

Refinish Distributors Alliance: Collaborating to IMPACT Minds

by Chasidy Rae Sisk

The Refinish Distributors Alliance (RDA) is a national group of refinish distributors dedicated to providing quality services and products to their customers. Founded in 2008 by seven members, they now consist of 15 members and are represented in 179



locations over 26 states. RDA's marketing brand is IMPACT. They understand the importance of marketing their brand and use IMPACT when referring to the group and everything they do in the group.

Representing a cross-section of all major refinish brands, IMPACT members do over \$400 million in sales as a group, comprising around 15% of the refinish business nationwide. Their goal is "to leverage the

creative solutions to benefit the whole. Combined, IMPACT members have a better opportunity to compete with large national chains while maintaining their independence.

IMPACT was formed as a for-profit company. Members are all equal shareholders and thus invested in the organization's success. One way that RDA members enjoy the benefits of group strength, through combining business and marketing programs as well as combined purchasing power, is through the development of the Impact Brand. According to their brochure, IMPACT "provides our members an exclusive and powerful 'Common Theme' approach to marketing products and services to the collision industry. Members are fully engaged in working to develop and implement products and services that benefit each member of the group" by providing a variety of tools to aid members in effectively competing against both local and national distributors.

IMPACT uses the funding created from the group's purchases to increase the resources and programs offered to members and their customers. Examples of these programs include discounts on AAIA membership, credit card processing through First Data, discounts on business forms through RR Donnelley and partnership with I-CAR training. Members can offer their customers the IMPACT Elite Member program. This program is for the premier collision shops and will help them become stronger, more competitive and grow their business. IMPACT has put together business and marketing tools at discounted rates. As an IMPACT Elite member they will receive savings on uniforms, Phoenix Solutions Group's marketing services, credit card processing, the Impact BizUnite market place and much more.

Since IMPACT's inception, Blickenstaff has seen positive effects to his business operations, including the creation of better buying opportunities from a margin perspective and a better gross profit margin. The networking and sharing of ideas with

members has been beneficial for him and his company. He notes that involvement with IMPACT "allows members to differentiate themselves by providing customers with something that no one else can."

Blickenstaff notes that it has become increasingly tougher to compete in the distribution business as the insurance, collision and distribution industries are all going through consolidations which make it difficult for the 'little guy' to compete against big national players. IMPACT members are better able to increase their footprint by "banding together from a resource perspective."

The RDA/IMPACT group is unique and the first PBE group where independent distributors who are all leaders in their markets have come together. IMPACT's members have integrity and commitment to the success of their businesses as well as their customers' businesses. Their goal is the group strength that allows members, collectively, to compete on a national level on which they have no chance individually.



A recent RDA member's meeting was well attended to represent the IMPACT brand. Inset: **Bernie Blickenstaff** (upper) is president of IMPACT. **Robert McKenzie** (lower) is Executive Director.

strength of individual members in an effort to become even stronger as one cohesive group."

Bernie Blickenstaff, president of IMPACT as well as CEO of *Pro Finishes Plus, Inc.* in Lanham, MD, notes that IMPACT was formed to allow members "to accomplish things as a group that we can't do individually. We are stronger together and unified."

Executive Director **Robert E. McKenzie, Jr.** adds that "IMPACT's members all have common interests and a common desire to grow their business." By collaborating as a group, members are able to discuss problems in the industry and arrive at

Their approach to growing business includes lowering sales and distribution costs, increasing overall market share and profits, marketing new products and programs, training and education support. They have also created the IMPACT Collision Solutions web site, which provides members access to a variety of buying, marketing and training programs for their businesses and their customers. Only members of their group sell IMPACT Performance Products, their premium private brand of products, offered through manufacturers with a proven record of consistency and quality.

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The IMPACT board has monthly conference calls and holds four meetings a year. They also hold two membership meetings per year. The membership meetings offer net-

working opportunities as well as seminars on topics, such as Increasing Customers Business, Removing Cost from Distribution, Business Building, Time Management, Mar-

Colormatch of Jackson, TN has been involved with RDA since January 2009, shortly after the association's inception. According to Marketing Coordinator **Georgia Thorson**, "Colormatch became an RDA member in order to participate in a new industry association that related specifically to what we do as jobbers. We couldn't ignore the potential of networking with a peer group to develop advantages for our business and our customers. It's beneficial to have open communication with like-minded companies in the industry. For the most part, our perceptions and goals strongly relate to one another. The camaraderie that develops within the group is a good thing, and the purchasing leverage

we have is a definite advantage." Colormatch feels their involvement with RDA is important because "we have always been a strong supporter and proponent of the industry and the future of our customers. This requires communication on various levels with others in the industry and involvement with organizations that will benefit the industry as a whole. RDA contributes to the philosophy of communicating with other distributors to exchange information and ideas. Also, as RDA distributors, we can join forces with other members to assert purchasing power that benefits all of our customers. RDA has become a positive resource and reinforcement to our business."

keting and Sales. Their next member meeting will be held October 29-30 in Las Vegas just before SEMA.

IMPACT is selective about who is permitted to join the organization as they allow no competition within the group, a concept that lends to members' willingness to collaborate on solving problems they face in the industry. Those interested in joining RDA/IMPACT should contact Executive Director Robert E. McKenzie, Jr. directly at 731-217-9081 or via email at robertemckenzie@me.com. IMPACT continues to seek new members that share a common desire to improve their business and work collaboratively within the group to address national industry issues. McKenzie expects to see additional growth within the group during the last quarter of 2012 and into 2013 because "we have some exciting things happening to assist members with growing their business." Besides the addition of new marketing programs, IMPACT is currently in the process of creating a more effective website which they hope to have published in September or October 2012. The URL address is www.impactcollision-solutions.com.

CARSTAR Annual Event Set for Sept. 22 in San Antonio

CARSTAR will hold its annual conference in San Antonio, TX, September 22-25 at the Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa. The Conference will include a vendor expo featuring manufacturers and service providers in the industry, a keynote address by nationally recognized Afterburner, a team of real fighter pilots who deliver powerful leadership seminars, and a general session address by five industry experts: **Greg Horn**, Mitchell VP of Industry Relations; **Robb Knott**, Nationwide Insurance Claims Director; **Jeff Peevy**, I-CAR Director of Field Operations; **Vincent Romans**, CEO of the The Romans Group LLC; **Matthew Ohrstein**, Managing Director of Symphony Advisors LLC.

More than 350 store owners and employees will join the CARSTAR corporate leadership team to plan for the growth of CARSTAR in the years ahead, celebrate the successes of the CARSTAR store owners, participate in training programs and share time together as North America's largest MSO network. CARSTAR also is expecting claim executives from a majority of the top 20 personal auto insurers to be in attendance.



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