

DESIGN EXPRESS

The graphic services newsletter for promotional products pros



January 2017

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS FOR SMBs AND COMPANIES THAT SERVE THEM



It's pretty typical that, when the end of the year rolls around, small and medium size business (SMB) owners think in terms of what is in store for next year. Setting goals and aspiring to new opportunities is part of the entrepreneurial mindset.

Just the same, conjuring up resolutions for the New Year isn't necessarily about making up for goals that were not met last year. Instead, SMBs should feel free to "get over" what they didn't accomplish in 2016 and just look forward.

Website Magazine shared the results of a Constant Contact survey about what business people choose for their New Year's resolutions. The answers they got from entrepreneurs are not too surprising:

- "Grow annual revenue"
- "Run more efficiently"
- "Gain more customers"
- "Try different marketing tactics"

Sometimes finding a reasonable set of resolutions is a challenge. Whatever ones your SMBs come up with will likely be more specific to their needs as individuals and as small business rainmakers. Gathering wisdom from the industry resources we read and the entrepreneurs we serve, Idea Custom Solutions found that two general ideas stood out for us.

Trim the Fat: Focus on What Works and Eliminate What Doesn't

QUICK NEWSLETTER SURVEY

Would you recommend this newsletter?

Nope ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 For sure

UPCOMING EVENTS

ASI Show!

Orlando, FL
January 19-20
Exhibiting, Booth #1347

PPAI Expo

Las Vegas, NV
January 10-12
Attending

ASI Show!

Dallas, TX
February 2-3
Exhibiting, Booth #1048

PPAI Expo East / ISS

Atlantic City, NJ
March 23-25
Attending

QUALITY AND SECURITY YOU CAN COUNT ON!



A year ago, to start 2016, *Entrepreneur* served up some suggestions for **goals tailored to SMB leaders**. Much of it sounded like normal business guru advice:

- Spend less time at work
- Eat better to improve health and focus
- Keep current and be social
- Hire those who can help business

Reading between the lines, much of what the *Entrepreneur* article emphasized was that SMB owners should remove the unnecessary from their work lives — unnecessary tasks, work drama and habits — that can derail them from what they do best.

The *St. Louis Business Journal* took a more metaphysical approach on the idea of cutting back, stating that ways to make businesses more profitable are to **“prioritize marketing”** and **“identify the biggest time-wasters”**, as well as **use technology or staff to minimize wasting resources** on non-core activities.

“(S)tart by making a list of the most time-intensive parts of your day. Whether reading and responding to emails, scheduling ... tracking business performance or your accounting, there’s a cloud technology solution for almost all of the inefficiencies that plague small-business owners.”

Another way to boost success by trimming the fat, especially if SMBs are one-person shops, is to consider business and personal expenditures that happen during the business day. Listing **“12 Actually-Attainable New Year’s Resolutions”** *Forbes* wrote some advice about focusing on the little things.

Among their recommendations: SMBs should reduce the amount of coffee and drinks they buy, walk more and take fewer cabs, Ubers and Lyft rides. They should buy and use reusable water bottles and ditch take-out for a month. All of these small actions can put more money in their wallets and company coffers. Every dollar counts, no matter whether they are company or personal dollars.

Refresh Branding, Marketing and Promotions

One of the first things that the *Christian Science Monitor* listed in its **“Five New Year’s resolutions for small business owners”** is that SMBs should refresh their web presences. This can be a very different undertaking for businesses in different sectors. For some, it might mean just an update of content on new products and sales or specials. For others, new logos, website designs or other **custom creative designs** might be the best ways to drive more business in 2017.

David Kiger, a freight shipping entrepreneur who writes for *Business 2 Community*, mentions the resolution to **“experiment with marketing”**. Within the article, Kiger put forth a couple of popular promotional ideas:

- Hold prospecting or educational events in the office or online
- Launch podcasts or social media campaigns
- Write and distribute customer newsletters “to see which content generates the most leads”

We’re pleased to announce that Idea Custom Solutions has achieved two new certifications for our facilities in Pune, India, which mean our clients can be assured of the highest level of quality management and information security.

ISO 9001:2015: Sets the requirements for quality management systems, helping businesses and organizations to be more efficient and improve client satisfaction.

ISO 27001:2013: Applies to the management of information security related to production systems, third-party applications, data center operations and infrastructure services.

ISO certifications are based on continual improvement — a core value at our company. The Idea Custom Solutions goal is to help clients provide the tools and products their customers need. The ISO process requires us to work together to meet requirements and enhance satisfaction. These newest certifications confirm that we have indeed met world-class standards.

NOTABLE QUOTES



“Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to **understand more, so that we may fear less.**”

— Marie Curie

Adding to these ideas, Kiger writes, that “over the course of the year you’ll gain a lot more clarity into who’s attracted to your business and who’s spending money with you.”

Certainly, anyone reading Kiger’s post might think these ideas seem like things everyone is doing. But don’t assume that most small businesses are “all set” when it comes to marketing. Many SMBs want help and will pay for the right partners to help them.

We know that many of the SMBs you encounter need suggestions and advice in the promotional arena. Fortunately, the design services we provide to our distributor and supplier clients support virtually any marketing effort.

Idea Customs Solutions provides a range of graphic services, from vector artwork and embroidery digitizing to image editing and marketing materials, as well as logo design. Whatever the sector or marketing plans, we can help you assist your SMBs to improve their brands and visibility.

STITCHED STYLES FOR WEARABLES AND MORE

We’ve spent a lot of time talking about the importance about the importance of distinct, eye-catching logos. Whether they appear on two-dimensional surfaces or more tangible and touchable items, they should indeed catch eyes and hold them.

There are so many places now for SMBs to showcase their brands. These include your customers’ websites, brochures and other printed materials, social media channels like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, and promotional products.

One thing that both Idea Custom Solutions and the Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI) have repeatedly pointed out is the huge popularity and regular use of wearable promo products including caps, golf or “polo” shirts, and outerwear as a way to expand the reach of brands.

So many options exist for SMBs out there too. As such it is critical to make sure logos look their best when put on wearable products. That’s why it’s a good idea — with all this talk about logos and rebranding — to take a stroll through some options for your SMB customers now that we’ve entered 2017.

Stitched Goods and Embroidery are Back

It’s not just us in the promotional products industry who have noticed the value of well-stitched products. *Parade*, the popular magazine insert that graces newspapers nationwide on a weekly basis, has also taken to the web to announce that embroidery and its fashions “aren’t just for grannies anymore.” In a photo gallery piece, *Parade* also showcased some examples of things that companies are making and that people are wearing. But it goes beyond hobbyists.

“Needlepoint is shaking off its granny stigma. Designers at Valentino, Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci have paraded pieces embellished with embroidery down the runways and through the pages of *Vogue*.” For what it’s worth, NBC’s “Today” also mentioned embroidery is one of four “must wear” trends emerging now.



“Logic is the beginning of wisdom, not the end.”

— Leonard Nimoy



“In the end, it’s not the years in your life that count. It’s the life in your years.”

— Abraham Lincoln



“I wanna live ‘til I die, no more, no less.”

— Eddie Izzard



“I try to make the good days great and take something positive from the days I’m not feeling good.”

— Katie Ledecy

Of course, when it comes to embroidering promotional products, most customers you work with think logos rather than the custom-embroidered garments. SMBs want their wearables to have the same crisp precision for their original logos that they have in digital and printed formats such as websites, collateral and t-shirts. Luckily for almost every product you sell, top-level embroidered graphics are available.

Here are a few products to consider for your customers:

- **Stuffed Animals.** These huggable promos aren't popular with kids or their parents alone. [Stuffed animals have also found their way into the hearts of sports fans](#) (think mini-mascots), in addition to millions of professionals who have a hankering for desk toys. ASI's quick [tutorial on how to embroider stuffed animals](#) demonstrates that mascot toys can wear company logos as well as any other products, while adding a bit of character or a sense of humor.
- **Hats.** ASI also recently took a spin through [techniques for embroidering hats and caps](#), which have always been a winning category of promotional products. According to ASI's Impressions Study, [19 percent of U.S. consumers own a promotional cap](#) and 52 percent of promo hat owners earn \$50,000 a year or more. This seems to suggest that this item not only reaches the customer with disposable income, but is also is something they tend to keep and wear often.

Colors that Sparkle

Options such as shiny metallic logos can easily be put on products, whether they are silver, gold or just a shimmering version of a primary color like red or blue. Today, [embroidery providers can use metallic thread](#) to achieve the right look and can provide what is referred to as "[elevated embroidery](#)" for customers that want to add a little "bling" with sequins or shiny add-ons, and even simple three-dimensional finishes. Whatever look your customers prefer, you can help make their new or existing logos really stand out.

Understanding How it Works

While distributors may not get knee-deep into every stitch technique ([Idea Custom Solutions does!](#)), it does help to know how to explain what makes a logo on a promo product look so sharp and [this article provides good insight on embroidery](#).

Keep in mind that Idea Custom Solutions can help with [embroidery digitizing for every product you offer customers](#). We also excel at logo design, vector artwork, image editing and other related services that make world-class branding easy for small businesses that need to maximize their marketing budgets.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION ARE A GREAT BRANDING IDEA

In the period of booming growth after World War II, the consumer sector and mass media exploded. And long before rank-and-file employees and executives were being rewarded for great results and hard work with stock options, profit sharing plans, or even company trips, "the company watch" became a symbol of achievement and service for American professionals.

Since the 1950s and 1960s, the demand for watches combined with



"[Candor is a compliment](#); it implies equality. It's how true friends talk."

— Peggy Noonan



"[Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face.](#)"

— Victor Hugo



"When something is important enough, you [do it even if the odds are not in your favor.](#)"

— Elon Musk



"[I don't want to be somebody else.](#)"

— Tina Fey

CLIENTS ARE RAVING

"I wanted to let you all know that I audited a good amount of jobs yesterday and things looked good as far as following the

consumers' taste for luxury and individuality have elevated this accessory to a must-have for many. Meanwhile the emergence of high-quality, low priced goods makes a name brand watch an accessible purchase for nearly every consumer.

Nevertheless, as businesses of all sizes continue to grow, their dependence on skilled employees remains a reason for them to adequately recognize and reward key employees. Today, the company watch might be a relic of the past, but there are many other options for rewarding employees.

Trophies, Plaques and Awards

"Celebrating your employees", as *Entrepreneur* called it last year, seems to be more than just a good deed. According to a human resources study cited by the publication, recognizing or rewarding people in a substantive way — meaning by means other than financial bonuses — accomplishes several objectives:

- 90 percent say it positively impacted engagement.
- 86 percent say it increased employee happiness.
- 84 percent say it improved employee relationships.
- 68 percent say it positively impacted retention.

Last month, the Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI) highlighted "8 awesome awards" that businesses, non-profits and educational institutions can use for their professionals. More popular choices in this relatively traditional category of promotional products include high-quality crystal and glass trophies, gilded awards that look like football trophies or Academy Awards, as well as wood-and-pewter wall plaques and shimmering banners.

All of these options work for conventional corporate businesses including financial and law firms. Meanwhile, sales-oriented organizations such as insurance and stock brokers and manufacturers can reward sales reps for hitting quotas or other achievements. Even small businesses can demonstrate appreciation for their best workers with awards for good service or long tenure.

Other Rewards and Perks

It could be generational, but some companies that employ large numbers of people under the age of 30 have discovered that "cool stuff" works too. In the minds of Generation Y or millennials, meaningful "rewards" may have much less to do with bragging rights or shiny plaques than they do with receiving practical items for everyday use.

For example, the in advertising sector, "agency welcome kits" are a special part of joining creative teams or account service departments. *Digiday* writes that these branded sets usually include wearables such as caps, t-shirts and hoodies, which couple well with useful items like coffee cups, headphones and earbuds. Also, stationary and tote bags stamped with firm logos not only make great gifts but also double as free marketing for the agencies themselves.

Following the same welcome and reward-first logic, social media giants Twitter and LinkedIn opt for the "swag bag" route, loading up new recruits with branded items on day one. "Twitter is far from being the only tech

procedures and making sure the applique laser information was in the files. Thank you!"

Digitizing Auditor, Idea Custom Solutions national supplier client

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



Sachin Sawant

Unit Process Specialist, Artwork Team

Sachin started with Idea Custom Solutions back in early 2012 as an artist. Now as a unit process specialist, his role is to deliver the best quality designs within the required turn times for customers.

Since joining the company, Sachin's proudest accomplishment is that he was awarded the "Star Performer of the Month" three times. In addition, he was commended for helping other teams, including two major accounts for well-known national suppliers. Among his colleagues, he would like to be known as a good mentor who can enhance the skills of other team members.

What he thinks people should know about the company is that "It is a knowledge hub where we can always be current with international trends in design, media, publishing, retail and other industry sectors. Sachin advises current and potential employees, "Work smart and you will always get rewarded and have good opportunities open to you at Idea Custom Solutions."

When not at work, Sachin likes to spend time with his wife and daughter. To get additional

company to offer freebies to new employees,” wrote Lisa Eadicicco for *Business Insider* last spring. New LinkedIn employees, for example, get a **swag bag** with a water bottle, a notebook, and a copy of LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman’s book *The Startup of You*. Of course, part of the psychology is to get employees excited about their new employment and to buy into both the company’s mission and living brand.

That said *Fast Company* points out that **branded gifts don’t have to be offered as a quid pro quo reward** for achieving something, nor as a welcome gift to be effective. In an August 2016 post about corporate event marketing, *Fast Company* noted that “throughout the year, Paul Marobella, CEO of Havas Worldwide, will randomly hand out gift cards to people wearing company swag each month,” encouraging company spirit to engage workers.

As a resource to promotional products distributors everywhere, Idea Custom Solutions knows that small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), as well as bigger corporations are always looking for smart, cost-effective ideas to promote their brands. Talk to your business, education and non-profit customers about how rewarding and recognizing employees can build brand equity. And **look to us to help design, convert or digitize your customers’ logos** for production!



Embroidery Digitizing



Vector Artwork

opportunities and grow at the company, he is also furthering his education. His hobbies include playing cricket and exploring social media and news online.

Someday, he would like to construct a dream house at his birthplace in Konkan and would also love to take a world tour with his family.

TWEET THAT!

Career fairs are great for [#SMB](#) [#branding](#). Some [#PromoProducts](#) popular with young consumers. <https://goo.gl/hf7bzF>

Tweet
That!

Football enthusiasts talk good, better, best of college bowl [#PromoProducts](#). [#FootballFriday](#) <https://goo.gl/jZULXM>

Tweet
That!

Hot Rod magazine: the best places to get “free swag”, [#PromoProducts](#) for car lovers of all stripes. <https://goo.gl/8Gsy57>

Tweet
That!

Gillette provides [#giveaways](#) for customers returning to the [#brand](#), rolling into the New Year. <https://goo.gl/fso5lu>

Tweet
That!

A look at some of the best seasonal [#branding](#) and [#PromoProduct](#) ideas for HVAC firms. <https://goo.gl/SAiaa3>

Tweet
That!

From t-shirts to booze, AV Club reviews the “best and worst” [#PromoProducts](#) offered by TV. <https://goo.gl/98KeZQ>

Tweet
That!

Updated [#marketing](#) materials — brochures, business cards, signage — can help [#SMBs](#) rev up 2017. <https://goo.gl/lhhDih>

Tweet
That!

[@TravelweekGroup](#)’s survey shows that [#brochures](#) = success in hospitality. See the [#infographic](#). <https://goo.gl/IT6L73>

Tweet
That!

What makes a font work for business [#logos](#) and your [#brand](#)? A quick guide and [#infographic](#) on

Tweet
That!



fonts.

<https://goo.gl/RJF1FH>

From Budweiser to Instagram, a spin through 2016's most notable new [#logos](#) and rebrands.

<https://goo.gl/Bw4U0F>

[Tweet That!](#)

2017 prediction: major [#brands](#) will look, feel "less branded" to connect with consumers.

<https://goo.gl/DPoVLV>

[Tweet That!](#)

Yet another small town considers a new [#logo](#). This time it's Reddingtown, Connecticut.

<https://goo.gl/nddYYB>

[Tweet That!](#)

Some think the state of Minnesota's new [#logo](#) looks like the Loch Ness Monster. Do you?

<https://goo.gl/hKvcUc>

[Tweet That!](#)

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