

A man in a blue suit and glasses is looking at a tablet on a balcony. The background shows a modern building with large windows.

HOW TECHNOLOGY DRIVES SUCCESS IN THE PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS INDUSTRY



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With \$24.7 billion in annual sales, the promotional products industry requires the right mix of people, processes and technology to function at the highest levels of efficiency. Here's how eXtendTech and NetSuite are giving these companies the tools they need to work smarter, better and faster in the competitive business environment.

A triathlete digs down into her swag bag for the weekend's race and pulls out a selection of keychains, mini calendars and beverage koozies featuring the names of local businesses. The owner of a manufacturing firm smiles with delight when he gets a set of wine glasses embossed with a supplier's logo. A team of sales reps wears matching polo shirts embroidered with its company's name and enters the national sales meeting as a unified force.

What do all of these people have in common? They've all been touched by the promotional products industry. From the consultant who tells a client to invest in logo pens to the supplier that manufactures those writing implements to the distributor that sells those

goods to the end customer, this multifaceted industry posted more than [\\$24.7 billion in annual sales in 2018](#).

Because the promotional products industry has complex, multi-level relationships, including vendor-to-vendor, vendor-to-customer and drop-ship, it requires sophisticated software and processes to operate efficiently. All entities, products, protocols and procedures must be orchestrated in a very efficient, productive and customer-centric way. For example, there can be a need for extensive collaboration to obtain approvals on artwork and customized goods or samples before they are mass produced. Done correctly, this can help to drive consistent profitability and growth for the 24,000+ companies that operate in this space.

This white paper will examine how companies in the industry are running their businesses, explore the shortcomings of these approaches and show how a unified technology solution made specifically for the promotional products industry is helping organizations save time, money and effort.

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Chapter 1

A GENERATION-AGNOSTIC SELLING TOOL THAT WORKS

According to the PPAI, the promotional products space is currently home to more than 24,000 distributors that work primarily with business services, health care, education, financial and manufacturing firms that want to build brand awareness, distribute business gifts, hand out trade show swag and recognize their employees. Topping these companies' favorite promotional products list are wearables, drinkware, travel items, writing implements and technology gadgets.

Getting these products from concept to completion takes some doing, and includes the work of supplier firms that produce or process products offered for sale through promotional products distributors. There are [more than 3,500 supplier companies](#) in the promotional products industry. Acting as independent agents and selling products to their clients, the nation's more than 30,000 distributors develop ideas for using promotional products in marketing or promotional campaigns, buy the items from the supplier, and then sell them to end customers.



Chapter 2

WHAT'S KEEPING COMPANIES UP AT NIGHT?

“For suppliers, the key challenges start on the production floor, where simply automating the warehousing and/or manufacturing environment is both necessary and challenging.” – **Sam Hornstein**, President, eXtendTech

According to Sam Hornstein, President at eXtendTech, which has worked extensively within the promotional products industry, its dual-channel nature lends itself to high levels of fragmentation. And while the lines between manufacturing (aka, “supplier”) and distribution do tend to blur, the former typically focuses on importing goods from overseas and then applying the silk screening, embroidery and other customized touches to the products.

From there, distributors take orders from customers that want promotional products to give away at trade shows, hand out to employees and give to customers. After nailing down the customization requirements, distributors manage the procurement from manufacturers, the customer service component and anything else the end customer requires.

eXtendTech, which delivers service bundles for both supplier and distributor organizations, often finds itself working with companies that rely on a patchwork of proprietary and off-the-shelf technology systems to run their businesses. For many, that means using the systems developed by large suppliers to place

orders, check on those orders, invoice and receive payment. These highly proprietary systems often don't talk to one another, nor do they allow for easy integration with systems that enable more modern functionalities (e.g., mobile ordering capabilities).

“For suppliers, the key challenges start on the production floor, where simply automating the warehousing and/or manufacturing environment is both necessary and challenging,” Hornstein said. “That issue rings true for both distributors that manage the manufacturing functions themselves and for the entire universe of suppliers.”

On the selling side of the equation, companies face key challenges in the areas of order entry, artwork and file management, all of which must be orchestrated perfectly in order to get the correct promotional product made and into the hands of the right end customer. Just one mistake on a proof, one wrong color selection or an incorrect order quantity can put an entire order into jeopardy (not to mention the negative impact it has on the client relationship).

To help, eXtendTech has built a family of applications that layer on top of NetSuite that specifically address these gaps and other pain points that the promotional products industry is grappling with.

- An order configurator for placing orders for customized goods/promotional products that enables the capture of all necessary decoration details, artwork, surcharges and the drop-shipping of goods involving multiple vendors and decorators.
- An artwork management and collaboration tool for use with vendors and customers.
- Industry integrations including PromoStandards, ASI's ESP and supplier-direct API integrations.
- A presentation tool for ideation and collaboration integrated with native NetSuite opportunities.

Chapter 3

MAXIMIZING PRODUCTIVITY, CUTTING OPERATIONAL COSTS

“There are mom-and-pop operations working out of their homes all the way up to multimillion-dollar distributors. We’re bridging that gap through integration and helping to speed things up in an industry that’s known for lagging behind the technology curve.”

— **Dino Bangiorno**, Director of Distributor Applications and Services, eXtendTech

Promotional product companies can’t add time to their days, but with eXtendTech’s NetSuite bundles and integrations, they can maximize productivity and cut operational costs. These bundles can reclaim lost time with targeted speed optimization and ensure accuracy of the input data.

Built to help companies move faster, do more and perform better, eXtendTech’s apps, bundles and integrations offer users these solutions:

- Cloud storage integration and file management
- API Integrations
- Order configurator for customized goods
- Presentation creation and automation

Especially critical to the smooth running of the promotional product distribution process, **eXtendFiles** is a fully-integrated cloud storage and proofing solution for NetSuite users. By allowing companies to leverage all the power that NetSuite has to offer, the application uses

native custom records, collaborative proofing tools and image conversion to offer:

- **Repository Integration:** Seamless integration with cloud storage services from Amazon S3, Google Drive, Microsoft OneDrive, Azure and Box.com, allowing users to easily work with their preferred repository.
- **Visual File Picker:** Transaction Pop-up Modal allows users to visually select a file that will target its source URL into a Transaction Body Field.
- **File Captioning:** Custom file captions eXtendFiles supports the configuration of eXtendFile record meta-data in the caption of the file when using File Picker.
- **Drag and drop:** Use it within the NetSuite record to load files to eXtendFiles from a local drive to the repository.
- **External File Upload:** Generate file upload links to allow customers and/or vendors to

upload artwork, logos and other files directly for use in the decoration process or to display the finished product.

- **File Upload Notifications:** When a file is uploaded from an external source, eXtendFiles sends a notification to alert the user that a new file has been uploaded.
- **Connected Records:** Artwork and other files are automatically associated with related NetSuite records (i.e. customer records) and will be automatically available for future use and reference.
- **File Conversion:** eXtendFiles automatically converts the large AI, EPS, PSD, DST and other types of files used in the industry into lightweight images and thumbnails to facilitate viewing, sharing and displaying on forms and web pages.

External vendors (suppliers and/or decorators) can easily download artwork files for use in the decoration process. External users (customers and vendors) can also upload new artwork files of logos to be embellished on goods or of the production proofs showing the finished/decorated product.

Working in tandem, these features come together to help promotional products suppliers and distributors take their orders from the PO stage to manufacturing to customization and delivery seamlessly.

“eXtendFiles addresses all of the interaction and collaboration that needs to take place across the entire value chain,” said Dino Bangiorno, Director of Distributor Applications and Services at eXtendTech.

The same can’t be said for ERP systems from companies like Epicor, Microsoft or SAP, none of which have the hands-on knowledge and experience needed to create an industry-specific solution for promotional products companies.

“To be able to really speak to the industry on its terms and understand what keeps it up at night is a critical part of targeted solution development,” Hornstein said. “Regardless of which ERP you look at, they all have the same gaps.” For example, none can tackle the issue of drop-shipping from vendor to vendor, or managing multiple vendor movement. They also can’t manage the process of taking blanks from one supplier and shipping them to a decorator and then shipping them to 1,000 different end users in one-off fashion. “Every ERP blows up on certain inherent gaps,” Hornstein says, “that simply aren’t addressed for this vertical.”

To help fill those gaps, eXtendTech has created several direct integrations between NetSuite and top suppliers like AlphaBroder and SanMar. eXtendTech is committed to the full life-cycle of the transaction process by enabling end-to-end integrations between the industry’s suppliers and distributors.

This includes integrations with top trade organizations as well as full [PromoStandards](#) services for both sides of the supply chain. These integrations enable smoother transactions between suppliers and the tens of thousands of independent distributors that they work with on a regular basis.

“There are mom-and-pop operations working out of their homes all the way up to multimillion-dollar distributors,” Bangiorno said. “We’re bridging that gap through integration and helping to speed things up in an industry that’s known for lagging behind the technology curve.”



Chapter 4

TRACKING THE WINS

With several customers on [Promo Marketing's 2019 Top Distributors](#) list, eXtendTech helps those businesses achieve everything from cost savings to more streamlined operations and improved productivity levels. For example, a top supplier of thousands of promotional and custom goods, [Jetline more than doubled its order entry capacity](#) with no additional staff required, while reducing departmental order processing time by 63% thanks to NetSuite and eXtendTech. By customizing NetSuite order management, Jetline was able to streamline execution of complex custom orders, reduce the risk of costly errors and gain new levels of visibility into complex relationships with its B2B customers.

These and other benefits are helping promotional companies work smarter, better and faster.

“We’re saving companies hours and hours of time,” Bangiorno said, “and helping them avoid the double- and triple-data entry that they had to do with their old systems. For them, NetSuite has become their next best employee.”

Other key wins that aren’t always anticipated include the ability to create workflows that “softly” remind clients of their unpaid invoices without the need for human intervention.

“No one wants to do collections and especially not with big clients,” Hornstein said. “Our customers are using NetSuite to automate A/R and collections to speed up the receivables process and shorten the time it takes to get paid.”

Promotional products companies from any part of the industry—and of all shapes and sizes—can benefit from being able to consolidate their business activities onto a single, industry-centric platform.

“I worked for one of the largest distributors in the industry and we had an entire team dedicated to following up on orders, checking on PO statuses, managing proofs and everything else that companies can now do on a single dashboard and with much less manpower,” Bangiorno said. “This is just one reason why integrating from a transactional standpoint is a slam dunk.”

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