

Made in the USA

Are foreign-made products really less-expensive than their American-made counterparts? Or have the advantages that overseas manufacturers currently enjoy with regard to their operating expenses and overhead costs come to an end? 'Made in USA' is making a strong resurgence and once again those 3 words are not just a point of pride, but are quickly becoming the hallmark of a better quality as well as a cost-comparable alternative.

Despite the hype of overseas manufacturing being the 'wave of the future,' at this year's PPAI Expo in Las Vegas, there were countless booths that donned the 'Made in the USA' designation. The selection was endless from crystal decorated T-shirts to household items of plastic made from US-grown corn. It was evident that American manufacturing continues to thrive in an industry where its presence is often considered the exception, rather than the rule.

There are several reasons cited for this return to our roots, according to PROMO Marketing's March 2008 feature story. Most notably, the choice to manufacture in the USA has to do with both *product quality* and *pricing*. Additionally, being able to control the production schedule to accommodate sudden changes in demand is another good reason to stick with American manufacturing.

Although those distributors in business less than 15 to 20 years have become accustomed to cheap tooling and set-up charges or no set-up charges for, sadly, poorer-quality, China-made products; and have now accepted those standards as the norm; there are many who are simply unaware there are higher-quality alternatives. And it looks like these alternatives really pay off in the long run.

Douglas Beckwith, director of sales and marketing at Creative Modeling & Design, North Attleboro, Mass., provides this reminder: "Quality starts with good designs and tooling, and is remembered long after price is forgotten."

With strict FDA standards regarding personal-care amenities such as Prop 65, American sources are clearly the better choice.

Take, for instance, the misfortune of children's toy giant, Mattel. Last year they were faced with a recall of more than 22 million toys found to have lead-based paint. Product liability is something end-buyers are anxious to avoid at all cost. Buying American-made promotional products, particularly with personal-care amenities is the best way to insure compliance and alleviate risk.

When it comes to pricing, the cost of airfreight to offer a reasonable production schedule alone can far outweigh the benefit of any low production rates touted by Chinese manufacturers. With the production of heavier and larger products such as medallions, if customers are not interested in waiting up to 12 weeks (or more) for their orders this can easily become cost prohibitive.

Additionally, the risk of price inflation is, in fact, significant for distributors selling imported products. There is far less protection against price increases with imports, where so many cost variables are in play.

So it's not just loyalty and a sense of pride that has so many proudly proclaiming and displaying "Made in the USA." For quality of product, safety and price control, domestic manufacturers are confident their decision to stay stateside will pay off in the long run.