

## A LOOK INTO 2020

# NEW YEAR BETTER BUSINESS



We have officially reached the end of yet another decade and looking back, this has been the most successful, growth-inspiring, and lucrative decade in our industry's history. This puts significant pressure on 2020 to continue that upward mobility.

### LOOKING AHEAD

All signs point to an economic slowdown in the year or years ahead. Looking at the alignment of specific catalysts such as Britain's departure from the European Union to the trade tariffs that are beginning to be widely felt, the economy will react naturally, and with some unfortunate consequences. Economic slowdowns and even recessions are something that no one and no industry can avoid. These happen as part of the bigger economics machine. What we can do is prepare. Our industry did an incredible job overall at avoiding mass conflict during the last severe economic collapse of 2008 and 2009. The early assumptions were that the

industry was going to be hard hit. This was a group of small and independent businesses who often by nature are unnecessary victims of economic shifts. However, what was quickly learned was that because the industry was well-aligned to meet the demands of a shifting buyer market, the industry not only maintained, it actually grew during this time. This was primarily because our industry was offering something that couldn't be passed up: the ability to reach a mass audience for a very low cost.

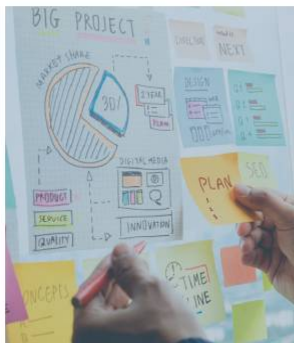
Cost-conscious businesses needed a safe haven, and they found it with promotional products.

But what if we could prepare ourselves based on something other than price? A major initiative for AIM in the coming year is to help our industry as a whole move away from the conversations about cost and price. Yes, we are cost-effective. But that rhetoric is outdated and, in a post-economic recession economy, cost-consciousness has another translation: cheap.



Now is the time to establish our business' New Year's resolutions and focus on what we can do to ensure mutual success!





**SELL BEYOND PRICE**

Price is the most powerful tool in our industry. We can more quickly improve our returns on invested capital through risk-averse opportunities based on our control over our own market. We do this by avoiding being seen as “cheap.” This control is driven by how we establish our margins based on marketplace assumptions, competition adherence, and the demands of the consumer. The industry itself has moved away from being seen as exclusively

the “cost-effective industry.” Our buyers, like general consumers, want choice beyond price. They appreciate connectivity to the marketplace and, in fact, demand it. They also seek reliability in consumption. What we have learned from the most recent economic recovery is that consumers and buyers have become smarter, but not just about price. Buyers are wary of being sold to, but the assumption is still that buyers are in a race to the cheapest price. But what if service outsold any price?

Fast, available consumption has been a central topic of conversation in the industry and especially around AIM as we want to provide as many access points for capturing your client’s and prospect’s attention as possible. But the most critical factor is still the relationship. That is the difference in selling something that has a higher cost but has a naturally assumed higher value. There is a necessity of personalized service in our modern world and this has developed from the disconnect that has been created by the shift to the online marketplace. There is certainly no discounting the ever-present need for online consumption. It has taken our industry a while to understand the importance of a digital presence. But we can learn from the missteps of larger companies outside of our industry over the past decade.

Many assumed that in order to keep up with demand and an increasingly online community, they needed to do two things: lower their cost and go exclusively digital. What we are learning now from a consumer behavior perspective is that too many companies did this, and too quickly. There is a reason that Mom & Pop storefronts are thriving in 2019. This mass exodus of the traditional consumer market left a gap in human need. That gap is interaction. Digital interaction cannot stand in the place of real relationships. In addition, consumers acknowledge that this importance comes with a cost. In fact, cost is not usually top of mind while developing these relationships. Trust in

who someone is doing business with is the real cost of the transaction. Consumers have shown that they are willing to pay a higher price over time for consumption that is not ad hoc.

**Our goal is to give you the time to sell beyond price and focus on the evolution of your business.**

**STRATEGY**

In order to sell beyond price, we must give our customers more of ourselves. Speaking with AIM distributors over the past year, I have learned the most valuable commodity in this industry is time. The more time we have, the more value we assume in our business. AIM’s programs, and specifically AIM’s new strategic programming, are designed to give you and your team more time. Efficiencies are not created naturally and are certainly not created alone. AIM also understands that no marketplace organization is the same. In the coming year, you will have the opportunity to see and be a part of AIM’s strategic programs as we help create a better seller’s marketplace for you.

**Seth Barnett**  
VP, Strategic Partnerships