



UNIFORM APPEAL

Use these inspiring stories and keen insights to excel with uniform programs, a lucrative niche with repeat sales potential.

BY CHRISTOPHER RUVO

Uniform programs are the proverbial gift that keeps on giving. A whopping 95% of distributors and screen printers expect steady or increased uniform sales this year, according to the *Wearables Sales Forecast*.

Uniforms are necessity items, core components of an organization's operation and brand. The widespread need for uniforms spans markets for hospitality and health care, to education and manufacturing and reps. Here's how reps like you are fueling success with this niche.

IT'S FUNDAMENTAL

Set up correctly and executed well, company apparel initiatives lead to long-term repeat business. The reason is simple: As companies onboard employees or as staffers' older uniforms require updating, the need to buy new logoed threads becomes paramount.

"Uniforms are great because they're a fundamental part of the supply chain," says **Josh Frey**, founder of On Sale Promos and the **Swag Coach** program. "The more supply chain items you sell, the more repeat business you get – and the more your business grows."

Both a frontline rep and a sales coach for promo industry pros, Frey has kept revenue streams flowing steadily with uniforms. By leveraging the services of key decorator partners, third-party website builders and

suppliers like SanMar (asi/84863), he delivers made-to-order uniform solutions that free both him and his clients from having to carry inventory. Clients order the company wear through websites his tech vendors create, and the industry partners engineer the lightning-fast fulfillment.

"Customers are so happy with that kind of service they want to kiss your pinky ring," he says, chuckling. Indeed, he has been working with one property management company for 10 years. As the firm expands, so do Frey's sales. "Unless you screw it up," he says, "the business lasts a long time."

A WHOLE NEW COMPANY

Sometimes, setbacks are platforms for success.

John Phyllis can testify to that. Six years ago, he decided to bid for a school's uniform program. Phyllis, who was already running a successful promotional products business, didn't win the deal. Nonetheless, by developing the bid, his eyes were opened to the potential in the uniform niche. "There are a lot of organizations looking for uniforms and we already had many things in place to be able to serve them," he says. "We decided to go after the business."

It was a wise choice. These days, Phyllis is president of Impact Promotions (asi/230396) and Uniforms Pros. The latter business is a direct outgrowth of the success he and his team have been able to produce

working in the uniform arena. The fast-growing firm – which is bolstered by in-house decoration capabilities – provides uniform solutions for entities that range from first responders to hotels.

Phyllis says one of his best clients is a large hotel. Following a cold call, the sales pro initially got his foot in the door with the hospitality client by providing shirts for its housekeeping crew. Impressed by the service, pricing and quality of the products, the hotel steadily increased its spend with Phyllis.

Nowadays, he delivers uniforms for the hotel's front desk personnel, chefs and banquet facility staffers, too. Typically embroidered, the apparel pieces range from dress shirts and vests, to ties and chef coats. "We keep our clients happy by over-servicing them," says Phyllis. "We do embroidery here and that's a big help. We receive an order and quickly get it out the door."

The responsiveness is no doubt playing a role in Phyllis' success. The uniform component of his business was up 30% last year. "We're getting referrals that lead to new customers," he says, "and we're growing with existing clients."

MASTERING LOGISTICS

Russ Howarth's sales are accelerating. Uniform programs are a big reason for the growth. He drives nearly half (45%) of his business through uniform solutions he delivers for