

NEOCONOMIST: Merger Talk is Too Late for Cleveland and East Cleveland

# Inside Business

Northeast Ohio's Business Magazine

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Anup Gupta,  
Lauren Steiner  
and Marling Engle

# NEO SUCCESS AWARDS

THE REGION'S TOP-PERFORMING COMPANIES  
GET BEYOND THE CLICHES TO OFFER  
INSPIRATION, IDEAS & ADVICE

PLUS: A LITTLE LOVE FOR TCHOTCHKES!



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## GIFT GUY

ANUP GUPTA HAS BUILT AG PRINTPROMO SOLUTIONS BY OFFERING MARKETING PRODUCTS THAT STAY WITH YOU.

**THE ITEMS** a company gives away to prospective customers go by many names: swag, freebies or tchotchkes, originally used to describe the trinkets given as gifts for Hanukkah.

But to Anup Gupta, tchotchke is a dirty word.

"We don't sell items," says the president of AG PrintPromo Solutions in Cuyahoga Falls. "We sell solutions."

Not page views or likes or followers. We're talking pens, grocery totes, travel mugs, water bottles with fruit infusers — things potential customers will actually use.

In fact, promotional products are an \$18.5 billion industry in this country, according to the Promotional Products Association International. So yeah, that's a lot of stress balls.

"There's a good return on investment," says Gupta. "But only if it's done right."

Just as with any marketing, that means knowing your audience. Gupta, for example,

recently made a presentation to a group of college student leaders offering new ideas to promote their organizations. He brought out his logo-bearing samples — 100 percent cotton Gildan T-shirts, throwback beanie caps, 32-ounce stadium cups — and gave something to everyone in the room.

"The whole mood of the meeting changed," he says.

Because who doesn't like a gift?

Yet if the point is to keep your company's name in front of a potential customer, the only thing worse than giving out a piece of junk is giving out a piece of junk with your company's name on it.

"If you're putting your logo or name on a product, it'd better be good," Gupta says. "It's your brand."

To that end, AG PrintPromo has no shortage of items. Some cost less than a dollar per item, some are luxury items such as watches that can cost more than \$200. One of Gup-



The items available through Anup Gupta's AG PrintPromo Solutions range from less than \$1 to more than \$200.



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# RAISING THE ROOF

**GARLAND INDUSTRIES MAKES EVERY EMPLOYEE AN OWNER, WHICH HAS ELEVATED THE ENTIRE COMPANY.**

**LOOK AT GARLAND INDUSTRIES NOW,** and it's easy to forget how the maker of commercial roofing solutions got here. With 14 distinct companies throughout the U.S., Canada and the United Kingdom, Garland employs approximately 650 people. Revenue last year topped \$298 million.

But back in 1974, the company that had begun in the 1890s to service and maintain glass greenhouses was dying. Seven roofers saw Garland's factory and industrial mixers as an opportunity.

With about a dozen employees and a million dollars in sales, Garland began again. "We needed each other," recalls Richard DeBacco, a company founder and CEO emeritus.

Every one of the original founders pulled double-duty, acting both as salesmen and executives

until they generated enough revenue to hire a dedicated sales team. "We decided that we were going to hire only people that were better than we were," he says. "We were going to give them responsibility, and we were going to get out of their way."

But DeBacco knew there was a catch: "To get those good people, we have to pay them well, and we have to share profits with them." It created a management model that put the customer and sales team at the top, supported by the rest of the organization. It was also the first step in Garland's employee stock ownership program, which started in 1985 and makes every worker an owner as well.

"That we are 100 percent employee-owned has been a huge factor in our success," says DeBacco.

— LAURA ADILETTA

## HERE ARE THREE LESSONS FROM GARLAND'S EMPLOYEE-CENTRIC CULTURE.

**BE HAPPY.** Garland fosters a fun, exciting atmosphere, with chili cook-offs, holiday parties, free lunches and an annual sales conference in a warm climate. "Service is what really sells," DeBacco insists. "That's our best product."

**INVEST WISELY.** "We spend a lot of money training [our people]," he says. It pays off with a low employee turnover. "A lot of people find that they don't like climbing roofs," DeBacco laughs. But after some churn in the first three years, "we hardly lose anybody," he says.

**STAY TRUE.** Garland is more than halfway to its revenue goal of \$500 million by 2020. DeBacco expects to reach it two years early. "When you do the right thing, good things happen," he says.

ta's favorites is a bandana AG PrintPromo developed for school campuses that can be used as a rally towel for sporting events, then folded and worn as a headband, cap or scarf.

Gupta has seen firsthand how a gift chosen wisely can work. His daughter had nearly decided on the private high school she planned to attend until a student she had shadowed from a different school stopped by with a sweatshirt. It wasn't an expensive gift — particularly relative to the cost of attending the school — but the personal touch affected her.

"Just because of a sweatshirt, she saw this school as a possibility," he says. "That's the power of the product." — VINCE GUERRIERI

## HOT PRODUCTS

**THE HOTTEST PROMOTIONAL** materials are basic and useful, according to Anup Gupta, president of AG PrintPromo Solutions in Cuyahoga Falls. "If branding is done right, it has value," he says.

→ **BALLPOINT PENS.** "The ones that click. People lose pen caps all the time."

→ **TRAVEL AND CERAMIC MUGS.** "Almost everyone drinks tea or coffee."

→ **REUSABLE SHOPPING BAGS.** "Some people still want to use canvas, but most have switched to polypropylene."

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**CRITERIA:** NEO Success Award winners must have grown revenue, added employees or both (from 2011-2013) while at least breaking even on profitability. Winners could also be down no more than 5 percent in either revenue or employee growth during that time to qualify.

COMPANY BUSINESS TYPE	CITY	YEAR EST.	TOP EXECUTIVE	REVENUE RANGE	REVENUE GROWTH ('11-'13)	2013 EMPLOYEES	EMPLOYEE GROWTH ('11-'13)	PROFIT RANGE
<b>AG PrintPromo Solutions</b> <i>Printing, promotional products &amp; corporate apparel</i>	Cuyahoga Falls	1996	Anup Gupta, president & founder	< \$5 million	50.4%	6	50.0%	> 16%
<b>Abode Modern Lifestyle Developers</b> <i>Real estate development</i>	Cleveland	2005	Andrew Brickman, managing member	< \$5 million	142.9%	15	275.0%	> 16%
<b>Accellis Technology Group</b> <i>Information technology consulting</i>	Cleveland	2001	Joseph Marquette, president & founder	< \$5 million	377%	14	55.6%	> 16%
<b>Alliance Solutions Group</b> <i>Staffing &amp; recruitment</i>	Independence	2001	Aaron Grossman, president & founder	\$15 million- \$50 million	32.3%	77	48.1%	1-8%
<b>Ardleigh Minerals Inc.</b> <i>Recycling</i>	Beachwood	1994	Ernest O. Petrey Jr., president	< \$5 million	23.1%	6	20.0%	> 16%
<b>Area 51 Consulting</b> <i>Information technology consulting</i>	Akron	1997	Marling Engle, CEO	< \$5 million	157.1%	9	50.0%	> 16%
<b>AtNetPlus Inc.</b> <i>Information technology service &amp; support</i>	Stow	1998	Jay Mellon, CEO	< \$5 million	4.0%	24	4.4%	> 16%
<b>BearWare Inc.</b> <i>Software development</i>	Chagrin Falls	1987	Robert J. Brooks III, president & COO	< \$5 million	11.9%	21	10.5%	> 16%
<b>Blue Technologies</b> <i>Office technology</i>	Cleveland	1995	Paul Hanna, president & founder	\$15 million- \$50 million	24.1%	197	42.8%	> 16%
<b>Briteskies</b> <i>Information technology consulting</i>	Independence	2000	William Onion, managing director & Michael Berlin, executive partner	\$5 million- \$15 million	21.4%	29	16.0%	9-16%
<b>CBIZ Inc.</b> <i>Professional business services</i>	Cleveland	1995	Steve Gerard, chairman & CEO	> \$250 million	17.4%	4,100	10.8%	> 16%
<b>Career Connections Staffing Services Inc.</b> <i>Staffing &amp; recruitment</i>	Westlake	1996	Beverly Sandvick, president	\$5 million- \$15 million	88.0%	70	105.9%	> 16%
<b>Centric Consulting</b> <i>Consulting</i>	Kirtland	2001	Dave Rosevelt, CEO	\$5 million- \$15 million	24.4%	23	27.8%	> 16%



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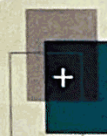
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