Letter from the Publisher

In conjunction with our annual “100 Fastest Growing Private Companies” List, we decided this year to change things up a bit and celebrate a few of the companies from that prestigious List that have emerged as genuine “disruptors.”

So what does it take to be a disruptor? Ingenuity, creativity, game-changing innovation, outside of the box thinking, maverick leadership, trend-setting practices, and an attitude that blends a constant eye toward the future and a refusal to settle for mediocrity. It’s the blend of qualities that made Apple, Microsoft, Tesla, Ring and other household names what they are today.

The Los Angeles region seems to embrace and produce fast-growing disruptive companies more than any other place. There are quite a few that are doing incredible work right now. In recognition of their accomplishments, we’ve featured all 17 finalists and our six honorees on the following pages.

Our Disruptor of the Year, Innovator Award, Accelerator Award, RSM Middle Market Award, Social Responsibility Award and Sustainability Award were all presented to their worthy recipients on November 4th as part of our special online event. Safe interviews were conducted with each CEO via Zoom. We’ve produced a video montage for our readers to get to know them better. The videos can be found online at: labusinessjournal.com/bizevents.

Congratulations to all of this year’s Disruptors and thanks for the inspiration!

Best regards,

Josh Schimmels
Publisher & CEO
We're up to speed, so you can go full speed.

SEE CHALLENGES BEFORE THEY'RE CHALLENGING.

To make confident decisions about the future, middle market leaders need a different kind of advisor. One who starts by understanding where you want to go and then brings the ideas and insights of an experienced global team to help get you there.

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CAULIPOWER was born on a Pinterest fail. As the mom of two boys with celiac disease – an autoimmune disease leaving their bodies unable to process gluten – Gail Becker tried desperately to find nutritious, gluten-free options that weren’t filled with fat, sugar, salt and calories. Frustrated, she turned to a like-minded community of healthy hackers and stumbled upon recipes (lots of them) for cauliflower crust pizza. Becker’s creation tasted just fine, but it looked awful, her kitchen was a disaster and she had spent 90 minutes she didn’t have making a pizza crust.

Becker figured she probably wasn’t alone and in 2016 left her job as President of Edelman to take the entrepreneurial dive and create CAULIPOWER. Now CAULIPOWER is on a mission to reinvent our most favorite foods, one healthy meal hack at a time. CAULIPOWER’s first meal hack, cauliflower crust pizza, created a white-hot category right out of the gate. Today, CAULIPOWER is America’s favorite cauliflower crust pizza, the #1 better-for-you pizza, #1 gluten-free pizza, and fastest-growing frozen pizza brand in the U.S. In addition to cauliflower crust pizzas, the CAULIPOWER family of vegetable-forward meal hacks now includes baked not fried chicken tenders, flavored riced cauliflower, cauliflower tortillas, and sweet potato toast. CAULIPOWER is innovating the frozen food aisle – in more than 25,000 retail stores.

To this day, the company’s mission is to eliminate the need for consumers to choose between taste, convenience, and health. Plus, every CAULIPOWER purchase benefits the American Heart Association Teaching Gardens Network, a program installing edible teaching gardens in underserved public schools.
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INNOVATOR AWARD

HOPSKIPDRIVE

What started as the struggle of three working moms trying to get their busy kids to and from school and all their activities more than five years ago, has grown into a proven transportation solution that helps schools, families, organizations, and government agencies give kids easier access to the opportunities they deserve.

HopSkipDrive’s “mom DNA” laid the foundation of extensive safety measures and attention to detail. The company added technology and logistics to build a robust system that enables a seamless network of thousands of attentive CareDrivers. Together, this is the engine that powers a unique, proven solution for some of the largest school districts and social services agencies in the nation.

HopSkipDrive has always been dedicated to making a difference in the lives of children and families. The company founders, and entire team understand that transportation can be the difference between success and struggle, which is why they established the company mission to use technology, operational expertise, and new thinking to help kids reach their full potential by providing a safe, dependable way to get them where they need to be. HopSkipDrive’s innovative technology platform optimizes routes, ensures kids are never left waiting, and is totally turnkey. And no other alternative transportation solution utilizes HopSkipDrive’s powerful Safe Ride Support system, including advanced telemetrics, to ensure total ride visibility and safe driving behavior. Users can easily build, edit and cancel one-time and repeating rides within minutes in the company’s easy-to-use, intuitive platform.

INNOVATOR AWARD

CALDERA MEDICAL INC.

In 2002, Caldera Medical was founded to bring differentiated technology to an emerging market. While large multinational corporations dominate the medical device industry, Caldera Medical foresaw an opportunity in the female pelvic health arena to form close relationships with surgeons and to build a company around this principle. Surgeon relationships continue to be the company touchstone, inspiring Caldera’s team to make life better for surgeons, the facilities that they operate in, and the patients they care for.

Caldera Medical concentrates exclusively on women’s health applications. Focus is one of Caldera’s hallmarks. The company is dedicated to improving the quality of life for women. It develops and markets differentiated surgical implants specifically for the treatment of stress urinary incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse. Today, Caldera’s products are used by urogynecologists, gynecologists, and urologists worldwide.

EPIC FREIGHT SOLUTIONS

At Epic Freight Solutions, the team puts in countless hours interviewing clients finding out what they want, how they want to be serviced, and why it all matters. Epic also understands that client service and superior performance go hand in hand. This feedback has led to the company’s emphasis on providing a unique, integrated freight solution. This system allows customers to book air, ground, domestic and international freight in one place.

Epic Freight Solutions also provides 24/7/365 proactive communication, via dedicated client service teams and technology, so customers can get in front of issues and plan accordingly. The company's technology provides superior visibility into shipment data and transportation spend data so customers can make better business decisions. The provided 24/7/365 proactive communication, tracking and tracing updates throughout the shipment lifecycle, transportation optimization and integrity with dedicated client support teams are a constant.
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I
n 2012, Los Angeles Distributing Company was founded with a simple mission: to supply businesses in Southern California with healthier snacks and beverages. Eight years later, the company has built an amazing reputation that is rooted on simplicity, quality, and customer service. Over the years, LAD has expanded into new territories and product categories with many additions on the horizon. Five years ago, LAD added refrigeration by implementing cold chain infrastructure to support this growing and now dominant segment. LAD’s product focus revolves around three pillars – refrigeration, plant-based, and hemp-derived items. The company is building out a new pillar in response to support this growing and now dominant segment.

LOS ANGELES DISTRIBUTING COMPANY

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ACCELERATOR AWARD

ERAVENT INC.

E ravant is an award-winning engineering firm known for changing the millimeter-wave components market through standardization and borrowed practices of scale.

Heavy investment in product development continues to deliver first-to-market designs that enable customers working across all millimeter-wave applications. Eravant is woman-owned, U.S.-owned, and ITAR-registered. Eravant develops high-performance microwave and millimeter wave components and subassemblies for commercial and military system applications. The company’s catalog of products is organized into ten families based on functionality, and it doesn’t end there. Eravant is also committed to designing and manufacturing custom products to meet customers’ specifications or assisting customers to define their system products by using the most available microwave and millimeter wave technologies.

The company is on a mission to design and manufacture a wide array of high-performance components and subassemblies that support engineers working on traditional and emerging applications for millimeter-wave technology. Eravant is committed to delivering a quality product as it is to delivering a quality customer experience.

Eravant was built around the idea that purpose can be found in the pursuit of potential. Originally established as SAGE Millimeter, Inc. in 2011 by two founders who wanted to continue serving the industry that gave them their life’s work, the duo imagined creating a space where they could share their knowledge with the next generation of RF hardware engineers. Today, Eravant’s team is comprised of men and women of diverse backgrounds, all of them key in realizing the mission to help customers enable the technology of the future.

Traffic Management, Inc. started with very humble beginnings in 1995 by brothers Chris and Jonathan Spano in their great grandmother’s garage. They were only teenagers, with a handful of employees. Today, TMI is the largest privately-owned minority business based in the United States. TMI is well-equipped to provide best in class products and services that include traffic control services, engineering, equipment rentals, product sales, sign manufacturing/installation and 24/7 emergency dispatch response.

T MI utilizes a proprietary technology which is a shared, yet secure, cloud-based communication and project management system called “TM-Soft.” This enables TMI clients to share real time needs in terms of changing equipment, driving directions, traffic control, crews as well as crew contact information, documents, and location maps that show existing or new conditions overview of jobs – no matter how complex.

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Scorpion Inc. is a full-service marketing and technology company focused on being a great partner for businesses, professionals, and organizations across the legal, home services, healthcare, and franchise industries. The company’s goal has always been to help people reach their goals, and to solve problems for people. The problems may have changed, the people Scorpion is solving them for have changed, and the tools it uses to solve the problems have changed. One thing that hasn’t changed is Scorpion’s relentless drive to see its clients succeed and solve their problems.

Scorpion provides full-service digital marketing and technology solutions. Since 2001, Scorpion has made it its mission to help clients future-proof their business through an improved digital presence that drives revenue growth. At Scorpion, the team believes in going above and beyond in everything it does because they know the more effort and energy the team invests, the better the results will be for Scorpion’s 10,000+ clients.

Headquartered in Valencia, Scorpion is devoted exclusively to web design and internet marketing for businesses across the nation. The company has developed online tools to help handle all facets of its clients’ online marketing campaigns, including content development, search engine optimization, paid search advertising and conversion metrics. Plus, its award-winning website designs and cutting-edge marketing strategies help our clients gain online exposure, convert leads, and grow their businesses. Services include website design and development; online marketing; search engine optimization; pay-per-click; advertising; online reputation management; video production; content management; and social media.

Dollar for dollar, affiliate marketing is the most profitable performance revenue channel for e-commerce companies. Since 2011, Advertise Purple has successfully facilitated affiliate growth and management for today’s leading e-commerce companies and has the expertise and dedication required to maximize profitability, and grow brands on the leading consumer websites in the world.

With years of successful industry management experience and close to $1.3 billion in incremental affiliate revenue driven, Advertise Purple is revered by affiliate networks and top affiliates as the leading affiliate management company online. Its approach is to ensure clients will be a top advertiser in their vertical, and if Advertise Purple cannot ensure this, it won’t take them on as a client. Through close affiliate relationships, proven strategy, and proprietary management tools, its affiliate management platform has proven to be the best in the business.

SADA Systems believes that it’s not enough to migrate to the cloud, it’s about what you do once you’re there. The company helps its clients by accelerating application development; advancing productivity and collaboration; and using client data as a competitive edge. When it comes to Google Cloud, SADA is not an add-on, it is a must-have, driving the business performance of clients with its power.

SADA is grounded by its core values with ‘Do the Right Thing’ as the true north in everything the company does. When it comes to the Google Cloud ecosystem, SADA helps clients change the way they work, harnessing the power of what technology can do. With over 20 years of experience in technology consulting and IT services, SADA stands ready to tackle clients’ biggest ambitions and boldest goals.
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AWARD

GOLDEN STAR TECHNOLOGIES, INC.

Golden Star Technologies Inc. (GST) is a woman-owned business that helps its clients stay ahead of the technology curve, connecting them to advanced end-to-end IT and AV solutions and services tailored to meet their needs. GST’s global expertise inspires confidence and creates lasting relationships. As the leading technology integrator, GST works with key industry manufacturers to provide you with comprehensive and creative solutions that include the latest technologies, products, and design methodologies. Business operations require 24/7 support and monitoring. GST’s customized services extend beyond staff augmentation. GST’s certified and trained professionals can provide the necessary services to meet your mission-critical objectives and business workflows.

GST’s commitment to give back to the communities it serves is critical to empowering its people, who in turn empower GST’s business. At GST, the entire team believes in putting people first. Some of the charitable organizations the company supports include American Red Cross; Boys & Girls Clubs; Ronald McDonald House; and Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

GST is also committed to encouraging the development of a diverse workplace, recruiting and retaining people from all sorts of backgrounds. One of GST’s greatest strengths is the diversity within the company, providing a wide range of creativity, viewpoints, and inclusivity. GST has and will continue to nurture a company culture that celebrates and respects the diversity that exists within the organization. GST is also dedicated to ensuring that the company has a sustainable effect on the environment.

ACE FENCE CO.

ACE FENCE CO.

Ace Fence Company originally started in the San Gabriel Valley in 1949. In 1988 Ace was acquired by America Tang, who has owned and managed this company until 2016, when her daughter, Amy Tsui stepped in to continue the family business. Ace Fence Company jobs are comprised of 85% Public Works, 10% Commercial and Industrial work and 5% residential work. The company is signatory to a collective bargaining agreement with the Southern California District Council of Laborers and its affiliated locals.

Ace Fence Company believes in paying its success forward whenever it can and embraces the idea of social responsibility as a way of giving back to the community through donations to local school programs and various charities. The company also recycles and disposes of waste properly. America Tang is also the founder of Lending Hope Foundation, a non-profit organization whose mission is to “end global poverty with education and capital.”

MILLION DOLLAR BABY CO.

MILLION DOLLAR BABY CO.

Million Dollar Baby strives to make the safest, most beautiful (mostly children’s) furniture in the world. The company started with two parents and one crib, the classic Jenny Lind, back in 1990. Over 26 years and millions of cribs later, the company has grown to six brands of children’s furnishings ranging in design aesthetic and price, and have also developed an in-house startup, Capsule Home, designing modern, accessible home furnishings at incredible prices.

Million Dollar Baby’s philanthropic focus has been to give and support thoughtful non-profit organizations that are making a life changing impact on children throughout the world. Whether it is supporting and participating in summer camps for foster children or helping a blind orphanage in China build a special needs campus, the company is drawn to the people, most importantly, who have dedicated their lives to being selfless and making others’ lives better.
SHIP & SHORE ENVIRONMENTAL INC.

Ship & Shore Environmental, Inc. is a Long Beach-based, woman-owned, certified business specializing in air pollution capture and control systems for industrial applications. Ship & Shore helps major manufacturers meet Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) abatement challenges by providing customized, energy efficient air pollution abatement systems for various industries, resulting in improved operational efficiency and tailored “green” solutions. Since 2000, Ship & Shore has been prepared to handle and advise on the full spectrum of environmental needs with its complete array of engineering and manufacturing capabilities and global offices around the U.S., Canada, Europe, Middle East, and China. The Ship & Shore technical engineering team has custom designed tailored solutions for clients throughout the world.

From regenerative thermal oxidizers to condensing boiler systems, Ship & Shore’s team of engineers works closely with the company’s large fabrication shop, installation and service technicians to design environmental solutions for cleaner air today and tomorrow. The company’s mission is to provide energy efficient, innovative, quality products and services that help Ship & Shore customers meet the increasing demands of environmental regulations while enhancing productivity and profitability. Ship & Shore services clients nationwide and around the globe.

The objective for Ship & Shore’s team of designers is to develop an emission control platform that will meet the individual needs of each customer facility. At Ship and Shore, the team acts as an engineering partner with its customers, focusing on each step of the process to develop a truly custom solution that not only meets the regulatory requirements, but that minimizes operating and capital costs as well.

EV CONNECT

Stepping into a leadership role in the EV charging station management arena, EV Connect makes it easy with premium customer service, from installation to driver support. For its network, EV Connect offers comprehensive EV charging management software to manage access, pricing, and performance on its customers’ charging stations. Its network solution is ideal for multi-unit dwellings, workplaces, municipalities, education, retail, hotels, and hospitals.

EV Connect’s customers enjoy the benefits of best-in-class EV charging software that powers startup networks to the largest networks in the world. EV Connect’s customers enjoy the benefits of best-in-class EV charging software that powers startup networks to the largest networks in the world. Its Foundation system enables customers to customize their EV charging platforms with an innovative and open charging network platform of software and services. Foundation’s powerful API Gateway serves as the back-end platform that enables a custom solution that is perfect for fleet operations, retail locations, and grocery stores.

PBS ENGINEERS INC.

PBS Engineers, Inc. is a leader in MEP engineering consulting, dedicated to personalized service through excellence, innovation, and high performance solutions since 2003. The company’s goal is to provide a superior industry-leading service to its clients. With offices in Los Angeles, San Diego and headquarters in Glendora and an internal staff of over 60 professionals, PBS offers a range of engineering services which include mechanical, electrical, and plumbing design, fire protection, IT & telecom systems, study and implementation of co-generation, thermal energy storage, and photo-voltaic and day-lighting systems. PBS Engineers’ LEED certified and Title 24 compliant designs demonstrate the company’s commitment to energy savings and sustainable design which is evident in its approach to each project. PBS utilizes the latest in CAD/D and BIM technologies, assuring that clients receive the highest quality engineering services. The company’s founders’ vision is to establish an MEP consultancy that delivers a quality product design and seamless and personal customer experience.
Building an Advisory Board for Your Business

Presented by BRANDON FERRERA

When it comes to advisory boards, companies should think of them as a beacon, not a burden. Long a requirement of corporate governance, advisory boards can be a critical component for guiding privately-held companies toward future growth, navigating challenges, side-stepping risk and, when relevant, mapping out an exit strategy.

In its 2020 Private Company Board Compensation Survey, Lodestone Global notes that 94 percent of private companies with boards reported increased revenues and 92 percent increased EBITDA. More than half categorized their boards as “indispensable” or “very effective” at driving corporate strategy.

Here are some best practices to consider when creating a board that can help your business reach new levels of success.

IDENTIFY YOUR COMPANY VISION

One of the first considerations in creating an effective advisory board is identifying your company’s strategic vision and being able to articulate that to potential board members.

If a company is diving into new markets or parallel sectors, it makes sense to consider a board member well-connected in those areas. For example, if a company’s vision is to be the best lifestyle marketing firm in Chicago, that may narrow the field to local and strategic talent. On the other hand, if the company’s vision is to gain nationwide appeal, the board needs to be more diversified. Likewise, if a major shift in technology is on the horizon, a member who has experience in change management and technology may be key to help navigate choppy waters. Similarly, if your business foresees a large expansion on the horizon, a member who has experience in capital and growth capital may be your first recruit.

MISTAKES TO AVOID

A common mistake in creating boards is building it in the image of current leadership. The difference between an insightful, effective and active dream board and one whose main purpose is to validate a company’s management is the difference between winning and losing.

Boards should be socially (e.g. gender, race and age) and professionally diverse—but that’s just a starting point. Research published in the Harvard Business Review concluded that “diversity doesn’t guarantee a better performing board and firm; rather, the culture of the board is what can affect how well diverse boards perform their duties and oversee their firms.” And as far as size, bigger is not better when it comes to your board, particularly for smaller, privately held companies. Boards that are too big may be difficult to manage and expensive. You wouldn’t hire two people to do the same job. So why would you bring on board members with the same work experience?

The ideal size varies by company, but in the Lodestone Global survey the median number of board members was six with three independent directors. The median total compensation among respondents—whose median revenue was $50 million—was $41,500.

The old saying, “dress for the job you want, not the one you have” is relevant to your first recruit. To be sure, it’s important to set expectations with your board. It typically makes sense to meet quarterly or semi-annually; a lot can happen to a business in a year, and monthly may be overkill unless a company is going through a major crisis or transition. According to the Institute for Organization Management, a program of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, it also helps to establish a logical cadence for your meetings, including the typical lengths, issues covered and primary themes of each meeting.

Whether or not you’re compensating your board, make a point of letting them know how and where they’re making an impact. While it’s important to not overstep, company leaders should recognize that most board members want to contribute in a meaningful way. Indeed, building a dream board is only the first step. Cultivating an effective board takes time and energy—but it’s an endeavor that can pay significant dividends over time. A great board can not only help a company realize its near-term vision, it can manage difficult transitions, execute new strategies and create a foundation for sustainable growth for decades to come.

Brandon Ferrera serves as Southern California market executive for Fifth Third Bank. Bringing more than a decade of executive-level experience in relationship banking to his role, Ferrera’s teams focus on developing and maintaining relationships with both privately-owned and private-equity-owned middle-market clients, supporting their growth with financing for leveraged buysouts, acquisitions, working capital and growth capital. Fifth Third Bancorp is the indirect parent company of Fifth Third Bank, National Association, a federally-chartered institutional association. As of September 30, 2020, Fifth Third had $262 billion in assets.

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Holiday Season Rings in “Next Normal”

Middle market retail’s challenge to navigate uncertainty

As the eve of peak holiday shopping is upon us, retailers are adjusting to meet consumer needs and wishes, anticipating demands, stocking up, paring down, pricing right, offering discounts, checking it twice … and readying for an uncertain shopping climate, all amid a worldwide pandemic and a volatile economy. This “next normal” holiday season poses challenges never seen before for middle market retailers, but those who truly understand their customers can quickly respond to marketplace shifts and leverage smart digital strategies could capture much-needed sales during the holiday shopping season.

CONSUMERS WANT WHAT THEY WANT AND THEY WANT IT NOW

The pandemic has changed the consumer, for certain. People are now more comfortable than ever with online shopping, delivery and pickup. Positive experiences for those who have not previously used these alternate channels most likely mean that these new consumer habits will survive the pandemic. According to CoreSight Research, 60% of consumers indicate they will maintain their changed buying behavior and expectations post-COVID-19. Seamless online shopping, fast delivery, curbside pickup, easy returns and more have all become the norm and will likely continue that way.

“It’s about ease, convenience and safety for consumers,” said John Nicolopoulos, retail and restaurant practice lead for RSM. “People this holiday season will either order online or they will want to get in and get out of stores quickly. In addition, consumers will want what they want and in many cases won’t wait for discounts for fear that many items will sell out fast and not be available later,” he said, adding, “The challenge for retailers will be to maximize margins on short supply/high demand items while discounting sluggish categories to maximize sell through and clear out slower moving inventory. This isn’t a new concept, but heightened variability brought on by the pandemic magnifies the situation and makes it even more important to be able to pivot quickly.”

According to Chris Shaker, senior consumer products industry analyst for RSM, a digital presence is paramount for middle market retailers this holiday season, not only to reach the consumer, but to understand them as well.

“A digital strategy can obviously provide a platform to engage and transact with customers and also help forge a relationship between consumer and brand,” he said. Beyond that, added Shaker, digital engagement and data analytics allow retailers to further understand the preferences and behaviors of their customers; this in turn can help retailers create convenience, maximize basket and predict future needs to guide promotions, discounts and more.

STAY NIMBLE

Shaker also said it’s important for retailers to be nimble this holiday season, and having a digital strategy can help with that as well.

“Everything is accelerated due to the pandemic and the situation can change quickly. Will there be a surge in virus cases, will the recovery stall out? It’s important to think through the various scenarios and be ready,” said Shaker, adding digital intelligence can help predict some of these scenarios for smarter supply chain and inventory management, for instance.

And this nimble factor could play in middle market retailers’ favor, said Shaker, given their smaller organizational size and more streamlined decision-making structures. These sometimes more flexible environments can allow changes to happen faster than in larger organizations, and quick pivots will be essential for this challenging and hard-to-predict holiday season.

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IS SANTA CANCELLED?

“Another uncertainty is what is holiday celebration going to look like this year for families across the country?” said Nicolopoulos. “Will gatherings be smaller or virtual? With decreased travel, will there be more disposable income for increased gift buying? And, how will children visit Santa? Will Santa be cancelled this year?”

He mused, adding that the incongruity of it all just demonstrates the major shifts in norms and traditions we’ll be seeing this holiday season. While it’s certainly not business as usual this holiday season, Nicolopoulos reiterated that those middle market retailers who listen and deeply evaluate the needs of their customers, adjust quickly to the marketplace climate, and use digital to analyze and connect with their customers may have a merrier season than their competitors this year. And as for Santa, he’ll likely find his “next normal” too this year.

Christopher Shaker is partner in RSM’s Boston office. He is also a member of the firm’s national consumer products and national retail sector teams. In this role as a senior analyst, he seeks to understand, forecast and communicate economic, business and technology trends impacting the consumer sector. He uses these skills to advise clients on conditions impacting middle market leaders.

John Nicolopoulos is a partner in RSM’s assurance practice and serves as the national industry audit leader and the national leader of the retail and restaurant sectors with RSM’s consumer products practice. He has over 25 years of experience providing assurance and business advisory services to a diverse client base with focus on the retail and restaurant industries.

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RSM’s purpose is to deliver the power of being understood to our clients, colleagues and communities through world-class audit, tax and consulting services focused on middle market businesses. The clients we serve are the engine of global commerce and economic growth, and we are focused on developing leaders and professionals and services to meet their evolving needs in today’s ever-changing business environment. RSM US LLP is a U.S. member of RSM International, a global network of independent audit, tax and consulting firms with more than 43,000 people in more than 120 countries. For more information, visit rsmus.com.
Agility is Key to Success in Post-Pandemic World

By MICHAEL KAPLAN

This year has been full of experts trying to predict what will happen next with the economy, commercial real estate, small businesses, tax codes, and more. Well, here’s one more prediction — the agility commonly found in industry-leading companies, and that was required of all companies to survive the pandemic, will be a permanent determining factor of success for all businesses.

This year required restaurants to shift to delivery models they maybe hadn’t previously embraced (or even to offer groceries in addition to their famed dishes), beer and wine tastings went digital — requiring distribution and shipping models to adapt, tech companies were forced to staff up — quickly — to meet new demands for their products and services. While the need for a business to be agile is not new, the hyper-fast, hyper-sensitive manifestation of that this year has really divided the herd — those that can become “Disruptors” and those that cannot are likely to fade out.

So what does it mean for your business to be agile in this context and how can you adapt your company to maintain that framework long-term?

FLUID TEAMS

The pandemic has forced many companies to re-evaluate their teams. Are they equipped for this new, ever-changing marketplace?

You may have heard of Finders, Minders, and Grinders. Finders are your business development experts — they will leverage relationships to convert them into new business. Minders do the work of maintaining a company’s established products and services — focusing on the relevant processes. Grinders deliver the products or services. There’s one more category, though, that is critical to a company’s success — the Accelerators; this group knows how to scale up the company’s offerings by increasing awareness, implementing demand-generation programs, or developing higher-efficiency processes. Innovators are arguably a fifth category, although often those with the innovative mindset are serving as a company’s Finder or Accelerator.

Most start-ups launch with Finders and Grinders, later adding either Minders or Accelerators — but rarely both. Companies with a staff that ticks all four boxes though — are the ones that rise to the acclaim recognized in the Fastest Growing and Disruptor lists.

However, just having the right mix of individuals may not be enough to stay on the list. You have to be ready to shift the responsibility and ownership of projects to the other categories of teams as a program, product, or service line matures. At the heart of this fluid team structure is the realization that you don’t want your best innovators or accelerators overseeing the day-to-day of established products or services — you want them innovating and expanding the company’s offerings.

The adage ‘what got you here is not what will get you there’ is true for the team managing the project too; the individuals and teams that are best suited for finding and developing new products or services are likely not best suited to maintain, deliver, or scale those products and services.

MONEY MANAGEMENT

No matter which end of the spectrum your company is at on this — it has become a particularly challenging aspect of business in 2020. Whether a company is booming during the pandemic (as is the case with many streaming services and grocery chains) or if it’s struggling to hold the pieces together (as is the case with many distribution companies), the solution is the same — fine-tuning the balance sheets to ensure there is enough cash flow to cover current needs and future growth, and leveraging the available resources to feed that cash flow.

While this has always been true, the pandemic has magnified that fact. A company’s cash flow needs today likely aren’t what they were at the beginning of the year, and the safe bet is that this will remain a bit of a moving target for most companies. That’s why it’s more important than ever to make cash flow forecasting an integral part of your overall business planning.

As part of that, many executives have found that keeping up with the ever-changing list of pandemic-related icons and funding assistance programs — such as the Paycheck Protection Program, Employee Retention Credit, and Main Street Lending Program (which have often been vague and not clearly defined at the start) — has monopolized valuable time and resources. All this flux and unknown can stretch things particularly thin, making it imperative that someone is dedicated to verifying the accuracy of the financials, analyzing the data, and relaying that information to the stakeholders so they have the opportunity to adjust course operationally, as needed.

TECHNOLOGY

Telework took the world by storm this year, but beyond that, companies who have steered into AI and other forms of automation have realized that these investments offer a stabilizing factor in times of crisis. Using technology and automation to limit human interaction (i.e., improve social distancing), pivot product offerings, and increase overall efficiency is critical for any company to achieve and sustain a competitive edge.

E-commerce should also be noted here. Many companies (especially smaller ones) didn’t see the value or in need for this before, but they should all expect that in the post-pandemic era, the convenience consumers and clients found in e-commerce and platform-based businesses will be the “new normal.” The platform-based economy is here to stay.

Lastly, don’t overlook cybersecurity. The advancement of technology and increased adoption of e-commerce means cybercriminals are ready to take advantage — and top performers, fast-growing companies, and industry-disruptors are prime targets. Having sound information security strategies, policies, and other safeguards in place will be critical for top companies to protect their data and finances.

A company’s agility (or lack of) has been the make-or-break moment for so many this year. Congratulations to those who have survived — or even thrived — throughout it all, just remember — while it may be unlikely another pandemic will strike soon, you never know when there will be another call for a new normal. You can set your company up for success — to handle whatever life throws at us all — with fluid teams, strong money management, and always being ready to safely and securely leverage the ever-advancing technological opportunities.

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SADA Boldly Asserts Leadership Role in Cloud Ecosystem with New Brand Identity

The Google Cloud partner ushers in the next phase of its 20-year history with a brand refresh reflecting its mission to transform businesses with technology.

SADA, a leading global business and technology consultancy, looks a lot different today than it did twenty years ago when it was just a newly-formed, humble family-owned IT services operation. While SADA still maintains the spirit that carried it from its scrappy origins as one of Google Cloud’s launch partners to an award-winning global partner last year after the company is experiencing tremendous growth that’s propelling it into exciting new territory.

Over the years, SADA has evolved, pivoted and expanded, growing over 65% CAGR for 15+ years and increasing headcount by over 60% this year (with expectations to increase headcount another 50-60% next year). To reflect what the brand embodies today and to capture where we’ve changed over the years, the value we bring our clients, and our social responsibility posture,” said founder and CEO Tony Safoian. “It was vital to make sure we lay the groundwork to be a ‘forever company’ as we enter into the next phase of our 20-year history.”

SADA embarked on this brand-identity journey late last year with global branding agency, Siegel+Gale. After working together to identify the firm’s brand promise and core values, SADA landed on a simple pledge, “Together, we’re all in,” signifying SADA’s unified and collaborative approach to working with customers, partners and each other. Three key pillars serve as the foundation of how SADA interacts and delivers on its mission: Bold, Dynamic and Nonstop.

“Our pillars and pledge came easily because they represent who we already are, communicate what we stand for inside and out, and reflect our fearless approach to finding the best way forward—always,” said Narine Galstian, SADA CMO.

Capturing the idea of performance and determination, the new brand takes inspiration from the visual vocabulary of automotive brands to emphasize the company’s dynamism, technical prowess, and flawless execution.

“Throughout all the work we do, we pride ourselves on continuous innovation, strong partnerships and service excellence.”

In short, SADA has positioned itself as the go-to technology advisor and services provider – always,” said Narine Galstian, SADA CMO.

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