

M Squared Specialties — where promotion is

by JODY SPRENG

For the business owner, politician, wedding planner, sports team or any individual who needs to get their name out and amongst the general public, Mark and Kristine Mennell, owners of M Squared Specialties of Spencer, can think of at least 700,000 ways of accomplishing that task.

M Squared Specialties is a home-based business that offers its customers more than 700,000 items to be adorned with company names for advertising and promotional purposes. The vast listing of items includes the traditional fare of hats, t-shirts, calendars, coffee mugs and pens. But there are so many other items, including mini bottles of hand sanitizers, barbecue sets, crystal stemware, the all-in-one tool and just about everything and anything else imaginable, including products made from recycled materials.

“We help companies promote themselves with specialty advertising products that they can hand out to clients or use as employee recognition,” Mark said. “We deal factory direct with all national suppliers so we can find the best prices and products for our customers.”

A little more than three years ago, this son of a Medina County dairy farmer may not have given much thought to the free yardsticks passed out at county fairs or the ball caps that feed dealers generously gave away at the farm. His mindset, however, changed after searching for a sideline venture to complement his career in construction.

“I found an ad for Kaeser & Blair in a small business opportunities magazine,” Mark said. After doing a few test runs with the Batavia, Ohio-based compa-



Mark and Kristine Mennell, owners of M Squared Specialties of Spencer.

ny that was established in 1894, Mark was sold on its professionalism, quality of products and dealer support team and soon became one of its independent and authorized dealers of specialty items.

What began as Mark’s venture now includes the help of his wife, Kristine, who is employed by Black River Schools.

Both Mark and Kristine laughed while thinking about their beginnings with the business. “Mark was actually on the road a lot at that time and would go to local libraries and colleges to use their computer to search for products for customers,” Kristine said. “I would even use the fax machines at the different hotels I stayed at,” Mark noted.

But that was all behind the scenes.

Doing business with M

Squared is quite a simple and friendly process. Mark explained a customer may come to him wanting a specific brand of blue pens featuring the company’s name in white or might even like corn oil or soybean ink. A quick online product search or a call to Kaeser & Blair will enable him to give that customer a full listing of options available.

By customer request, a sample of the item can be obtained and put to the quality test, but most likely it already has passed a pretty intense going-over.

“Kristine is our official product tester,” Mark said, adding that she tests every pen and sample they receive and she places her standards of quality pretty darned high. “Giving a specialty item is a gift to a customer or someone you would like to do business with. It doesn’t have to

the name of the game

cost \$50 but it has to be good," Kristine said. From there, graphics are sent to headquarters where other options for artwork may be given before customer approval. Finalized items are shipped in a timely fashion with not one deadline missed.

Mark says statistics have shown that using specialty items for advertising is more cost-effective per impression than television commercials or radio spots.

"It is amazing how specialty advertising products travel. If you don't want an item, most people are likely to give it to someone else. It is also neat that you can take a standard pen and make it special so everyone wants one," Mark said.

Along with handling promo-

tions for businesses, M Squared can provide employee appreciation gifts, items for fundraisers and products for schools and churches. The business also is seeing an upswing in party favors, including clever items to be used at dinner place settings for wedding receptions and anniversary parties.

"If someone is looking for an item, we can find it. We can tweak it and make it unique and special. I find it neat to find items clients are looking for and to make that product stand out to fit their business," Mark said. "We're in business to build your business."

M Squared Specialties can be reached at 330-416-3186 and its products can be viewed at www.msquaredspecialties.com.

Check-by-phone payment method discontinued

Lorain-Medina Rural Electric no longer will accept "E-Check by Phone" as a bill payment method.

Members used this convenient payment method to meet the cooperative's bill payment deadline or for past-due accounts. The after-hours call center also will not accept a check-by-phone payment.

Unfortunately, some members "scammed" the cooperative by deliberately providing incorrect account numbers. This resulted in the cooperative's absorbing an unnecessary returned-check fee.

Members still can pay by check online, E-bill, Co-op AutoPay, debit card and credit card.

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