



# THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

Get To Know *PPB's*  
2015 Rising Stars

BY TINA BERRES FILIPSKI

**W**hen newspaper publisher Jasper F. Meek imprinted a burlap book bag with a shoe store's message in 1886, an industry was born that has continued to evolve, expand and thrive for more than 100 years. The strength of its staying power isn't the products—it's the people who imagine, create, develop, sell and promote the campaigns in which our medium carries the message.

The promotional products industry has a rich heritage, and a bright and promising future. Those who carry on our industry's legacy take on a vital responsibility to keep it strong and innovative. That's why it's essential to attract, mentor and groom the next generation of industry leaders.

Since 2010, *PPB* has identified and recognized the most watchable young industry pros. This year's 10 *PPB* Rising Stars reflect the ambition, innovation and resourcefulness needed to pilot the industry's new pathways—and the dreams that will take them as far as they want to go.



## Jill Albers

- Age 32
- Executive Director of Global Sales, Shumsky
- Dayton, Ohio

### EDUCATION

School of Advertising Art in Dayton, Ohio, with double degrees in graphic design and marketing

### FIRST INDUSTRY JOB

Marketing and advertising assistant at Visions Awards/Awardcraft in 2003

### PREVIOUS JOB

Promotional marketing manager for the central division of WorkflowOne

### FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB

“Two things: the creativity and the pace. I love the fact that in this industry we can create a custom product to meet our clients’ business objectives. A new day brings a new challenge. You can wake up to a new adventure every day in this business. You never know what’s around the next turn and that keeps life from getting predictable.”

### BIGGEST GOAL FOR 2015

“Launching a new sales-training methodology for our team including tools to help them easily incorporate it into their daily selling. This will provide them clarity on our vision as an organization and help them be as successful as they can be while continuing to grow their knowledge of our wonderful industry. Also, creating scalable (forward-thinking, yet standard) solutions for our reps/clients that we can easily customize for each brand and update as we develop new enhancements into the market.”

### PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT

“Being a mother to my two wonderful children, Charleigh (girl, age 6) and Breck (boy, age 3).”

### BEST ADVICE EVER RECEIVED

“The best advice I have received regarding sales would be to make sure that you are always focused on ‘sales activities.’ There are a lot of things that get in the way of productivity ... as a salesperson you need to focus your business hours on only sales activities—the others come second.

This includes internal meetings, paper work, etc. Just say ‘no.’ You choose how you spend your time—make it ring the bell!”

### STATUS IN FIVE YEARS

“Five years from now ... yeesh! I hope there is a new, interesting creative twist to the branding world that we in this industry can sink our teeth into and grab a piece of.”

### IN MY SPARE TIME

“I’m active with family and friends, snow skiing, boating, working out ...”

### ALTERNATIVE CAREER

Fine artist, interior designer or morning news anchor

### ON MY DESK RIGHT NOW

Coffee (in my ‘Get Sh\*t Done’ mug), *PPB* magazine, my iPhone, sunglasses, regular glasses, giant handbag and my favorite white Cross pen.

### WHY JILL IS A RISING STAR

Nominator **Michael Emoff, Shumsky**, says: “Jill truly understands the value of relationships. It’s rare that anyone builds the kind of relationships with clients and colleagues to the degree that Jill does. She joined our new business development team in 2010 and quickly became team leader. Through vast networking, she developed working relationships with some of the world’s top companies, and together with our creative team, developed award-winning campaigns. In 2013, she invented her first promotional product: a convertible running vest/tote bag. She has been inducted into PeerNet’s Million Dollar Club for the past four years and achieved the highest sales-over-quota with a number that astounds us all: 365 percent over quota. She is transparent, opinionated, energy-packed and loves to mentor her peers.” Nominator **Fran Ford, CAS, Castelli North America, Inc.**, adds: “Her skills and tenacity impressed me. Rising Stars are those who shine the brightest and Jill is a great symbol for our industry’s future leaders.”

# Kirby Hasseman

- Age 41
- CEO, Hasseman Marketing
- Coshocton, Ohio

## EDUCATION

Bachelor of Arts in Communications from West Liberty University

## FIRST INDUSTRY JOB

Account executive for The Vernon Company

## PREVIOUS JOB

Before the industry he was in corporate communications at The Longaberger Company (a basket-making company in Ohio).

## FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB

"To help customers, team members and industry peers grow."

## BIGGEST GOAL FOR 2015

"My goal is to double our business this year."

## PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT

"Wow! That's a hard one. I am most proud watching my two daughters dance (with my wife by my side). But beyond that, I am proud of my book *Delivering Marketing Joy*. I'm also proud of the group we are building at Hasseman Marketing. You just wanted one?"

## BEST ADVICE EVER RECEIVED

"When in doubt, go see the people. Don't wait for the customer to come to you. Go see the customer. That might look different today, but it's still true."

"When in doubt, go see the people. Don't wait for the customer to come to you. Go see the customer. That might look different today, but it's still true."



## STATUS IN FIVE YEARS

"Five years from now I hope to be running Hasseman Marketing—and several other successful businesses."

## IN MY SPARE TIME

"I love to hang with my family, read, travel, run, golf and work (yes, I love work)."

## ALTERNATIVE CAREER

"I love being an entrepreneur. I would start another business. I am not sure which one ... yet."

## ON MY DESK RIGHT NOW

Two books, random papers, a goal sheet, computer RoxBox from Starline and a Wedge phone holder.

## WHY KIRBY IS A RISING STAR

Nominator **Jeff Solomon, MAS, freepromotips.com**, says: "Kirby has taken the initiative to interview leaders inside and outside the industry for his book. He also shares a Weekly Word that is an interesting way to communicate various values. He's active in online posting and sharing relevant content that is beneficial to people's personal and professional lives."



## Jessica Hutwelker, MAS

- Age: 35
- Account manager, Sunrise Identity
- Bellevue, Washington



“I strive to be surrounded by people who will inspire me, support me, challenge me, and stand for the person they know I’m capable of being and becoming.”

### EDUCATION

She majored in modern languages at Bishops University in Lennoxville, Quebec.

### FIRST INDUSTRY JOB

Pricing coordinator for a Florida distributor. “Six weeks into the position, we landed our first co-op program ever with the third-largest insurance company in the country—I would be assisting the sales rep and managing it from Florida. It was the craziest learning curve ever. The sales rep left a few months in, and I ended up managing the program for more than nine years. I was given a tremendous amount of responsibility and accountability in a very short amount of time. I am grateful for the experience.”

### PREVIOUS JOB

As a teen, working at her parent’s candy store, Sweet Expectations. “It instilled in me all the key components of being successful in the promotional products industry—stellar service, bonding and creating relationships, building trust and loyalty, caring about the end result for the customer, creating an experience.” She also worked on cruise ships (“Yes, I was like Julie from ‘Love Boat’”), which required bringing value and making others feel like they are the most important people in the room.

### FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB

“The relationships. I treasure the relationships I have built over the years with clients, suppliers and co-workers alike. I love to help others, to create connections that allow for growth. I care tremendously about my clients and others, and I invest a lot of my energy in nurturing the relationships. I am honored to have the people in my life that I do, the network of support that I have built and the mentors that I have surrounded myself with. Our industry is full of amazing, inspiring people.”

### BIGGEST GOAL FOR 2015

“To shine! I dedicated last year to going outside my comfort zones and completely changing my life, which I did. Now I am happy and excited to share my talents and gifts with others, and bring value and contribution to Sunrise Identity.”

**PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT**

“2014 itself was the proudest accomplishment of my life. I invested in myself and in a coach, sought out incredible mentors, pushed myself continually outside of my comfort zones and seized opportunities to grow. Being featured on my first PromoKitchen podcast last year was a game changer and one of the highlights of my life—afterwards I felt like I could run eight miles. It was a huge turning point for me, and it inspired me to reach out to PPAI and ASI about giving education sessions on women’s empowerment at the 2015 January trade shows.”

**BEST ADVICE EVER RECEIVED**

“You’re only as good as the people you surround yourself with.’ That has been a mantra of mine for years. I strive to be surrounded by people who will inspire me, support me, challenge me, and stand for the person they know I’m capable of being and becoming. I am so grateful for the people in my life, and I make sure that they know it.”

**STATUS IN FIVE YEARS**

“Continuing to live my purpose, which is engagement. I want to be speaking around the world about women’s empowerment, helping people wherever I am remember the greatness within them, and bringing joy to others. I am so blessed and thankful to Sunrise Identity, and our industry is my vehicle to do that right now.”

**IN MY SPARE TIME**

“I like to connect—whether that is with friends and loved ones, spending time alone in nature, exploring new places, meditating as I stroll along streets—it’s all about connection. Otherwise I’m reading books about leadership and development, writing about learned insights and contemplating things in different ways—and taking good care of myself. I highly value quality time.”

**ALTERNATIVE CAREER**

International speaker, published author and life coach.

**ON MY DESK RIGHT NOW**

A HandStands Ergo Mat (“best mousepad ever”), four different journals from four excellent journal companies, and a really great gel pen.

**INDUSTRY CHANGES SHE’D LIKE TO SEE**

“I would like to see a collaborative effort in really identifying who we are as an industry and what we do, a single resource for job openings in the industry that can be searched by industry professionals and college grads alike, and a robust ambassadorship and outreach into colleges across the country to share the creativity and opportunities that the promotional product industry has to offer. I would especially love to help establish a group of young and emerging talent that can come together to discuss ways to elevate our presence in the world of advertising. There is a generational shift happening in the workplace. It is essential to attract, engage and retain the emerging talents entering the workforce. Most people are in our industry by having fallen into it—what would it look like if we created a presence that actively attracted people to it instead?”

**WHY JESSICA IS A RISING STAR**

Nominator **Brian Porter, Pro Towels**, says: “She dove headfirst into our industry, the way very few people do. She’s involved, engaged with many different groups and demographics, has brought a long overdue look at empowering women in the industry and does it all with an amazing smile and energy few could match.” Nominator **Danny Rosin, Brand Fuel, Inc.**, says: Jessica is not just a dreamer, she is a doer. She is a woman of action and is deeply invested in our industry. She represents the voice of both women and millennials.” Nominator **Jen Barja, Kobie Marketing**, says: “Jessica is a go-getter. She is serving on the PromoKitchen board, on multiple committees in the industry, has presented education sessions about women’s empowerment, got her CAS and then her MAS two months later. She drove 3,152 miles across the country by herself to work for Sunrise.”

Other nominators included Sydra Newell, SnugZ USA; Aubrey Collins, MediaTree; Mitch Mounger, Sunrise Identity; Lindsay Heller, Sunrise Identity; Eileen Lynch, BIC Graphic; Bobby Lehew, CAS, ROBYN; Nikole Flannery, Brand Fuel, Inc.; Mark Graham, commonsku; Charity Gibson, Green Banana Promos; Erin Bartucca, BIC Graphic and Fran Ford, CAS, Castelli.

# Andrea Jaeckels, MAS

- Age 37
- Training and project coordinator, AIA Corporation
- Neenah, Wisconsin



## BIGGEST GOAL FOR 2015

"To transform the training at AIA from being one and done (the class is done so go implement what you learned) to a continuous process that is never ending. At the beginning of the year, we adopted a learning transfer environment. When the classroom training is done, the real work begins. My goal is also to ensure associates have opportunities to use their newly acquired skills and be successful."

## PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT

"In my professional life, it would have to be the various certifications I have earned to help me develop my skills."

## BEST ADVICE EVER RECEIVED

"Don't worry about failures, worry about the chances you miss when you don't even try."— author Jack Canfield

## STATUS IN FIVE YEARS

"Through my current position, I have discovered a love of training and an interest in the field of adult learning. I see myself remaining in the promotional products industry but continuing to develop my skills."

## IN MY SPARE TIME

"[I like to be] with my family and friends, traveling and reading."

## ALTERNATIVE CAREER

Speech therapist

## ON MY DESK RIGHT NOW

Pens ("You can never have too many"), a lot of paper and a stress cube that displays the six steps of learning transfer.

## INDUSTRY CHANGES SHE'D

### LIKE TO SEE

"I would like to see a continued focus on product safety to raise awareness. In addition, I would like to continue to see new innovative and creative products. I have worked for AIA for almost 13 years, however my mom has been employed in the industry for 25 years. I think back to some of the products she would bring back home and I can't believe how much the products have evolved in terms of design, colors and materials."

## WHY ANDREA IS A RISING STAR

Nominator **Wendy Eiden, AIA Corporation**, says, "Andrea is an innovator and change agent at AIA and passionate about creating and providing training programs that help our associates and distributors succeed. Her programs create long-lasting behavior changes. She is an active member of the employee council and helps shape the culture at AIA. As a member of the PPAI Member Services Committee, Andrea is actively involved in enhancing the success of the Association's members by providing input into products and services. Andrea is also active in her community and has held a position on her town's park and tree board and is currently on her library board."

## EDUCATION

Bachelor's degree in political science and public administration from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

## FIRST INDUSTRY JOB

"AIA Corporation was my first industry job. I have been with the company for almost 13 years, first as an account coordinator and then in my current position."

## PREVIOUS JOB

She worked for Guardian Life Insurance Company in medical and prescription drug customer service.

## FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB

"At AIA, one of my main responsibilities is to provide training to all of our associates. My favorite part is when I see that an associate understands the concept I am trying to explain. At the same moment they understand how what they just learned can help them with their job responsibilities."

# Ray Jimenez

- Age 37
- National sales, Pacific Western Sales
- Brea, California

## EDUCATION

Attended Dallas Baptist University on a baseball scholarship

## FIRST INDUSTRY JOB

Customer service position with Pro Colors

## PREVIOUS JOB

Logomark

## FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB

"I like walking through the PWS doors to start my day with our great team and always providing my customers the special attention they deserve. Answering emails or a phone call on a weekend for a client can go a long way."



my VP Andrea Pennington and the best CEO in the business, Lyndsey Tidwell."

## IN MY SPARE TIME

"I like to entertain family and friends by cooking and enjoying sporting events."

## BIGGEST GOAL FOR 2015

"I'd like to reach an increase of 30 percent growth in sales."

## PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT

"Marrying my beautiful wife, Evelyn, and the birth of our beautiful daughter, Harlow Rae."

## BEST ADVICE EVER RECEIVED

"Enjoy each day as if it's your last, because tomorrow is never promised."

## STATUS IN FIVE YEARS

"I'd like to continue to call PWS my home, increase sales and become a Top 40 supplier. I hope to continue to learn from



## ALTERNATIVE CAREER

A sports broadcaster on major television

## ON MY DESK RIGHT NOW

Computer, pens, phone, cell phone, catalog, notepad, calculator, 10-pound dumbbell and two boxes of tissue.

## INDUSTRY CHANGES HE'D LIKE TO SEE

"... both suppliers and distributors work a healthy balance between the demand for excellent service and low prices. Certainly, we both strive to provide the best prices, however, we also want to ensure that quality and service are not compromised. I believe going forward this is a win-win for both sides and will ultimately benefit the health of our industry as a whole."

## WHY RAY IS A RISING STAR

Nominator **Curt Stanley, AIA Corporation**, says: "He is young, yet has the mind of a very mature sales and marketing person." Nominator **Bob Vibe, Ad Pro, AIA**, says: "He is a refreshing presence in the company of so many salespeople in our industry who are tired and complacent. I believe Ray will achieve much success in our industry." Nominator **Bob Simmons, NDS**, says: "The industry needs and requires a younger generation of people who have integrity and a can-do attitude—Ray fulfills both."

Other nominators are Pam Wolle, Wild 'n Woolly Marketing, Inc./AIA; Carole Friedman, Geiger; Athena Alegria, Geiger; Linda Palmer, Proforma-UniSource; Kay Bradbury, Boss Promo Powered by Proforma; Kimberly Anderson, A4 Promotions; Tracy B. Ritchey, AIA/A.C.E. Promotional Products, Inc.; Kara Main, AIA Corporation; Maria Perez, AIA New Directions; Heidi Haupt, MARCO Promotional Products; Carrie Lautner, Geiger; Elaine Riperti, Kaeser & Blair; Annette Benley-Pintor, HALO Branded Solutions; Tracey Barton, Safeguard; Holly Spillers, Proforma MVP Marketing; Kurt Brockman, American Diversity Business Solutions; Bob Michel, Proforma Marketing Agency; Lori Bruns, Proforma Salant Marketing; Debbie Johnson, On Target Marketing; Dan Ahern, Proforma Albrecht and Brian Cohrs, ABC Printing/Proforma.



## Michael Marias

- Age 32
- Director of Sales—Midwest Region, Hit Promotional Products
- Largo, Florida

### EDUCATION

Degree in criminology from the University of South Florida

### FIRST INDUSTRY JOB

Hit Promotional Products in production. “During my summer vacations in college I would work in several different areas around the factory.”

### PREVIOUS JOB

He worked for a steel transloading company based out of Chicago. He began as a crane operator and worked his way up to terminal manager before being relocated and ultimately moving back to Florida. He then returned to Hit as an inside sales representative.

### FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB

“... working with my team on projects to support distributors in product selection, helping provide the most effective marketing solutions for their clients. Having a hand in these, from the small opportunities like making a cookout a success, to the larger ones like a game-day giveaway or brand launch, is exciting day in and out.”

### BIGGEST GOAL FOR 2015

“My most important goal is to continue growth within the Midwest region, assisting the team wherever possible.”

### PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT

“I am most proud of my home and the quality of life that working hard has provided. Walking in the door to my wife Milena, daughter Mia, son Michael and dogs (Lola and Tripp) can keep or put a smile on my face every day!”

### BEST ADVICE EVER RECEIVED

“The best advice I have ever received didn’t come in the form of conversation but by leading by example. My mom is one of the hardest workers I know and is always leading by example. She really paved the road for me by showing me what great morals, work ethic and determination will get you.”

### STATUS IN FIVE YEARS

“I would like to have continued my career at Hit in management—becoming more knowledgeable by studying the industry dynamic, building on relationships and creating new ones along the way.”

### IN MY SPARE TIME

“I like to spend my free time at home with my family. When I am not home with them, in the pool or working, you can find me on the golf course.”

### ALTERNATIVE CAREER

“This is a tough one to answer. I would probably pick a career where I could spend some more time outdoors. Utilizing my degree in criminology would also be on the top of this list. During my studies in college I had interest in becoming a United States marshal.”

### ON MY DESK RIGHT NOW

A picture of his family, a trophy, dual monitors, mug full of Hit pens (favorite Hit No. 833), notebook (Hit No. 6962) and a desktop fan.

### WHY MICHAEL IS A RISING STAR

Nominator **David Walker, Hit Promotional Products**, says: “Michael led his team in 2014 to be the fastest-growing region in the country for Hit. He balances his whole team along with the accounts he services, and a wife and family with two newborn twins. Nominator **Lisa Shayne, Hit Promotional Products**, says: “Mike is one of the few who truly started on the line in the factory and worked his way through the ranks at Hit. He is a true problem solver; he never hides from a problem but dives in headfirst to find a workable solution for all parties involved.”

# Sasha Pirrie

- Age 39
- Vice president of sales, west division, Logomark
- Tustin, California

## EDUCATION

Bachelor of Arts in English from UCLA

## FIRST INDUSTRY JOB

Sales Administrator for Sweda Company LLC

## PREVIOUS JOB

Clegg Promo

## FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB

"The amazing relationships I have developed with my customers and colleagues across our great country."

## BIGGEST GOAL FOR 2015

To continue to build the best sales team in the industry.

## PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT

"My three sons—they are well-versed in industry lingo."

## BEST ADVICE EVER RECEIVED

"Be yourself. It is important to know the product line, your company's messaging and your customer's business—but always be yourself."

## STATUS IN FIVE YEARS

"I'd like to take more vacation from my busy work-travel schedule."

## IN MY SPARE TIME

"I volunteer at my church and with my youngest boy's sports teams."

## ALTERNATIVE CAREER

"Worship leader at my church. Boy do I love to sing—especially on Sundays!"

## ON MY DESK RIGHT NOW

"My laptop, my cell phone and a stack of to-do items."

## INDUSTRY CHANGES SHE'D LIKE TO SEE

"I'd like to see a unified effort in our industry regarding the importance of education. We have critical issues such as product safety compliance, the speed of internet buying and the importance of the consumer buying experience. It would be amazing to see more conferences and regional shows/events base the major part of every event around education and Q&A panels instead of trade shows."

## WHY SASHA IS A RISING STAR

Nominator **Brian P. Padian at Logomark** says: "Sasha is the most creative and passionate person in an industry that requires non-stop attention to micro details. Her knowledge of her customer's clients is remarkable and impressive. She is humble, friendly and smart, has risen through the ranks in this industry, served on the Specialty Advertising Association of California (SAAC) board for two years, is the mother of three terrific sons, proudly sings in her church choir and always hits her sales numbers."



"Be yourself. It is important to know the product line, your company's messaging and your customer's business—but always be yourself."

# Ashley McCune

- Age 34
- Vice president of marketing and communications, Facilisgroup
- St. Louis, Missouri

## EDUCATION

Degree in business administration with a specialty in marketing from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE).

## FIRST INDUSTRY JOB

Marketing associate for distributor GatewayCDI at age 23. “My main roles were working on RFPs, developing marketing for sales reps and assisting the chief marketing officer.”

## PREVIOUS JOB

Assistant manager at the Gap



## FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB

Brainstorming sessions with the marketing team. “I very much believe that teamwork, especially in this area, equals success. I get excited when there is synergy, and the best ideas are usually the result of no one person being able to take direct credit. As I have progressed in my career, working with others to help them grow and succeed has definitely been the most rewarding.”

## BIGGEST GOAL FOR 2015

“... to take life a little less seriously and spend a bit more time enjoying the now rather than planning for what’s next. That type A syndrome can be brutal sometimes.”

## PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT

“Personally my proudest accomplishment is being married for 13 years and raising two children who thus far are well balanced, well behaved and respectful (they are only six and seven but we are on the right track). Professionally, I am proud to be a part of the success of Facilisgroup. I have been here from its

infancy and have seen my hard work (along with that of my dedicated colleagues) develop the

company into what it is today. I have an extreme passion for Facilis, who we are and what we do. I feel truly blessed to be a part of this organization—working with such an amazing group of promotional products distributors and suppliers.”

## BEST ADVICE EVER RECEIVED

“Be true to your values. At the end of the day, you take only yourself home with you. Make sure you can look in the mirror and be proud of who you are.”

## STATUS IN FIVE YEARS

“We will see what the future holds, but I am committed to ensuring that I continually have a passion for what I am doing. In the ever-changing world we live in, there are always opportunities for growth and development, both for yourself and those around you. Being part of a company that believes in and supports its employees will always be a priority.”

## IN MY SPARE TIME

“Ha, ha ... spare time ... what is that? When given the opportunity, I enjoy reading, dinner and wine with friends, spending time with family, volunteering at my children’s school and date nights with my husband. I typically stay pretty busy but wouldn’t have it any other way.”

## ALTERNATIVE CAREER

“I would be a college professor. When I was younger, I wanted to be a teacher but really didn’t have the patience for teaching young children or dealing with sassy teenagers. However, I have thoroughly enjoyed developing training programs and working with adult users of the Facilis system. Teaching young adults who are eager to learn would bring me great satisfaction.”

## ON MY DESK RIGHT NOW

Pictures of her kids, two bottles of hand sanitizer, a Diet Dr Pepper, iPhone, file folders and her Macbook.

## INDUSTRY CHANGES SHE'D LIKE TO SEE

“There needs to be an increased level of education about our industry among college students and young people. From what I have seen when hiring and speaking to adults, there is little awareness about our industry. I think a lot more could be done as far as college outreach programs. This leads to the second problem, which is the aging distributor. As an industry, we need to reignite the younger generations as to what PPAI is about and look to hire and mold young leaders. I also feel there is not a high enough level of entry or standard for suppliers and distributors entering the industry.

What more could be done to develop a bit more stringent application process to become affiliated with PPAI? Should members have to renew and answer questions that meet certain criteria regarding product safety, quality, structure, etc.? All boats could rise if the standard was set a bit higher.”

#### **WHY ASHLEY IS A RISING STAR**

Nominator **Matthew Lamb, Facilisgroup**, says: “Ashley has been an integral part of building Facilis Group into the progressive, fast-growing company it has become. She has built the culture that exists in Facilis Group by hiring the right people, leading by example and setting the tone in the workplace. She has also been the inspiration for many of the young women who are part of our company by her leadership within the organization. It takes a special talent to be able to consume the amount of work thrown her way. She always brings a can-do attitude to work and is a polished young professional.”

## Megan Zezzo

- Age: 27
- National account manager, Jetline
- Cleveland, Ohio

#### **EDUCATION**

Bachelor's in business management, Cleveland State University

#### **FIRST INDUSTRY JOB**

Working in inside sales for Catania Medallie Specialty, a supplier in Avon Lake, Ohio

#### **PREVIOUS JOB**

Catania Medallie Specialty

#### **FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB**

“My favorite part of my job is that no two days are the same. Being a national account representative, I am in different cities each week. I love meeting new people and building relationships with my clients.”

#### **BIGGEST GOAL FOR 2015**

“... to grow the accounts that I am accountable for and be the best possible person/employee for my company.”

#### **PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT**

“Working with my father [Dana Zezzo] at Jetline; he is probably one of the best mentors someone could ask for.”

#### **BEST ADVICE EVER RECEIVED**

“Be yourself, be humble and work as hard as you possibly can.”

#### **STATUS IN FIVE YEARS**

“I hope that I'll still be in the industry selling promotional products.”

#### **IN MY SPARE TIME**

“Hiking, running, being outdoors, relaxing with friends, playing volleyball and enjoying time with my family.”



#### **ALTERNATIVE CAREER**

Event planning

#### **ON MY DESK RIGHT NOW**

“Since I'm currently in a hotel (where I am 45 weeks of the year), my Surface Pro, cell phone, notes from meetings and receipts.”

#### **WHY MEGAN IS A RISING STAR**

Nominator **Jessica Onions, Jetline**, says: “Megan is a huge asset, especially when Jetline implemented a new ERP a couple of years ago. She became the unofficial liaison between management and sales because she quickly adapted to the new software. In the three years she's been in the industry, she's been rapidly promoted, understands the importance of 'face time' and is quickly building strong relationships with customers and has created the strongest customer follow-up strategy in Jetline's history. She also has served on the board of directors for Three Rivers Advertising Specialty Association (TRASA).”

# Adam Taylor

- Age 35
- Vice president of development, Essent Corporation
- Easton, Pennsylvania



## EDUCATION

Bachelor of Science in Computer Science from Penn State University

## FIRST INDUSTRY JOB

Application and support developer at Essent. "It was a great opportunity for me as I was able to interface with distributor customers to learn the industry and help solve pain points with automation. Essent provides a great work environment (named one of the *PPB* Greatest Companies to Work For in June). I've been thrilled to stay on board here for more than 10 years and work my way up."

## PREVIOUS JOB

"I worked in web development at PJM Interconnection, which maintains the electrical grid for 61 million people in 14 states and Washington, DC. I was able to take the analysis skills and work ethic I learned at PJM and carry it over to Essent to help promotional products companies solve real-world problems."

## FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB

"The best part of the job is working with a lot of great people, colleagues and customers alike, and helping solve real-world business problems whether it's operations, accounting or automation. I really like helping people be successful whether it's guiding a colleague through a project or creating technology that allows a customer to do the impossible."

## BIGGEST GOAL FOR 2015

"Professionally, my biggest goal for 2015 is to ensure a successful launch of the newest Essent product, EssentOne. It's a big project and I'm taking great care to make sure it provides great results for the industry. Personally, my biggest goal in 2015 is to finish my basement arcade for my kids. We have about a dozen machines down there now and have arcade nights for friends and family."

## PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT

"Besides becoming a *PPB* Rising Star? It's tough to name a proudest accomplishment because I'm proud of my education, my career, and my family and kids. Sounds like I'm playing *The Game of Life*. If I had to pick one I'd say my family and kids, including my wife, two sons, and my twin daughters—although there's a lot left to write in that chapter."

## BEST ADVICE EVER RECEIVED

"At my first job, when I was finished with a task, I would quickly seek out another task, always wanting to do more and more. My boss at the time gave me some very good kudos and that has stuck with me: never settle for status quo and always to be pushing to do more and more. It makes me a great fit for Essent, where striving to do more and more is ingrained in the culture."

## STATUS IN FIVE YEARS

"Five years from now I want to be doing the same thing I am doing right now, creating leading-edge technology for businesses. And I definitely want to be doing it for Essent and the promotional products industry—only I see it happening at a larger scale: mentoring more colleagues and helping more companies do even more seemingly impossible things."

**IN MY SPARE TIME**

"I like to spend my spare time with my family, coaching Little League baseball and youth soccer, and fixing arcade games to get them in my basement for the kids to enjoy. It's a really fun time to be a coach because the kids are just getting to the age where they understand the mechanics and strategy of the games."

**ALTERNATIVE CAREER**

"I've always had an interest in medicine and health services, so I'd be a doctor, nurse or physical therapist—something along those lines where I could use my skills to improve and save lives. I'd also want to infuse technology with those to help me do it."

**ON MY DESK RIGHT NOW**

Family pictures, including the dog; development magazines; assorted tech gadgets like an iPod, iPhone and tablets; a strategy board game called "Betrayal at House on the Hill" that he plays with the support team and the developers; and dish full of candy that makes his colleagues want to visit him more often.

**INDUSTRY CHANGES**

**HE'D LIKE TO SEE**

"The supply chain needs technology that provides our industry the same conveniences available to us as consumers. Doing business should be as easy and convenient as retail shopping—and it's getting to the point where it's expected."

**WHY ADAM IS A RISING STAR**

Nominator **Eric Alessi, Essent Corporation**, says: "Adam cares deeply about the success of his company, coworkers and customers. He went right from college into the promotional products industry, immersing himself in his customers' businesses to understand what makes them tick so he could make them better. He has a vision to apply technology to industry problems to make the industry stronger. At just 25 years old he was consulting with a number of the largest distributors to guide them on business practices. He's also a father of four under 10 years of age and an avid community volunteer and coach." **PPB**

*Tina Berres Filipski is editor of PPB.*

"I really like helping people be successful whether it's guiding a colleague through a project or creating technology that allows a customer to do the impossible."



PPB'S 2015 RISING STARS WERE recognized at a reception and dinner in their honor during the opening night of the PPAI North American Leadership Conference in Nashville, Tennessee, on August 9. Presenters Tina Berres Filipski (far left) and Paul Bellantone (back right) presented each with a stylish, commemorative watch generously donated by supplier SELCO.