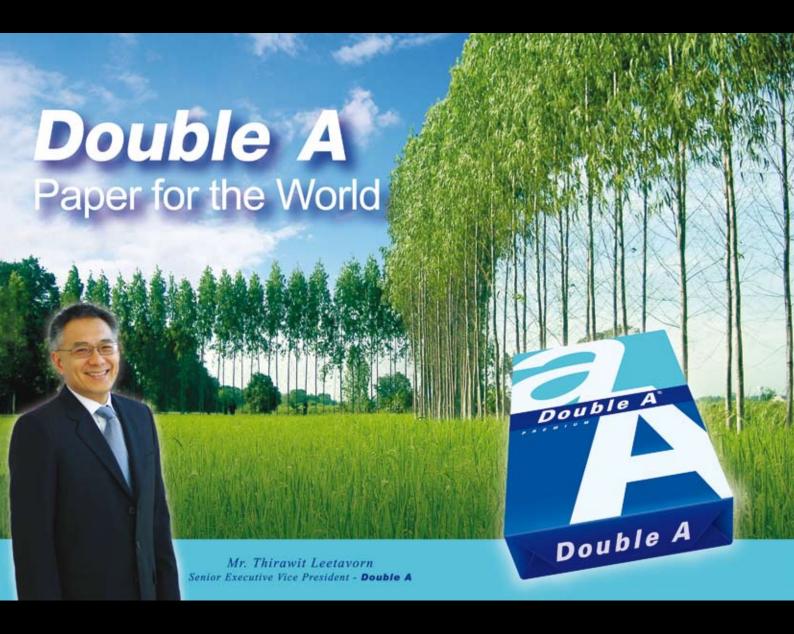


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Uncertain times, but opportunities still exist



Colin WARD

2012 has started pretty much where 2011 left off, with uncertainty still prevalent in the stationery and office products market as both dealers and vendors wait to see what lies ahead this year.

The slow economy and changes in consumer habits have hit large retailers in particular, resulting in the move towards smaller stores and cost cutting. Staples, thus far the most resilient of the big box retailers, said it plans several hundred job cuts in Europe and Australia after disappointing fourth-quarter retail sales. International sales fell 5% during the last 3 month of 2011.

The economic conditions are forcing the sector to look at new ways of generating sales. One channel that continues to grow is the Internet and this issue of Visions & Trends includes an interview with Mark Baccash of Office 1 Superstore, which has developed a unique web franchising concept to generate new business. In conjunction with its franchise retail stores, Office 1 is investing in a program which focuses on appointing Associates to sell office products to friends on their social network using its website.

Examples such as Office 1 and those of other interviewees in Visions & Trends Spring show that there are still opportunities to grow despite these uncertain times.

Enjoy your reading!

Visions & Trends

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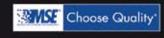


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