



PromoPath with Reagan Holm

October 16, 2015/0 Comments/in PromoPath /by The PromoPlacement Team

Welcome to the third installment of what will be an ongoing series of blog posts. Our aim is to explore and learn from the various career paths of promotional product industry leaders.

Our guest interviewee is Reagan Holm. Reagan has lead several of our industries largest supplier firms, served on the PPAI Board of Directors, and is currently the owner of the consulting firm TRH & Associates.



PP: First things first, how did you wind up in the promotional product industry?

RH: I started right after college working in the insurance business and the first time I ever heard of promotional products and their uses came from that business model. I used calendars and Parker Pens as handouts to build my brand and business with college interns and medical professionals. The Parker Pens were a big hit with the interns and students at the med schools in Dallas and it really pushed me to answer an ad I saw in the local paper when Parker Pens was hiring for a Territory Manager for Texas and the surrounding states. I worked there for several years, I enjoyed the people I met and the opportunity I saw to grow in the industry and was hooked!

PP: Many industry leaders spent time at Hazel Promotional Products early in their career. What was your experience there? Have you been able to network through your career with those Hazel contacts?

RH: Hazel was a fantastic place to learn the dynamics of the industry and the intricacies of the supplier distributor relationship. Back then, Hazel was a sought-after and desired franchise and our distributor network was a basic list of who's who in the Promotional Products Industry, at least for the time. Hazel

also had a great retail presence and as that business was changing dramatically, the promotional division always stayed consistent and profitable. Hazel was a fun place to be at the time and a great group of people came out of their program. Most of them are still leading the industry in one way or the other.

I learned about networking from Hazel and Glen Holt. Leveraging the right industry relationships was the nature of the business and to this day those friendships and relationships are very important in growing and managing a reputation in our business. Whether supplier, distributor or industry partners like ASI, PPAI, etc... the network of people are why I'm still in the business and hope to be for some time.

PP: You served on the PPAI Board of Directors and was Chairman of the Board for PPEF. How did the opportunity to take on such visible leadership roles come about? Did it lead to any opportunities?

RH: The opportunities I had to serve on these boards held a direct correlation with attending and volunteering in educational seminars, Presidents Forums, industry committees, presenting in classes and roundtable discussions. I feel honored and lucky to have been elected to the PPAI Board and consider the time serving on those boards as some of the most important time I have spent in the industry. As for opportunities from my board service, all I can say is that I learned much more than I feel I will ever be able to give back to our business. This industry has been very good to me and my family and I will continue to do all I can to pay it forward for the rest of my time.

PP: You've managed several industry supplier businesses (either as COO or President). What common challenges did you run into on the supplier side?

RH: The most significant challenge, for any business is to be able to determine the infrastructure needs both as you are growing, the when and how to add and manage people and when you hit the critical growth milestones of \$5MM, \$10MM, \$20MM, etc..., when investing in updated and larger capacity platforms, controls, systems, protection and efficiencies are no longer a luxury but a necessity to run the business and maintain profitability.

PP: When moving from one company to another what was your main motivator for making a change?

RH: In almost all cases, I felt like my job was done so moving along wasn't sad but a way for the business to grow in a new and probably different direction.

PP: There's always been a lot of job movement on the supplier side of the promo business. We've even heard it compared to a "revolving door" because territory reps seem move from supplier to supplier. Why do you think this is?

RH: I think that most small companies and their owners don't allow sufficient time to train and develop new talent. Especially in the sales and marketing rolls where you see talented people seemingly beating their heads against the wall because there is no real plan or support for them to base their success on. If a plan of substance is developed and agreed to within a company and metrics are defined and utilized to support the plan's progress you have a 70% chance of success with those associates. So imagine what your odds are if you don't have a workable plan in place to run your business? Most businesses fail because of poor implementation and training not because they didn't want to plan.

PP: We hear from people everyday who want to land a supplier sales job. What advice would you give a current supplier rep to get noticed by an employer? What advice would you give someone wanting to make the leap from the distributor side?

RH: Be creative and accurate in your pitch to a potential employer. Show them that sales people are not just a dime a dozen but critical thinkers with a process on how to manage, work and grow a sales area in this business. Get involved in the workings of the industry and its associations. Build your network from performers not just "funsters" and stay involved with them as you grow your career. The long term effects are invaluable.

PP: Our industry is constantly changing. What does the future look like for big suppliers? What about the smaller ones?

RH: Consolidation is continuing to happen across all fronts of our business. Though we remain very excited about the future of the industry we don't exactly conform to bigger is better and huge is great! Technology is driving improvements in production art, graphic art, order processing, change request, communication, imprinting, manufacturing, inventory control, supply chain, freight delivery and almost every other place you can envision. This leaves the door wide open for all opportunistic suppliers to manage, grow and implement change in their businesses faster than they have ever before.

Niche suppliers are being sought after by all distributors for their creativity and dependability in their niche. Become one of these niche quality suppliers and make sure the distribution can find you with all of the new methods that connect us together.

PP: You started TRH & Associates about 18 months ago. What motivated you to start this business? What kinds of things do you help suppliers with?

RH: I have successfully help people manage and grow their businesses over the last 30+ years in this industry and have learned a lot of what to do and what not to do during that time. I would like to share and develop that knowledge with several non-competing suppliers to the industry and build a

cooperative and sharing network within the business where we can learn, build and grow our businesses together. Plus, the business is based in Park City Utah!

PP: What advice would you give an experienced industry professional who is looking to change jobs? Would you recommend the industry to a recent college graduate?

RH: Educate yourself on new technologies, platforms, social media, marketing to today's younger demographic. Build and work your network. It is more important today than ever before.

Yes, I think it's a great business for a college graduate! The major market demographics are 20 to 35 and the business is bright, creative and inclusive!

PP: What was your most triumphant moment/sale/negotiation—when you felt you really had a mastery of this business? Have you ever mastered this business?

RH: Biggest moment was getting married to my wife "Lael" and being named President of Visions Awards / Awardcraft. Still working on mastering this thing we all love!