



# COUNSELOR

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY



## 85 Top Companies



## ROAD TRIP!

3 Editors • 11 States • 14 Great Workplaces  
8 Days To Learn Their Secrets



**Growth Mode**  
Industry Expands In  
Second Quarter

**ASI Chicago**  
Mike Ditka's  
Keys To Success

**Second Act**  
Truck Driver To Ad  
Specialty Rep

**The Haggler**  
7 Ways To Win  
Any Negotiation

# 2011 COUNSELOR Best PLACES to work

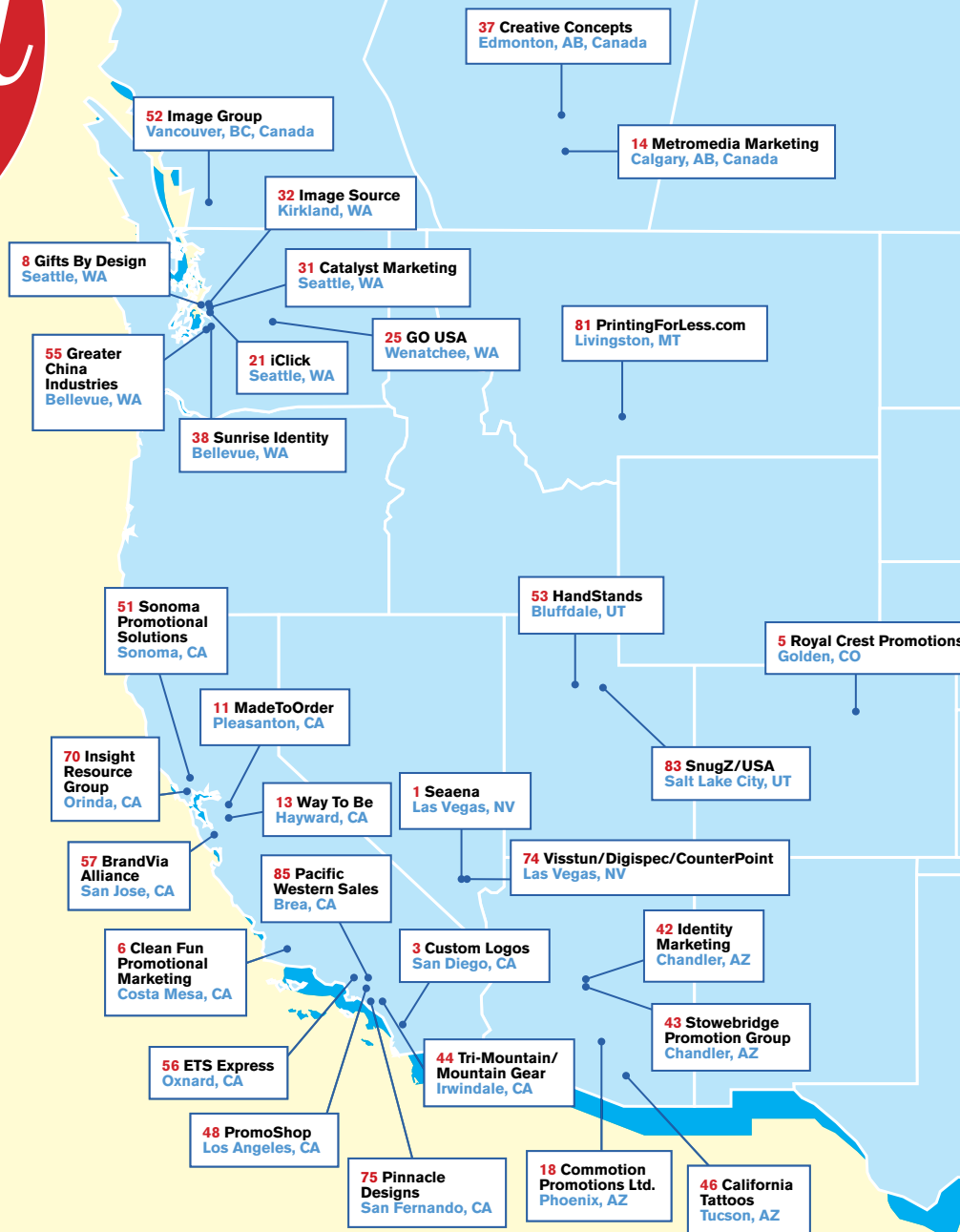
Counselor honors the 85 best companies to work for in the ad specialty industry.

By Andy Cohen; Research by Quantum Workplace

They come from places like Woodstock, IL, and Toronto, Canada. Their staffs range from 10 to 500 people. They're woman-owned, family-owned and even employee-owned. Diverse as they are, these organizations are the industry's Best Places to Work.

The companies on this map – ranked from one to 85 – all share one thing in common: Their employees love going to work there every day. They told us exactly that in an in-depth survey process – completed by 4,630 industry employees – conducted by outside research firm Quantum Workplace. Each company is shown at its location in North America, along with its rank on the list.

Turn the page to view the complete ranked list. Also on the following few pages, you'll find three themes that clearly run through the companies on this list: teamwork, recognition, and of course, fun. Take note to begin plotting your own path to creating a Best Place to Work.





## TOP WORKPLACE TRAITS

# Power Of Being A Team

The leaders of companies on the Best Places to Work list know one thing more than any other: Their employees need to feel connected to something bigger than just their day-to-day jobs. To ensure this, they foster teamwork, share company goals and communicate with employees as much as humanly possible. Plus, they give staffers the ability to influence the company's overall decisions.

It's an approach that Metromedia Marketing (*asi/268940*), the number 14 company on the Best Places to Work list, definitely espouses. The distributor splits its more than 20 employees into committees that brainstorm ideas for corporate charities, fun activities, client events, and even a shopping club to source new items for the company's salespeople to use as self-promotions. But the connection to the company for employees goes even further:

Once a year, Metromedia hosts a weekend retreat for all of its employees and their spouses – it's a time for celebration, learning and building on team spirit.

### Top 10 Small Companies

The following ranked companies within the 85 Best Places to Work have fewer than 50 employees.

1. **Seaena**
2. **Albrecht & Co.**
3. **Custom Logos**
4. **Royal Crest Promotions**
5. **Clean Fun Promotional Marketing**
6. **Hirsch Gift**
7. **Gifts By Design**
8. **The Book Company**
9. **New Clients Promotional Marketing**
10. **Metropak**

### Top 10 Mid-Size Companies

The following ranked companies within the 85 Best Places to Work have between 50 and 100 employees.

1. **American Ad Bag**
2. **Overture Premiums & Promotions**
3. **Bluegrass Promotional Marketing**
4. **Genumark Promotional Merchandise**
5. **ePromos Promotional Products**
6. **Sunrise Identity**
7. **Axis Promotions**
8. **eCompanyStore**
9. **California Tattoos**
10. **Promo Shop**

### Top 10 Large Companies

The following ranked companies within the 85 Best Places to Work have more than 100 employees.

1. **The Vernon Company**
2. **iPROMOTEu**
3. **Indoff**
4. **Tri-Mountain**
5. **Proforma**
6. **ETS Express**
7. **Visstun/Digispec/Counterpoint**
8. **Outdoor Cap**
9. **PrintingForLess.com**
10. **Snugz/USA**

## 2011 Best Places To Work

- |  |   |  |   |
|--|---|--|---|
| 1 <b>Seaena</b> <i>asi/47782</i>                             | 12 <b>Metropak</b> <i>asi/70830</i>                           | 23 <b>CE Competitive Edge</b> <i>asi/166085</i>              | 34 <b>Brand Fuel Promotions</b> <i>asi/145025</i>       |
| 2 <b>Albrecht &amp; Co.</b> <i>asi/116308</i>                | 13 <b>Way To Be</b> <i>asi/355980</i>                         | 24 <b>iPROMOTEu</b> <i>asi/232119</i>                        | 35 <b>Sonic Promos</b> <i>asi/329865</i>                |
| 3 <b>Custom Logos</b> <i>asi/173183</i>                      | 14 <b>Metromedia Marketing</b> <i>asi/268940</i>              | 25 <b>GO USA</b> <i>asi/208784</i>                           | 36 <b>Motivators</b> <i>asi/277780</i>                  |
| 4 <b>American Ad Bag</b> <i>asi/35290</i>                    | 15 <b>JH Specialty</b> <i>asi/232445</i>                      | 26 <b>Team Mates</b> <i>asi/90674</i>                        | 37 <b>Creative Concepts</b> <i>asi/170480</i>           |
| 5 <b>Royal Crest Promotions</b> <i>asi/83740</i>             | 16 <b>Overture Premium &amp; Promotions</b> <i>asi/288473</i> | 27 <b>Indoff</b> <i>asi/231011</i>                           | 38 <b>Sunrise Identity</b> <i>asi/339206</i>            |
| 6 <b>Clean Fun Promotional Marketing</b> <i>asi/162979</i>   | 17 <b>National Gift Card</b> <i>asi/73011</i>                 | 28 <b>LogoVision</b> <i>asi/255309</i>                       | 39 <b>The Icebox</b> <i>asi/229395</i>                  |
| 7 <b>Hirsch Gift</b> <i>asi/61005</i>                        | 18 <b>Commotion Promotions Ltd.</b> <i>asi/166010</i>         | 29 <b>Bluegrass Promotional Marketing</b> <i>asi/141964</i>  | 40 <b>Mac Mannes</b> <i>asi/259100</i>                  |
| 8 <b>Gifts By Design</b> <i>asi/205947</i>                   | 19 <b>The Vernon Company</b> <i>asi/351700</i>                | 30 <b>Genumark Promotional Merchandise</b> <i>asi/204588</i> | 41 <b>Axis Promotions</b> <i>asi/128263</i>             |
| 9 <b>The Book Company</b> <i>asi/41010</i>                   | 20 <b>Signet Inc.</b> <i>asi/326636</i>                       | 31 <b>Catalyst Marketing</b> <i>asi/159067</i>               | 42 <b>Identity Marketing</b> <i>asi/229857</i>          |
| 10 <b>NewClients Promotional Marketing</b> <i>asi/282470</i> | 21 <b>iClick</b> <i>asi/62124</i>                             | 32 <b>Image Source</b> <i>asi/230121</i>                     | 43 <b>Stowebridge Promotion Group</b> <i>asi/337500</i> |
| 11 <b>MadeToOrder</b> <i>asi/259540</i>                      | 22 <b>CredentialExpress</b> <i>asi/47204</i>                  | 33 <b>ePromos Promotional Products</b> <i>asi/188515</i>     | 44 <b>Tri-Mountain/Mountain Gear</b> <i>asi/92125</i>   |



“Our company has a great culture; everyone comes to work with a smile and is happy to see their ‘second family,’” says Laura Banyai, who holds the title of Customer Exhilaration Officer for Metromedia. “Employees enjoy coming to work because they know it is a place they feel comfortable and is filled with people who make professional and personal connections.”

Employees also like coming to work when they know they have the respect and attention of management. Supplier Royal Crest Promotions (*asi/83740*), number five on the Best Places to Work list, makes sure that its employees know they are empowered to make decisions. The key is that staffers know that management trusts their decisions and wants them to take ownership of their specific parts of the business. “The thinking process behind this management style is that it eliminates the need to micromanage people to keep departments functioning,” says Traci Pegg, marketing representative for Royal Crest. “Management would rather spend time

exploring other opportunities and goals. In this company, every person has the desire to continue to add value and contribute.”

To help foster that kind of environment, some companies on the Best Places to Work list, like Gifts By Design (*asi/205947*), number eight, even bring in outside consultants. The Seattle-based distributor hired a consultant recently to improve communication at the company. The consultant led a variety of exercises designed to identify any communication issues, and then provided tools to help staffers work through any challenges.

“This had a huge effect on the staff and it really increased the trust level, and helped us all feel even better about our workplace,” says Jamie Stone, owner of Gifts By Design. “It also seemed to have a direct effect on our bottom line, as our sales went up the following months. Every employee here has a voice, and knows that their opinion and their ideas matter. This gives people a lot of power and control over their work lives.”

## Best Companies For Employee Loyalty

The top 10 firms, ranked by how much loyalty employees feel toward the companies.

1. Seaena
2. Custom Logos
3. Clean Fun Promotional Marketing
4. American Ad Bag
5. Albrecht & Co.
6. Royal Crest Promotions
7. Metromedia Marketing
8. Gifts By Design
9. Hirsch Gift
10. The Book Company

- |   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| <b>45 eCompanyStore</b><br><i>asi/185782</i>            | <b>57 BrandVia Alliance</b><br><i>asi/145037</i>             | <b>67 Unlimited Promotions</b><br><i>asi/349939</i>              | <b>77 BrandAlliance Ontario</b><br><i>asi/230189</i>          |
| <b>46 California Tattoos</b><br><i>asi/43530</i>        | <b>58 Diversified Marketing Strategies</b> <i>asi/181308</i> | <b>68 Show Your Logo</b><br><i>asi/326179</i>                    | <b>78 Bob Lilly Professional Promotions</b> <i>asi/254138</i> |
| <b>47 Boundless Network</b><br><i>asi/143717</i>        | <b>59 Americo Manufacturing</b><br><i>asi/35750</i>          | <b>69 Promo Depot</b> <i>asi/104418</i>                          | <b>79 Outdoor Cap Company</b><br><i>asi/75420</i>             |
| <b>48 PromoShop</b> <i>asi/300446</i>                   | <b>60 CompleteSource</b><br><i>asi/525011</i>                | <b>70 Insight Resource Group</b><br><i>asi/231569</i>            | <b>80 CauseKeepers</b> <i>asi/159211</i>                      |
| <b>49 HDS Marketing</b> <i>asi/216807</i>               | <b>61 Pinnacle Promotions</b><br><i>asi/295986</i>           | <b>71 Bay State Specialty</b><br><i>asi/38980</i>                | <b>81 PrintingForLess.com</b><br><i>asi/79558</i>             |
| <b>50 Cavanaugh Marketing Network</b> <i>asi/159262</i> | <b>62 Walker-Clay</b> <i>asi/354530</i>                      | <b>72 Mercury Promotions &amp; Fulfillment</b> <i>asi/267770</i> | <b>82 RIGHTSLEEVE</b> <i>asi/308922</i>                       |
| <b>51 Sonoma Promotional Solutions</b> <i>asi/88188</i> | <b>63 Match-Up Promotions</b><br><i>asi/264230</i>           | <b>73 Showdown Displays</b><br><i>asi/87188</i>                  | <b>83 SnugZ/USA</b> <i>asi/88060</i>                          |
| <b>52 Image Group</b> <i>asi/230059</i>                 | <b>64 14 West LLC</b> <i>asi/197092</i>                      | <b>74 Visstun/Digispec/CounterPoint</b> <i>asi/49716</i>         | <b>84 Ariel Premium Supply</b><br><i>asi/36730</i>            |
| <b>53 HandStands</b> <i>asi/59525</i>                   | <b>65 CSE</b> <i>asi/155807</i>                              | <b>75 Pinnacle Designs</b><br><i>asi/78140</i>                   | <b>85 Pacific Western Sales</b><br><i>asi/75731</i>           |
| <b>54 Proforma</b> <i>asi/300094</i>                    | <b>66 The WOV-IN Group</b><br><i>asi/92980</i>               | <b>76 GatewayCDI</b> <i>asi/202515</i>                           |   |
| <b>55 Greater China Industries</b><br><i>asi/58135</i>  |  |  |   |
| <b>56 ETS Express</b> <i>asi/51197</i>                  |  |  |   |

TOP WORKPLACE TRAITS

# Recognition Creates Loyalty

Another trait common to great workplaces is that management continuously recognizes the efforts and successes of its employees. It's that recognition that deepens employees' connections to the company and makes them feel valued. San Diego-based distributor firm Custom Logos (*asi/173183*), ranked number three on the Best Places to Work list, makes sure that it consistently recognizes and honors its employees.

In addition to its regular holiday parties (which all feature lots of food and an open bar, by the way), Custom Logos hosts quarterly events that in the past year have included a mountain hike, a roller-skating party and a bowling party. At one recent quarterly meeting, each staff member was handed a crisp \$100 bill as a thank you for his or her loyalty and to celebrate the recent success of the company.

"We consistently make an effort to reward, praise and thank our staff for a job well done," says Custom Logos' Ryan Kaback. "The results can be found in the willingness by everyone to service our customers at the highest level possible and the fact that the majority of our staff has been with us for many years."

It's a sentiment that's shared by the

number-two-ranked company on the Best Places to Work list: Albrecht & Co. (*asi/116308*). Owner Fred Albrecht says that the company makes sure to recognize its

rather than interchangeable drill bits."

Another distributor, MadeToOrder (*asi/259540*), number 11 on the Best Places to Work rankings, holds an annual event that

goes a long way toward recognizing its whole sales force. They have an annual sales banquet at Morton's Steak House in Las Vegas where they celebrate in a private room with great wines, gifts and recognition for the sales force. This year was a Mont Blanc theme with fine writing instruments and watches for the top performers. The whole theme was carried over into their sales meeting the next day where each of the sales partners did a presentation for \$5,000 in "VC" funding. They had to come up with an idea and ask the rest of the sales partners to vote on whether they get the funding for the idea. All funds had to be spent on projects by July 1, and the result was not only a fun event for everyone, but also an opportunity to recognize

and share great ideas.

"MadeToOrder is a challenging yet comfortable place to be employed," says MadeToOrder's vice president Barbara Brown. "We work hard to encourage collaboration, and sales partners rely on each other and share ideas, skills and encouragement."

## Best Companies For Employee Value

Employees rate their companies on how valuable they feel to the overall organization. Here are the top 10 companies.

1. Custom Logos
2. Seaena
3. Albrecht & Co
4. American Ad Bag
5. Clean Fun Promotional Marketing
6. Hirsch Gift
7. Royal Crest Promotions
8. New Clients Promotional Marketing
9. Gifts By Design
10. MadeToOrder

## Best Companies For Recognition

The following 10 firms were rated the best by their employees for how they recognize staffers when they contribute to the organization's success.

1. Albrecht & Co.
2. Seaena
3. Custom Logos
4. Hirsch Gift
5. American Ad Bag
6. Clean Fun Promotional Marketing
7. Royal Crest Promotions
8. Way To Be
9. Gifts By Design
10. New Clients Promotional Marketing

staffers often and to show them the respect they deserve as valuable contributors to the organization. "Our main method to retain employees is to treat them with respect and include them in the overall goals of the company," he says. "Our employees are treated like family and as valued individuals

TOP WORKPLACE TRAITS

# Happy Employees Equal Happy Customers

On the agenda for most of the Best Places to Work companies – as regularly as possible – is fun. These are organizations that fully know that the happier their employees are the better their businesses will be. And to make their people happy, they're often hosting fun events.

Like the Spa Day that The Book Company (*asi/41010*), which is ranked number nine on the Best Places to Work list, recently held for its employees. The supplier firm closed its doors at noon on a Friday, had a sushi lunch in an outdoor garden of an upscale

spa and then each employee was treated to 90 minutes of spa treatments – anything they wanted including massages, facials, manicures, pedicures and hot shaves for men.

"The event continues to reap rewards for us through positive feedback, new-hire recruitment, team bonding, and of course, continued talk of how to top Spa Day," says Doug Greenhut, president of The Book Company. "We offer a laid-back, casual and easygoing atmosphere, combined with a serious and professional work ethic. All of our employees know that if the

company does well, everyone will benefit.”

The Vernon Company (*asi/351700*), ranked number 19 overall and first in the large companies listed in the Best Places to Work, also espouses the benefits of fun through team-building events. This summer, Vernon launched a full-scale wellness initiative and instituted a Wellness Council to oversee corporate health activities. The council recently conducted an employee-wide survey to gauge awareness and interest from staff and is planning a number of programs to address employee health and wellness concerns. From the survey feedback, Vernon just opened a new employee Fitness Center, has conducted complete wellness screenings for employees and switched to healthier options in its vending machines.

The company also announced a completely tobacco-free campus effort, effective November 1. Upcoming initiatives include hosting health fairs, offering healthy cooking classes and exercise programs and initiating a campaign to encourage drinking more water. In addition to the wellness effort, Vernon’s activity committee plans several fun events for employees each year, including a summer ice cream social, an annual garage sale, an annual holiday luncheon, a Valentine’s Day chili and cinnamon roll party, local nonprofit fundraising efforts for Relay for Life, United Way and the Salvation Army and much more.

“Through all of these efforts, Vernon is showing its commitment to causes that are important to the company and its employees,” says Andrea Smith, the company’s industry relations manager. “Working at Vernon is like being part of a big family.”

### Best Companies For Manager Effectiveness

Here are the top 10 firms for how employees rated their managers.

1. **Seaena**
2. **Custom Logos**
3. **Albrecht & Co.**
4. **Hirsch Gift**
5. **Royal Crest Promotions**
6. **New Clients Promotional Marketing**
7. **Gifts By Design**
8. **Clean Fun Promotional Marketing**
9. **Metropak**
10. **The Book Company**

### Best Companies For Leadership Trust

The top 10 firms, ranked by how much trust employees have in senior leaders.

1. **Seaena**
2. **Hirsch Gift**
3. **Custom Logos**
4. **The Book Company**
5. **Royal Crest Promotions**
6. **Albrecht & Co.**
7. **Way To Be**
8. **MadeToOrder**
9. **New Clients Promotional Marketing**
10. **American Ad Bag**

## How We Did It

The Best Places to Work program involved an in-depth survey process developed by *Counselor’s* research partner for this project, Quantum Workplace. The process began in March with a nomination period that involved industry firms initially nominating themselves for the contest. More than 250 companies completed the initial nomination process.

Then, employees of each company completed a 37-question survey about their experience working at that organization. The survey measured 10 different areas: team effectiveness, retention risk (employee loyalty), alignment with goals (does employee understand goals of company?), trust with coworkers, individual contribution (does the company adequately recognize employees?), manager effectiveness, trust in senior leaders, feeling valued (does the company invest in employee success?), satisfaction with current role, and people practices (satisfaction with company benefits).

Ultimately, about 150 industry companies began

the survey process with their employees. Surveys were administered between May 1 and June 17 through a secure, online site created by Quantum. In instances where certain employees couldn’t get to a computer, paper surveys were conducted through the mail. Also, the survey was translated into Spanish for non-English-speaking workers.

After the surveys were completed, Quantum scored all of the responses and all questions on the survey were weighted evenly. Quantum then presented *Counselor* with a ranking of all the companies that qualified for inclusion in the program. To qualify, each company had to meet a certain benchmark percentage of the amount of employees who responded to the survey (this was based on a sliding scale depending on how many people a company employs).

*Counselor* then took the top 85 companies from Quantum’s scored rankings and is honoring those organizations as this year’s Best Places to Work in the ad specialty industry.