

Trade Names: Brandito distributes promotional items

BY JOAN TUPPONCE Special correspondent | Posted: Sunday, August 24, 2014 10:30 pm

Rachel McMann needed help in picking some promotional giveaways for a September meeting.

McMann, special projects coordinator for vehicle history report supplier Carfax, sought help from Mike Lovern, owner of Henrico County-based Brandito, which distributes promotional marketing items, such as coffee mugs, pens, notebooks and water bottles, as well as corporate apparel.

“We use Brandito to do all of our clothing giveaways,” she said.

Carfax’s upcoming beach-themed meeting is being held in Florida.

“Mike brought the idea of beachnik cups (a cup holder that will hold a drink in the sand). We also added sunscreen, lip balm and water bottles with our logo,” McMann said.

McMann appreciates Lovern’s attention to detail.

“Mike knows the quality we are looking for,” she said. “He has taken the time to learn what we like. His suggestions are great.”

Lovern founded Brandito in 2009 as Shockoe Marketing Group with partner Jeff Saunders. Saunders left the firm this year.

“We started out of our homes,” Lovern said.

The company was rebranded to Brandito in 2012.

“We were growing on a national level, and Shockoe Marketing didn’t carry weight outside of the local area,” Lovern said. “We wanted to name it something more generic. We didn’t want to be thought of as a mom and pop Richmond shop.”



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Mike Lovern, owner of Brandito, and employees Nick Raible (from left), Victoria Kellam and Kevin Mullaney gather at the company’s warehouse that handles storage and order fulfillment for some clients.

The company has a diverse client base, from Fortune 500 companies to startup firms.

“We also work with nonprofit organizations, restaurants and small businesses,” Lovern said.

“We have the ability to sell to anybody.”

Eighty percent of the company’s business is event-based.

“There is some type of action that is driving the order,” Lovern said.

Lovern and Saunders wanted the business to take a new approach to marketing promotional items.

“For a long time, this industry has been thought of as being somewhat stale,” Lovern said. “I often hear the words trinkets and trash. We felt like it needed a facelift from the standpoint that clients wanted to be handled in a different way.”

Many promotional marketing companies simply drop off a catalog at a customer’s office, he said.

“We sit down with clients and work with them in a conventional business-to-business aspect,” he said. “We wanted to up the customer-service ante and make sure that clients are getting the product they wanted as well as the return on investment.”

Lovern travels across the country to meet with clients.

“We’ve gone as far west as Denver, but the bulk of our clients are on the East Coast,” he said.

“We have some national clients that are headquartered here in Richmond.”

The company has access to about 3,500 manufacturers and tens of thousands of items. Lovern makes sure the products clients order are items people will keep and use.

“It’s free marketing for companies, and that makes it unique,” he said.

In the past two years, revenue has grown 145 percent. Revenue rose 50 percent in 2013.

“We try to grow about 40 percent each year, and that is aggressive,” Lovern said. “Forty percent is our mark this year. We are trending now at about 50 percent growth, but we think we will end up around 40 percent when all is said and done.”

The company also handles storage and fulfillment of orders for customers who don’t have storage space in-house.

“We have a warehouse on-site,” Lovern said. “Fulfillment is one of the fastest-growing segments of our company.”

Brandito operates online retail shops for employees of five businesses who can order logo-branded items from their companies.

“People can go online and pay for it, and we pull it off our shelves and ship it to them,” Lovern said.

For instance, employees at CapTech Consulting, a Richmond-based technology consulting company, can go online and order company logo-branded merchandise from the CapTech store that Brandito operates. “That makes it so much easier,” said Michele Bezjak who works in employee development for CapTech. “Brandito takes care of everything. If it’s something we need right away, they will personally drive it over to our offices. When the inventory gets low, they let me know.”

Lovern credits Brandito’s success not only to the dedication of his employees but also to “being consistent in our approach day to day,” he said.

Debbie Ferguson, project manager for Antea Group, an environmental consulting firm based in St. Paul, Minn., was having response problems with another specialty marketing vendor in Minnesota when she started working with Brandito.

“I’ve never had any complaints with Brandito’s response time,” she said. “It’s phenomenal. Their customer service is what sold me on them.”