



Missy Kilpatrick

Jo-An Lantz

Linda Martinelli

Bonni Shevin-Sandy

Teresa Moisant

Mary Ellen Nichols

Cindy Qin

Theresa Roberts

Leanne Schillinger

Paula Shulman

WOMEN TO WATCH

A biker, Bond Girl, tomboy, trap shooter and more ... keep your eye on these female forces to be reckoned with.

BY JENNIFER VISHNEVSKY

If you attended The ASI Show Dallas in February, you likely listened to the keynote by former first lady Laura Bush. She was also on hand for the ASI Women's Summit, but she was hardly the only woman of distinction in attendance.

In fact, the following trailblazers were honored at the Summit as part of a brand-new ASI awards program. These "Women to Watch" were given that designation based on votes from their industry peers. Here are their stand-out stories and unique takes on life and the industry.

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The Biker Chick

Missy Kilpatrick starts her workday bright and early at 4:30 a.m. by corresponding with her counterparts in Italy. “I try to get to them before they get home,” she says. And when she isn’t on the phone with offices in Italy, she’s likely zipping around on her Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

The avid rider joined Castelli North America (*asi/44305*) in 1993 and is now the executive vice president. “I took the chance on a smaller company, thinking that I would have greater opportunities. I was right,” she says. The company started with Kilpatrick and Fran Ford, currently the executive vice president of J. Charles Crystalworks (*asi/62985*). “I was on the ground floor and I grew with the company. I didn’t think I had it in me for sales, but I was completely wrong,” Kilpatrick says.

At Castelli, a supplier of Italian-made appointment books, diaries, notebooks and journals, Kilpatrick has helped lead her team to major success. In fact, sales jumped from \$300,000 to \$8 million between 1993 to 2004. “It was at the height of dot-com. We were selling books through Internet providers, which was a miracle. A lot of people thought that if they were going to use computers, no one would buy books,” she says. She proved them wrong.

Kilpatrick is constantly on the road for sales meetings, trade shows and customer calls. She attributes her honor as a Woman to Watch to this high visibility. As part of her travels, she heads to Italy as many as nine times per year, since Italians “want to see you face to face,” she says.

As if traveling doesn’t keep her busy enough, Kilpatrick has had to revamp the entire product line for 2010 to stay current in the market as a result of consolidating Castelli USA and Castelli Canada into the newly formed Castelli North America. “Last year was really a great time for us to rebuild. We did a lot of marketing to let people know that we were back and better than ever,” she says.

BONUS POINTS

Does Kilpatrick look familiar, but you can’t figure out why? She modeled as a Johnson’s baby for two years. “People saw my bottom on TV,” she says. After she grew out of diapers, she continued to model until she was 12 for Sears and Montgomery Ward.



The Industry Veteran

As a new college graduate with an engineering degree, Jo-an Lantz didn’t expect to find herself in the promotional products industry. Fast-forward 33 years and she’s executive vice president of Geiger (*asi/202900*). “Geiger was the largest employer in Lewiston, ME, and like many other people who graduate, I gravitated to the first job I could get. It was the company and the people that really appealed to me,” she says. As time progressed, Lantz realized that Geiger was a terrific place to work.

“I learned more about the industry and the ability to be so creative. That’s what I learned to love,” she says.

Lantz spends about 50% of her time traveling, either meeting with salespeople and production partners, attending trade shows or working with clients. “When I’m not traveling, I’m working in the main office on everything from mergers and acquisitions to hiring, cuts, spending and plenty of meetings,” she says.

As an industry veteran, Lantz has come to know a lot about what drives success. “So much of business is simply perseverance. Do what you say you’re going to do – and do it very well,” she says.

One major part of her work is encouraging success in others: She and a small group of women in the industry created a leadership and development program for women, which has been in existence for six years.

In addition to earning honors as a past *Counselor International* Person of the Year and inclusion on the *Counselor Power 50* list, Lantz serves on the Presidium of the international group World Advertising Gift Exchange (WAGE) as vice president and the only U.S. member. But even as a Woman to Watch and major award winner, she is still genuinely humble. “I think I get credit for a lot of what other people do. There are so many terrific people that I work with,” she says.

BONUS POINTS

A mom of five, Lantz still finds time to work with charitable groups, like Seacoast Slackers, a running group that helps raise significant funds for small nonprofits by participating in marathons and half-marathons. She’s also an avid reader, and recommends her latest must-read: *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand.



The Million-Dollar Maven

Talk about a great transition. For 27 years, Linda Martinelli worked in her family’s printing business, where she got experience selling office supplies. When the company started selling promotional products, she found herself setting up that side of the business. “In the mid ’90s, I became dissatisfied with the way business was getting done. I had to go through so much red tape. I could never give my customers answers right away. I didn’t feel like I was servicing my customers the way I wanted to,” she says.

Then one day, Martinelli picked up a trade magazine and saw an article about Greg Muzzillo, CEO of Proforma (*asi/300094*). “I called them up and immediately

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made the change. I took a leap of faith. I had three kids and I was a single parent at the time. I look back now and think, ‘what the heck?’” she says.

But things definitely worked out. Martinelli acquired a franchise in March 1998 and set a goal of \$600,000 in sales by the end of that year. She surpassed that goal, big time. As CEO of Proforma Graphic PrintSource (*asi/300143*), she was the first female to achieve Proforma’s Million Dollar Club Member status in 1999, and has been in the club every year since.

Martinelli also simply loves her life. In the mornings, after bringing her husband coffee in bed and watching the news, she heads out for the 45-minute drive from her ranch in the wine country of Temecula, CA, to the office in Corona. She does the vast amount of selling in the office, but she also works

BONUS POINTS

You’ve probably seen her husband, Ron Martinelli, Ph.D., on TV. As a police detective with 22 years of investigative experience, he is also the retained criminologist in residence for the History and Discovery channels. When the couple finds time in their busy careers to travel, they head to their place in Puerto Vallarta and other tropical climates.

with her sales reps to help them attain their goals. “A lot of my time now is mentoring and managing the people that are joining us,” she says.

So what’s the key to Martinelli’s success? “I see myself as a really plain person. But it struck me the other day that I’ve really done a lot in this industry. I never take ‘no’ for an answer. I just do my homework and make it happen,” she says.

The Community Leader

Teresa Moisant worked for several large corporations before she found a job that could keep her interested and continue to challenge her – one in the promotional products field. “I knew some women who were in the industry. They were very successful. I evaluated my background and felt like I could be a success,” she says.

She started her company, Moisant Promotional Products (*asi/275276*), and turned it into one of the fastest-growing businesses in her area, and was recognized by the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce three times. The company has a good mix of large Oklahoma-based corporations as clients, ranging from banks and credit unions to hospitals and oil companies. She has welcomed her two daughters into the company as well, and they both have a corporate background. “I just love selling and handling relationships in the community. I’m letting my daughters make most of the operating decisions and handling employee relations,” she says.

Last year, Moisant’s company sold \$2.5 million. “I’m out with my customers 95% of the day. I’m the idea presenter and my staff writes the orders. My husband was very good at devising the systems for the company,” she says.

Moisant is also a major figure in the community, being very involved with Leadership Okla-



BONUS POINTS

After growing up with brothers, Moisant is a real tomboy. If there’s an Oklahoma sporting event on, she’s watching it. She’s a huge fan of The University of Oklahoma sports teams, especially football and basketball.

homa City. The nonprofit organization selects 50 people each year to develop community leaders and volunteers.

Today Moisant serves as a mentor to other women and encourages others to mentor as well. She continues to speak at trade shows about the challenges that women face in business, along with other topics, and says she’s always found herself in the spotlight, starting as a child: “The nuns used to always say, ‘You need to watch that one.’”

The Global Guru

If you’ve ever conducted any international business, you surely know the name Bonni Shevin-Sandy. She is both vice president of Dard Products (*asi/48500*) and president of Dard Design Inc. The global supplier has been on *Counselor’s* Power 50 List for the past three years. “I think one of the reasons I was selected for this honor is because I am one of the first women to jump into the international industry. I want to be more of a leader than a follower. And I love sharing my experiences. I’m not paranoid about giving up some trade secrets. I’d rather see our industry succeed as a whole,” she says.

Shevin-Sandy represents the third generation of Dard Products that began in 1948 out of the family garage with four styles of keytags. “Every summer of my life, I worked at Dard, whether it was customer service, marketing or trade shows. I sunk my teeth into it at a very early age,” she says.

After Dard was named *Counselor* Family Business of the Year in 2001, Shevin-Sandy launched a new custom-product division of the company, Dard Design, with employees in the U.S., Hong Kong and China.



BONUS POINTS

In addition to working 60-hour weeks and opening international offices, Shevin-Sandy finds time to teach aerobics. She has done so for 23 years now, and it’s her main way to de-stress. The mom of three sons also manages to provide a home-cooked meal for her family every night.

was a 9-million-piece order delivered in 60 days. I got it to them in a few days,” she says. After that, she started making more overseas trips to seek out opportunities. “I figured that I should start doing some creative things for

my customers, so I patented some items,” she says. Specifically, she patented 48 items, including a family of staplers and multipurpose pedometers and won several supplier achievement awards. Most of the items were designed for companies that were merging.

Shevin-Sandy also started exhibiting the items at Hong Kong shows in 2004. “I set up offices in Hong Kong and China because I needed to have feet on the ground for compliance and manufacturing,” she says.

So how did Shevin-Sandy decide to tap into the overseas market? She had a customer approach her with an opportunity for a huge end-user. “I went overseas and found out what they needed, which

The Center of Attention



Mary Ellen Nichols joined Bodek and Rhodes (*asi/40788*) in 1998 when the company was looking to grow their marketing. “When I first came, I realized that many of our customers didn’t know how to promote themselves as apparel providers,” says the director of marketing communications. So, she took on her first major initiative, launching a campaign of flyers, direct-mail letters and fax blasts. “I gave them a whole menu of things to pick from and people went crazy. This had never been done

by an apparel house. We just asked what they wanted and needed,” she says.

Sales grew exponentially. In fact, Nichols helped increase the company’s promotional products sales volume by 27% her first year. “My philosophy has always been to help a customer promote themselves, then they’ll promote us,” she says.

Since then, she’s created the industry’s first marketing menu of promotional tools for customers, which has evolved into a myriad of websites for online ordering and company customization. “We realized the power of electronic marketing and

BONUS POINTS

Giddy up! Nichols’ father was a real cowboy, and she’s become a master at the lasso. Also, next time you’re in the bookstore, you might see one of her page-turners. “I’m going to write a *New York Times* best-seller one of these days. During my husband’s struggle with cancer, I wrote a series of e-mails throughout the process. I plan to publish those,” she says.

refined the tools to help our customers market more economically,” she says.

Nichols spends a lot of time working with the Bodek and Rhodes executive team and sales force to strategize, put together promotions and attend shows. “I love creating promotions that work. It gives me such a high when I can identify an audience, come up with a really cool promotion and bring them the results they want,” she says.

One campaign stands out as Nichols’ most memorable experience on the job. When she first started, the owners of Bodek and Rhodes asked for a really “wow” promotion. She asked them what people didn’t know about the company, and they responded with the tidbit that they had lowered their prices. “They printed a price list, but I knew that they needed a campaign,” she says.

So Nichols took a small Ziploc bag, filled it with soil and stapled it to a card that read, “Dirt Cheap.” She followed up by sending a foam glider with a note that said, “Price Nose Dive.”

The owners looked at Nichols like she was crazy, but calls were up 20% in the first week after the effort. At the next trade show, everything revolved around the dirt mailer. “It changed the whole thinking about Bodek and Rhodes and it made us a player,” she says.

The Numbers Queen

Cindy Qin, who came to the U.S. at age 18, began her career at Sweda (*asi/90305*) in 2004 as director of finance when the company was looking for someone who spoke Chinese. She was promoted to CFO in 2006, then to vice president of operations in 2010, where she’s actively engaged in sales, order management, IT, customer service, shipping, supply-chain management, accounting and executive management.

Qin was an integral contributor in creating Toue, Sweda’s global sourcing arm, which now accounts for more than 10% of total revenues. “Through the economic downturn, our customers were looking for cheaper solutions for the end-users. We just figured that this is going to be the arm that will help our customers utilize our buying leverage. For the customers who use Toue, we’re providing them with quality assurance and direct-buy pricing,” she says.

In late 2008, Qin also spearheaded efforts to ensure Sweda’s new ERP system would enhance the company’s ability to not only serve the marketplace but also increase efficiencies. As a result of her leadership, Sweda has been able to provide an on-time delivery rate of 98.8% two years running, while implementing a 24-hour service program with a 100% on-time track record. “I gathered our employees around to come up with a measure to lead to on-time goals for the company. There was no confidence that we could deliver a goal of on-time delivery, but then we started to put ourselves to the task. It was very memorable and I have a high sense of accomplishment from that,” she says.

Sweda’s QCA accreditation process was also championed by Qin, and she was able to motivate the entire management team to accomplish the accreditation by December 2009.

Further, it was Qin who initiated the idea for the company’s most successful marketing promotion: “Sweda’s Case Study Challenge” which won the *Counselor* 2010 Spirit Award for Most Successful Supplier Self-Promotion. “Around the same time that the economy took a downturn, we were thinking about innovative solutions to promote ourselves,” she says. “Case studies always sell, so we just figured that we needed a story. What’s a better way to do that than to invite everybody to write about Sweda products and services?”

BONUS POINTS

Qin is the mother of a boy and a girl and embraces the importance of family time. “We enjoy hiking, so when we go on vacation, we go to national parks. Last weekend, we went to Joshua Tree National Park,” she says.



The Savvy Seller

Theresa Roberts started selling office supplies and equipment from her kitchen table in Grand Junction, CO, in 1985. After moving to Arizona, she decided to work for a company based in the area. “I realized that I needed people around me. I went on to another national firm before starting my distributorship in 1995,” she says.

Roberts grew her business from \$1.2 million to \$5 million-plus in 2008 and expanded operations to five major Western cities, at which time she sold it to Boundless Network (*asi/143717*). She has been a top producer for Boundless ever since. “I realized that my passion was with the customer. As I grew my business, it was great and I really enjoyed it, but then I felt as though I was losing my creative edge. I was spending too much time on that administrative side,” she says.

When she went to Boundless, Roberts had the opportunity to develop some large-scale programs, custom design and employee safety and recognition programs. She does a lot of work with technology, automotive and pharmaceutical clients.

Roberts has received plenty of honors: She was recognized by *Arizona Women’s Magazine* for six consecutive years as a Top 10 distributor in Arizona, and has been a part of the ASI Multi-Million Dollar Roundtable for 14 years. “I’ve mentored quite a few people in this industry. I think what makes me a woman to watch is that I have passion for this industry. I really enjoy the business that I’m in,” she says.

BONUS POINTS

When Roberts began her career, she met her husband, Fran Ford, executive vice president of J. Charles Crystalworks (*asi/62985*). At their wedding, they had a special musical guest: “One of my friends is married to a friend of Nils Lofgren, from the E Street Band. So he played at my wedding,” she says. Once a year, the happy couple visits their favorite spot, Ireland.



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The Junior-Class President

Leanne Schillinger's first experience with selling promotional products was when she was junior-class president in high school and came up with the idea to sell Wildcat hats, buttons and pom-poms for a fundraiser. "We received direct-mail catalogs that we worked through. We needed to raise money, so it was a natural fit for me to do that," she says.

Schillinger remembers her first taste of creativity in this industry: "I knew what I wanted the hat to look like specifically. Back then, it was before the days of having Illustrator,

but I remember the hats coming back and not looking like what I had envisioned. That was one of those times that I learned you have to be so specific," she says.

It took a few years and some turns along the way before Schillinger ended up as an account executive at American Solutions for Business (*asi/120075*) and started putting her sales skills and creativity to work in the industry for a living. She works with health-care accounts, state organizations, manufacturing companies, retailers and hospitality. Since she works from home, it's important for her to stay organized. "I'm always trying to keep things in order, scheduling appointments and getting out to see customers," she says.

BONUS POINTS

Watch your step, because Schillinger is a state champion trap shooter. "It's a mental sport and you're competing against yourself," she says.



Seeing the customers is the highlight of her job. "I love creating relationships and helping people plan their events. I work with organizations that can get excited about their promo products," she says. She has become one of ASB's top sales associates and serves on the ASB Sales Advisory Team and several other committees.

One of Schillinger's greatest business successes has been developing an online store that services a large hospital with over 1,000 warehoused and on-demand items. "We have turned their buying methods into a dream for them, making it so easy for their departments to access everything they need from us in one simple place. That was very satisfying to know that we have made their jobs easier," she says.

Schillinger is exactly where she wants to be. "This business has come so natural to me. I feel like I've always had insight on what is coming around the bend. I can spot trends and know where ASB needs to jump in and focus," she says.

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The Pioneer

Paula Shulman, a former ASI Woman of Distinction and member of the *Counselor* Power 50, began her career at Prime Resources (*asi/79530*) in 1981 as a receptionist. She got a call from Bob Lederer, president of Prime, asking her to join the company. “He didn’t really know what I would be doing, but I was willing to take a shot with a new company. I learned marketing and sales on the job,” she says. She attributes a lot of her business skills to Lederer’s mentoring.

Shulman soon proved her knowledge of the company and was promoted to director of marketing, then to national sales manager and vice president of sales – the only female vice president in the history of Prime.

Having been one of the first female executives in the industry, Shulman has created catalogs, media advertisements and helped to grow Prime’s marketing department from one person, in the early days, to the current large and fully staffed group of marketers. “A lot of marketing is a gut reaction,” she says.

Shulman also created a national sales force and trained and traveled with them across the country. She’s been an integral part of Prime’s growth and proud of its achievement in becoming a *Counselor* Top 40 supplier.

Shulman has obviously made her mark, and often tells people the “P” in the company name not only stands for “Prime,” but for “Paula,” as well. “I wear a diamond ‘P’ around my neck,” she says.

There are not many women who have spent their entire career at one company, but Shulman says, “I just do the best I can do. I need to know personally that I’ve achieved excellence, but it’s not about the awards. There was a woman in the factory who came into my office and told me that she really looked up to me. It struck me that you can be a role model all the time, even if you don’t know it.” ▲

Jennifer Vishnevsky is a staff writer for Advantages.



BONUS POINTS

It’s time to head into the attic and look for your old movie posters. “I was a Bond girl. Back in my 20s, I modeled for book covers and posters for the James Bond movies,” Shulman says.

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