out. “Early on in my career, I always wanted to say ‘yes,’ and realized quickly that ‘yes’ isn't always the best answer, but honesty is. My motto is, ‘don't over promise and under deliver.’”

So what tips does Ryan have for distributor reps to the industry? Get involved, network, be

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Kristina Newsom with Specialties Plus of NC

need new creative ideas for my clients. Jane has visited my office a few times since our first meeting in Orlando and follows through on sample requests and virtual flyers. Jetline is lucky to have such a dedicated and devoted sales rep that truly cares about her clients.”

Having averaged 15% or more growth in each of her three years at Jetline, Ryan was not only named the company's Sales Rep of the Year in her rookie year, but CAAMP's 2014 Supplier Rep of the Year as well.

social, listen, be yourself, work hard and have fun. “And be as forthcoming as possible with information regarding a project/leads,” Ryan advises. “The more information you can gather and share with your suppliers regarding a client's orders and programs will offer you better results.”

Eric Levin, the famously taciturn owner of Jetline, is downright chatty and convivial when it comes to Ryan. “Jane is a treasured member of the Jetline family,” says Levin. “She's been a contributor in so many ways since the day she



started with us and she continues to use her depth of experience to help in staff development. From my perspective, her success comes from a recipe of energy, dedication, professionalism and a lot of panache. Jane's disarming personality and bottomless enthusiasm opens doors and closes sales. Jetline would not be the same without her.”

Kristina Newsom with Specialties Plus of NC agrees. “Jane is a fierce force of positive energy that makes you excited to learn all about her products and want to sell them to everyone. She's so super-knowledgeable about this industry that I never hesitate to call her for sound advice on anything that arises,” she says.

“I think the number-one thing we love so much about Jane is her personality,” says Maxey Cloud, promo products account director for Benson Integrated Marketing. “She's always smiling and happy and her laugh is contagious. She's knowledgeable not only about her products, but about the type of clients we work with and has ideas that help the industries we're selling to. She's a true rock star.” ◀

Michele Bell is editor of Supplier Global Resource and director of editorial operations at ASI.