

Good morning, everyone, and thanks very much for your appreciation.

When I was told I won DMIA's Member of the Year award, my first thought was...I'm honored and humbled. My second thought was...crap, now I have to go to California and say something interesting and poignant!

(...OK, I'm not even 10 seconds into my speech, and I've already lied to you: I didn't really think of the word "*poignant*." I just included "poignant" because it seemed like a smart word. But as you just saw in that video, I'm a small-town, Rust Belt guy from Youngstown, Ohio. And guys from Youngstown don't even know how to *spell* "poignant"—we hear there may be a "g" involved. I don't really feel like looking it up. I'm too busy doing things like selling promotional products and remembering to tie my shoelaces.)

So, instead of trying to be poignant, I'm just going to be myself. Brian from Ohio. Laid-back and happy-go-lucky. No big expectations. I'm going to relax, take a deep breath and deliver a heartbreaking speech of pure genius.

Actually, I'm glad to be here with you. This has been a valuable conference, and quite surprisingly, the Santa Rosa Mountains of Palm Springs are more picturesque than Victoria Road in downtown Youngstown. I'm told the sky here is known for being "azure." The women in the room are nodding their heads. They seem to know what I mean...The men are wondering what the heck I just said...Azure is a light, purplish shade of blue—it's a great description for a clear and unclouded sky.

In other words, it's nothing like today's printing industry.

Everyone in this room works in an industry best defined by a cloud. To be honest, many of us have trouble recognizing and describing what business we're actually in. Think about it: Print Solutions Magazine could be renamed A Whoole Bunch of Stuff Magazine. The industry cloud is understandable, given the breadth of products our companies offer, the technology changes we face and the increasing demands of our customers. Navigating this haze is the reason we're here. It's why we belong to DMIA.

I came into this industry in 1989. As many of you will recall, this was the middle of the dot-matrix forms boom! How many of you remember the joy of selling those 8-10 ply forms? Look at the excitement I just saw on some of your faces! The good old days—boy was that easy! At the time, I quoted

from price books and designed forms on my layout grid with my trusty ruler. I occasionally dropped my rubber cement brush into my coffee cup. Get this: I actually stopped at the *corner-store pay phone* to call into the office.

Most importantly, I was bowling...with my grandfather's 1954 hard-plastic bowling ball. Ahhh, my grandfather's bowling ball! You should have seen this thing! It was bright gold and looked like a disco light as it rolled down the alley. It didn't matter that my average was 109. What mattered was I had an ultra-cool ball that once belonged to my grandfather. One day, I was asked to join a league, and I showed up proudly with this awesome ball.

Well, I quickly learned that other bowlers in the league *did not* think my ball was cool. As it turned out, all they cared about were strikes. The ball might have worked great in 1954, but the sport had evolved. Lanes had changed from wood to synthetic. Oil patterns were different. Ball manufacturing had advanced. Sadly, I had to retire my beloved ball.

Today, in the competitive sport we play every day, we have to retire old ways of thinking and focus on the future. Is your image of the future azure? Or is it darker?

Any industry that experiences rapid change is going to have its share of Chicken Littles running around. You all know the kind of people I'm talking about: the kind who are unwilling to accept new truths and try new concepts. They recall easier times in the '80s and '90s and now seem to shout, "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!" But in 2007—and I think you'll agree with me—it's not *the sky* that's falling; it's a mindset that's *failing*. We need to view challenges as opportunities. The problem isn't a wind of change. It's a storm cloud called fear.

The sky isn't falling. *Old standards* are. Traditional boundaries are disappearing even faster than some hairlines in this room. (Gail O'Roke, thankfully I think you're safe.) Distributors in the past could succeed by being friendly go-betweens. Company A wants a product. Company C can manufacture it. As Company B, I just have to join these two guys together. But as a distributor, if I'm just a *link*, if that's how I think, then I am no longer necessary. Why not? Because technology is a faster link than me. Instead, I must provide *value*. I must bring something unique to the business relationship, something that Company A and Company C can't live without.

Think about your company. Think about the products and processes that once buttered your bread. What if you hadn't made important changes over the past few years? Chanced are, you'd now be toast.

Our company, P&W Marketing, is moving away from generic answers and toward products and services sculpted to individual needs. We now present ourselves as "brand-identity consultants," not product peddlers, and we're dedicated to a simple concept: Our business isn't about the stuff we sell; it's about *creative ideas*. We build *concepts*. Sure, we sell coffee mugs. But we're *really* selling a way for clients to give some jolt to their employee-recognition programs. Yes, we sell pens. But we're *really* selling a promotional method for customers to ink new business.

Here's how I like to look at it: P&W Marketing isn't growing by *collecting* customers. We're growing by *connecting* with them.

And I'm honored to connect with great people at my company. The sky in Youngstown might not be azure, but our employees have blue-sky creativity and a blue-collar work ethic. What makes P&W Marketing successful isn't just corporate identity campaigns and direct mail and print ads. It's Peggy Trebus and Robyn Bardo and Joyce Seiter and other dedicated people. I'm honored to share this award with them.

I also share this award with each of you. When I started back in 1989, I was so impressed by the willingness of DMIA members to share their experiences and wisdom. From my first meeting, I was hooked. I knew where to go for all the good stuff to help my company prosper.

My love for the people in this industry started when I attended the School for New Sales Reps in 1989 in Boston. Harriet Carter was one of the instructors. Thanks to Harriet for all her dedication to the industry. Attending this school was a lot like one of these reality shows nowadays—too bad I didn't have the foresight to bring a camera! The long hours developed my industry education, and it was well worth the time. I do wonder sometimes if anyone from that class is still in the industry, 18 years later...man I am getting old.

Even in those early days, I recognized something that still rings true: There's a huge difference between being a member of DMIA and being an *involved* member of the association. DMIA is like a huge toolbox, and it's up to us to

pick up the tools and nail down more business. We reached inside the toolbox and found this conference. We should reach back in and pull out Print Solutions Magazine, the online Solution Center, the Source Hotline and other excellent services. Each of us should hammer home the benefits of participating in DMIA.

I want to thank the DMIA Board of Directors and those that were crazy enough to vote for me as Member of the Year. I was told that I received this award because "I have played a major role in helping DMIA and the membership move forward" and "I have faithfully donated my time and expertise." I don't think of myself as an expert in anything. I mean, come on...I've sold *janitorial supplies*.

But the truth is, I am proud to be a small distributor in Youngstown, Ohio. I feel as if I represent the backbone of the DMIA, and I gladly give of my time because I believe in the good that DMIA does and the members that it serves.

Also, I want to thank my wife for dealing with my "out in space" look, which I often have when thinking about ways to serve DMIA at regional and national events. I always say my family members aren't involved in the day-to-day operations of my company nor DMIA, but the simple presence of their support helps me tremendously. If I represent the backbone of the association, it's because my family makes it possible for me to give my heart.

It's a bright morning in the printing industry, and each of us has an unprecedented opportunity to play on a new field. If we maximize our opportunities, the industry will continue to be good to us. But it's *up to us* to have the initiative to overcome fear and embrace change.

If we don't, it will seem like the sky is falling. If we do, it will seem like *the sky is the limit*.