

1350 TENANTS TO MOVE EN MASSE / 20

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## MAGIC Mergers: Advanstar Buys Project and Pool

By DAVID LIPKE

**NEW YORK**—The MAGIC Marketplace just absorbed two of its key competitors.

Advanstar Communications Inc., owner of industry giant MAGIC, has scooped up Project Global Tradeshows and the Pool Trade



JOE LOGGIA

SAM BEN-AVRAHAM

Show, in separate acquisitions that bring into its fold two relatively small but fast-growing shows serving the premium, contemporary and streetwear markets. The Project deal closed on Aug. 19, with the Pool purchase following on Aug. 23.

"Our goal is to capitalize on the unique strengths of each event to create a seamless and richer experience for our customers," said Joe Loggia, president and CEO of Advanstar.

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# At Ease

A New Wrinkle for Spring



THROAT THREADS®  
RUSS FEARON

# Northern Exposure

Canadian neckwear entrepreneur finds gold in U.S. labels

By BRIAN DUNN

**MONTREAL** — How does a small neckwear design firm in Burlington, Ontario, become one of the fastest-growing companies in Canada?

By importing, marketing and distributing some of the biggest names in men's fashion—Tommy Hilfiger, Ted Baker, Ike Behar, Michael Kors, Hart Schaffner Marx, Nat Nast, Chip & Pepper, and Victorinox.

According to the June 2004 issue of *Profit* magazine, Throat Threads Apparel was ranked 177 among Canada's fastest-growing companies, with revenue growth up 307 percent over the past five years.

In June this year, the firm climbed to number 123, with revenue growth at 502 percent over the past five years. Sales were \$12.2 million, up from \$5.9 million in 2002 and \$1.2 million in 1997 (all figures have been converted from Canadian dollars).

Throat Threads Apparel was started in 1993 as Throat Threads Ties by Russ Fearon, now in his early forties, to fill a void in ties for the casual market. Although he had no design experience, he developed his own line of ties in the basement of his parents' home. By the end of Fearon's first year in business, he was selling to 170 retailers across the country.

But his business changed dramatically while showing his line at MAGIC in 1995. At the show, Fearon was determined to meet Mervyn Mandelbaum, owner of Superba, the world's largest tie company.

The two clearly hit it off, because after a friendly chat Fearon became Superba's Canadian distributor and never looked back.

It was also at that point that Fearon realized his talents were better suited to

distribution rather than designing, and he was soon importing and distributing neckwear from Tommy Hilfiger, Ted Baker and DKNY. And after executives at Hilfiger noticed their tie sales taking off in Canada under Throat Threads, they handed over distribution for their shirts, belts and underwear.

Throat Threads provides a complete vertical solution to companies outside Canada, including marketing, sales, customer service, merchandising and logistics with both majors and specialty retailers.

"Essentially, we become an extension of someone's business in Canada, where they can tap into our marketing infrastructure and management infrastructure," explained Fearon.

With ties and accessories sewn up, the next logical step for the company was sportswear. It was at another trade show, the Cologne Fair in Germany, where Fearon noticed a briefcase with the Swiss Army logo. Intrigued, he contacted the president of the North American operations of Victorinox, the parent company of Swiss Army, about distributing accessories in Canada.

As it turned out, the company was about to launch a men's sportswear collection, so Fearon nabbed it for the Canadian market. Since signing Victorinox in 2001, Throat Threads was also handed the company's new line of travel gear to market in Canada, and it picked up Nat Nast and its distinctive line of retro bowling shirts.

Sales next year? Fearon figures there are plenty of other opportunities out there. "I'm looking for solid brands to offer Canadian retailers. I try to go after what I believe to be the best long-term brands available, and I will continue to refine my vertical-solution business model." ■

## Foeller's

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some radio ads. "But a lot of it is word-of-mouth," he said.

There are very few men's retailers left in the Middletown market, as the city has seen some venerable names disappear from the landscape, such as Green's Department Store and Kassel Bros. Foeller's is arguably the last holdout.

In the nearby Galleria Crystal Run mall, there is a J.C. Penney, Filene's (soon to be Macy's), Sears and Christopher's, but they serve a different cus-

come to Foeller's," he said. "I can educate him about fine clothing and how it is made."

And with his tailoring background, special circumstances are no problem. "One of our customers is a bodybuilder, and when we fitted him in a suit we took the jacket pockets off, altered the suit and then sewed them back on. You won't find that in a department store. We do real serious alterations."

Although he now owns the business, Thompson is still the primary tailor—as well as salesman, buyer and bookkeeper. He has some help a couple of days a week, but pretty much spends every day on the

He has attended B.A.T.M.A.N. and the Men's Apparel Club of New York show at Russo's in Howard Beach and would like to attend MAGIC—if he can pry himself away from the store. "I have help, but they don't understand the business," he said. "So I'm here seven days a week."

One of the people he leans on is John Dino, who spent 20 years at Kassel's but is now retired and works only a limited number of hours at Foeller's. Dino called Thompson "an excellent tailor and a topnotch salesman."

For Thompson, it's all in a day's work. "When