

GALLEN ON THE GO▶▶

Debco Turns 30

On Christmas Eve we conducted our annual ritual - the 'changing of the voice mail'. It begins "Holiday closure alert. You have reached the desk of Stan Gallen. We are now closed until the New Year..." It occurred to me that this is virtually the same message that I have left for some thirty years. I recognized the comfort that I get when I utter the four words "we are now closed". The latter in some way obviates me from the responsibility of ownership. For a brief respite there are no rush deadlines for delivery, no urgent quotes and no client problems to solve. It is rather a time for reflection and hope.

Ironic that it was the 'closing' of Riviera Manufacturing in 1992 (a Canadian Bag Manufacturer in the then SAC) that allowed DEBCO the opportunity to become a player in the promotional products market. Debco was fast-tracked into the industry under the guidance of our first rep Patricia Morris. Her teachings and urgings resulted in us gaining membership in time for the Winter Show of 1992. Although a mere lad of 36, I learned rather quickly that the reliable supply of promotional bags in the Canadian marketplace was at best 'soft' with no real leaders stepping to the fore. Seizing the moment with enormous vigour and a no charge next day delivery of samples policy I travelled the countryside preaching the virtues of DEBCO in 1992 and not unlike a farmer who plants seeds in the fall and waits until the spring to see the fruits of his labours, orders started to come in during the hopeful months of March and April of 1993. Was it the 'vigour' or the free samples? I like to think it was the former but I am sure that a dash of the latter didn't hurt either. It was this 'out of the box' methodology (free samples) that allowed the market to take note and was perhaps the most instrumental inaugural policy that imprinted favourably on the distributor populace.

Walking into the Print Shop and warehouse I was struck by the sound of 'we are now closed'; the seemingly dozens of transfer stations, automatic presses and conveyer belts drawn to a halt. The noise of the various compressors silenced by the holiday season and now drowned out by the din of the overhead heaters. Were it not for the diligence of our 'Catalogue Team', DEBCO, home to almost 200 employees, would officially be in temporary hibernation. Debco was a home-based operation at start-up in 1983 with "warehousing" in the basement bathtub. In the 1980's we had our sample supply decimated by a leaking faucet. It seemed such a long time ago for a firm that now occupies greater than 150,000 square feet. The 1980's are often neglected in these writings but it was our inaugural dealings with the travel agent market that allowed us to learn the sales psychology that morphed into the 'vision' that we still employ. Our first stock bag was the F7114 folding travel tote and still remains a stable, if not nostalgic, product choice.

The industry has seen a host of changes over our thirty years, perhaps the most notable being in technology and distributor expectations. What I am most proud of is DEBCO's staying power as an elite supplier in the distributors' consciousness in the Canadian marketplace given the myriad changes and the constant need to redefine oneself. Yes, we did win the Supplier of Year for 15 consecutive years, but lost that place of honour for the past two dry years. It had saddened all of us to think that perhaps we were losing some of our foothold as an influential supplier in the Canadian marketplace. We are deeply gratified to have been nominated this year in the SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR category and I can tell you that our entire team holds this year's award in a very special place.

Year 2012 was a year we can look back on with pride, but we all know that the traditional sales model has been eroding over the past decade and increasingly so these days. A more efficient sales model will likely develop that's based on partnership, resource sharing and improved efficiencies. The creative implementation of emerging technologies will definitely guide the shape of DEBCO over the next five to ten years. I have little doubt that having our fingers on the industry's pulse will allow us to evolve and continue to grow and provide value to all our partners in the distribution channel. The company will certainly change within the next decade, but the heart and vision will undoubtedly remain the same.

From our outset in 1983, it has been the goal of DEBCO to be seen as a moral and ethical firm that acts as a true business partner. Our corporate goal is to continue to be a trendsetter that believes that a public presence instils confidence so that we are seen as a go-to supplier that partners in both the sale and in the problem resolve.

I wish you Happy New Year and I look forward to connecting with you as my Gallen on the Go travels continue this Spring.



Best Regards, Stan Gallen;
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