



ASI Show Chicago 2026

Top 5 Takeaways From All Education Sessions

Note: Sessions are in alphabetical order by title.

"5 Hot Ways AI Can Help You Get More Clients," presented by Sterling McKinley, Clarity AI Solutions

- Use NotebookLM to analyze source documents and discover hidden customer needs, enabling you to generate specific product ideas.
- Automate competitive analysis by prompting Gemini to act as a distributor and review competitor websites for pricing shifts, organizing the findings into a clear summary table.
- Improve your sales strategy by asking Gemini to simulate a skeptical persona, such as a burnt-out Marketing Director, to critique your pitch and preemptively address likely objections.
- Build highly targeted ad campaigns by defining hooks, content and images before designing, and then use AI to critique and perfect the ad copy against a specific target persona.
- Generate effective outreach sequences using a structured prompting method that defines the task, persona, context and format to address specific client pain points like quality concerns or shipping delays.

"AI Demystified: The Non-Techie's Guide to Using AI for Real Business Results," presented by Sterling McKinley, Clarity AI Solutions

- AI should be viewed as a powerful competitive advantage that enhances business capabilities rather than a replacement for the human workforce.
- The effective implementation of AI focuses on three primary pillars: automating key daily tasks, predicting future trends and instantly clarifying business data.
- TaskMagic allows non-technical users to automate repetitive workflows by recording browser actions and syncing them with tools like Google Sheets.

- Perplexity AI serves as a research engine that helps businesses predict trends and generate targeted ideas, such as finding specific product solutions for upcoming industry events.
- NotebookLM functions as an analyst that clarifies complex information, enabling users to upload documents.

“Boost Q4 Sales With Holiday Gifting Trends,” presented by Mary Furto & Liz Haesler, PCNA (asi/66887)

- Holiday gifting continues to shift toward practical products that combine everyday usefulness with elevated design. End-users increasingly want gifts that are functional, convenient and likely to be used regularly.
- Personal well-being remains a major purchasing driver, with growing interest in products that support organization, healthy habits, comfort and work-life balance. Younger generations are helping fuel continued growth in the wellness market.
- Consumers are spending more on gifts that reflect personal interests, hobbies and shared experiences. Gifting is becoming more focused on creating connections and supporting the activities people enjoy most.
- Pets are increasingly viewed as family members, creating opportunities for businesses to include pet-related gifting in holiday programs. This trend is supported by strong consumer spending and deep emotional connections between people and their pets.
- Premium and recognizable brands continue to carry strong appeal, particularly for employee recognition, client appreciation and executive gifting. Travelers are prioritizing convenience, organization, and mobility making travel-related gifts increasingly relevant during the holiday season.

“Build Trust & Be Unforgettable: Modern Marketing Tactics for Small Businesses,” presented by Shawna Suckow, The Buyer Insider

- Standing out is no longer optional – it’s survival. Small businesses aren’t losing because they’re bad at what they do. They’re losing because they blend in. In a crowded, commodity-heavy market, looking and sounding like everyone else makes you invisible. Differentiation isn’t about being louder – it’s about being unmistakably you.
- Your “five words” matter more than your logo. If you can’t clearly define how you want to be thought of, your market will decide for you – and it will be something generic. Determine how you would differentiate yourself using only five adjectives; make sure they’re completely different from anything your competitors use to describe their business. When they’re truly differentiated, consistency gets easier and trust builds faster.

- We're in a full-blown trust crisis, as 98% of people today are more skeptical of businesses than just 10 years ago. You will either inspire trust or blend in with the 98% of everyone else who sounds polished, perfect, overly professional – and painfully forgettable.
- Out-humaning the competition is the new advantage. People trust people, not brands. Relatability, empathy, vulnerability, imperfection and real-life context (yes, even pets and families) create emotional connection. When buyers feel like they know you, loyalty follows – even when cheaper options exist.
- Your website and social media should feel human first. Your site and socials aren't brochures – they're trust-building tools. Video beats text. Faces beat logos. Stories beat facts. When your digital presence feels like a real conversation instead of a corporate presentation, buyers trust quicker and engage more.

“Consistent Pipeline, Zero Burnout: Create an Outbound Sales Process That Works,” presented by Kevin Baumgart, Sales Ink

- Stop relying only on referrals/inbound and build an intentional outbound motion to make “net new” customer growth become predictable.
- A working outbound strategy has 4 parts: Leads + People + Tech + Campaigns. It's simple, but it requires consistent execution.
- Start with lead quality: Define your ideal client profile/persona, then build/verify contact data and manage it in a CRM before you buy a lead list and blast outreach.
- Reduce your team's burnout with role clarity and accountability. Specialize your sales roles where possible and manage their KPIs that focus on activity and outcome metrics.
- Run personalized outreach campaigns – multi-touch, multi-channel sequences (calls, email, LinkedIn, etc.) that are tracked in your CRM and measured for effectiveness.

“ESP+: Search Gets You Started, Everything Else Gets You Paid,” presented by John Young, ASI

- Customer engagement becomes more effective when buyers can interact with products, request information and communicate interest directly within the ESP+ digital selling experience. These actions create opportunities for sales conversations before a formal quote is even requested.

- The streamlined workflow of ESP+ carries information from presentation to quote, order, invoice and payment – reducing administrative work and helping projects move efficiently.
- Giving customers the ability to review, comment on and request revisions to quotes creates a more collaborative buying process. Faster feedback and easier revisions can help shorten the sales cycle.
- Automation reduces the need for distributors to perform repetitive manual tasks by carrying product details, pricing, artwork and order information through each stage of the transaction.
- Maintaining all customer interactions, approvals, documents and transaction history in one place creates a reusable record that supports future sales opportunities and repeat business.

“ESP+ Stores: Launch Today, Sell Tomorrow,” presented by John Young, ASI

- ESP+ Stores can be created quickly by repurposing work distributors have already completed, such as presentations, product collections, customer information and branding assets.
- Reducing duplicate data entry and setup tasks makes it easier to move from a sales conversation to a live purchasing experience. Existing customer and product information can be carried directly into a new store.
- A successful ESP+ Store requires more than product listings alone. Branding, imagery, customization and a polished shopping experience help create a more professional customer-facing destination.
- E-commerce stores can serve as a natural extension of the sales process by allowing end-users to place orders directly after product selections and pricing have been finalized.
- The faster a distributor can turn approved concepts into active stores, the easier it becomes to capture demand and generate orders while customer interest is highest.

“ESP+ Stores: The Feature You're Probably Skipping – But Shouldn't,” presented by John Young, ASI

- Automating order aggregation reduces administrative work by consolidating multiple customer purchases into organized supplier orders, improving efficiency and accuracy as store volume grows.
- Limited-time pop-up stores help create urgency, simplify order collection and make it easier to manage seasonal programs, events and group purchases.

- Fundraising features can transform an online store into a revenue-generating tool for schools, teams, nonprofits and other organizations.
- User account management gives distributors greater control over access, purchasing permissions and personalized shopping experiences.
- Store credits and points programs can encourage participation, support reward initiatives and streamline sponsored purchasing programs.

“ESP+ Stores: Your Store's Working Even When You're Not,” presented by John Young, ASI

- Once a successful ESP+ Store is created, it can be replicated for similar customers without rebuilding everything from scratch.
- Reusable product assortments, pricing structures and store configurations make it easier to expand into additional organizations, locations, teams or departments.
- Custom branding can be updated efficiently across products and stores, allowing distributors to tailor the customer experience while maintaining operational consistency.
- AI and automated design tools in ESP+ can help reduce the time required to adapt content, imagery and product descriptions for new audiences.
- Identifying a niche market and creating repeatable processes makes growth more scalable than treating every store as a completely unique project.

“Finding the Real Decision-Maker & Close the Deal,” presented by Jason McCracken, BAMKO (asi/131431)

- Just because someone talks to you doesn't mean they can buy from you. Friendly isn't power; budget, accountability and signature authority are power.
- The biggest sales killer isn't rejection – it's being stuck with people who can only say “maybe.” Progress happens the moment you climb the org chart, not when you wait quietly at the bottom.
- Executives don't want features, they want results tied to revenue, cost, risk and brand reputation. Change what you talk about and watch who suddenly returns your calls.
- You don't “luck” your way into the C-suite. You get there by speaking their language, showing you did the homework and proving you're solving problems they actually own.

- If your pitch sounds tactical, you'll stay tactical. But when you elevate the conversation to strategy, vision and business impact, the real buyer will make space for you at the table.

"From Rock Bottom to Million-Dollar Sales: A Candid Story of Resilience, Reinvention & Results," presented by Jason McCracken, BAMKO (asi/131431)

- Success is driven more by preparation than by perfect timing. When opportunities appear, the people who have developed skills, learned continuously and stayed ready are best positioned to act.
- Your past circumstances do not determine your future results. Growth begins when you stop accepting limiting narratives and take ownership of who you want to become.
- The most effective promo professionals focus on understanding others before trying to be understood. Listening carefully to customers, colleagues and stakeholders reveals opportunities and builds stronger relationships.
- Personal strengths are often hidden behind traits that seem like weaknesses. Identifying and leaning into your unique abilities can create a significant advantage in both business and life.
- Progress comes from consistent action, not comparison or waiting for permission. Define success on your own terms, stay disciplined and keep building toward your goals one step at a time.

"From Storefront to Shipment: Building a Scalable Print-on-Demand Fulfillment Model," presented by Dave Conner, Stahls' (asi/88984)

- Webstores capture customer demand, but they do not automatically create a scalable fulfillment model. Profitability depends on what happens after the order is placed, including order data, artwork, production routing, shipping updates and invoicing.
- Customers expect modern ordering experiences with online access, faster turnaround, small quantities, personalization, direct shipping, easy reorders and real-time visibility. Fulfillment systems need to match those expectations instead of relying on manual follow-up.
- Scalable fulfillment requires a shift from job-based thinking to program-based revenue. Repeatable programs such as company stores, team stores, event stores and employee-gift programs can create ongoing value when the process is built to scale.

- Disconnected systems create extra manual work and limit growth. Data entry, artwork handling, production coordination, inventory checks, shipping updates and invoicing become harder to manage when each step depends on emails and spreadsheets.
- Automation does not replace strategy or customer relationships. It removes manual drag so teams can focus on program design, product selection, brand guidance, sales strategy and account growth.

“Future-Proof Your Distributorship: Build Profit, Value & Long-Term Resilience,” presented by Jamie Watson, Certified Marketing Consultants

- Building a valuable distributorship starts long before a sale. The strongest businesses generate profit, create value and give owners more options whether they sell or not.
- Long-term business value is built on three pillars: profitability, transferability and predictability. Every major business decision should strengthen at least one of these areas.
- Profitability matters more than revenue alone because buyers focus on future cash flow, not top-line sales. Strong margins, efficient operations, disciplined pricing and profitable customers have a greater impact on business value.
- A business is more attractive when it can operate successfully without the owner, and ownership can be transferred smoothly. Strong leadership, documented systems, customer relationships, contracts and proper legal structure all support transferability.
- Predictability creates confidence by demonstrating that revenue, margins and earnings can be sustained over time. Diversified customers, repeat business, clean financials and risk mitigation help create a more resilient company.

“Industry Intro: What To Do When You're New,” presented by Joan Miracle, ASI

- Use self-promos strategically. Run multiple self-promo campaigns targeting different customer types and industries. Save higher-margin self-promos for high-potential prospects that are likely to have large marketing budgets. Partner with suppliers for support.
- Stay focused on the industry’s potential. Regardless of whether you’re new to promo or have been selling for years, be sure to set annual goals, create a business plan and look for opportunities to expand into new markets or grow in existing ones.

- Pitch proactively. Don't just take orders – offer suggestions and include items in presentations and quotes. Showing options in presentations often leads to more sales.
- Take a consultative approach. Ask about the purpose of the event or campaign, the recipients and the budget so you can provide thoughtful promo ideas and to position yourself as a valuable marketing partner.
- Prioritize high-margin items. Selling 50 premium gifts takes a similar amount of effort as selling 50 pens but yields higher profit and longer-lasting brand visibility.

“Lower Waste, Faster Turns: Support Sustainability With Heat-Applied Decoration,” presented by Dave Conner and Lizz Riedy, Stahls’ (asi/88984)

- Sustainability is now a baseline expectation for many buyers and brands. Companies are facing increasing pressure to use responsible production practices and reduce unnecessary waste.
- Traditional bulk-order production often creates waste through over-ordering, leftover inventory, reprints, excess production runs and obsolete event-specific designs.
- Heat-applied decoration supports a more flexible production model by allowing businesses to decorate products as needed instead of producing large quantities upfront.
- Demand-driven production can reduce inventory risk, lower costs, improve turnaround times and make reorders easier to manage.
- Sustainability should be communicated carefully and specifically. Instead of making broad claims like “eco-friendly” or “sustainable,” the stronger approach is to explain how the process helps reduce overproduction, minimize excess inventory and produce based on real demand.

“Market, Position & Grow With ESP+ Websites & Stores,” presented by Sarah Unruh, ASI

- ESP+ brings product sourcing, selling and order management together in one connected platform. This makes it easier for distributors to manage daily work and focus on growing their business.
- Websites and online stores serve different needs within the sales process. Websites support customer acquisition and growth, while online stores simplify ordering for specific audiences.
- ESP+ Websites give customers 24/7 access to promotional products using live search and product data. This creates a consistent, always-on shopping

experience without extra manual effort. A professional, branded website also builds trust and credibility from the buyer's very first visit.

- Website integration with ESP+ improves efficiency by automatically alerting distributors when quotes are requested or orders are placed. This reduces follow-up time and helps teams respond faster to customers.
- ESP+ Stores keep ordering organized by offering end-users a selection of the client's approved products in one easy-to-access location. They also maintain brand consistency and combine multiple orders into a single purchase order, reducing distributors' time and effort.

"The Marketing Mosaic Strategy: The New Way To Leverage Storytelling," presented by Shawna Suckow, The Buyer Insider

- Memorability beats volume – every time. Your buyers are overwhelmed, distracted and numb to generic marketing. Being louder doesn't work anymore; being memorable does. Stories that trigger emotion are up to 22x more memorable than facts alone. That's how you stand out today in a crowded market, build trust with skeptical customers and become utterly unforgettable. Facts tell, but stories sell.
- Sameness is your real competition. Your biggest competitor isn't who you think it is – it's the sea of sameness in messaging. Same products. Same buzzwords. Stories are your #1 way to escape "The Blandscape." When buyers can instantly tell why you're different without you having to explain it, you stop competing on price and start competing on preference.
- Micro-stories are the new marketing tool. You don't need long, polished videos or perfect proposals. You just need micro-stories – short, human moments that spark emotion, whether it's video, a photo or just words. Great micro-stories aren't just about What; they're about Who and Why.
- Stories speak to your clients' real motivations. Promo products are never just promo products – they're a boss trying to look good, a meeting planner under pressure, a business owner hoping this effort finally works. When you shift your messaging from what the product is to what the order represents, you instantly stand out in a crowded, look-alike market. That's the difference between being thought of as "another vendor" versus "our go-to partner."
- Storytelling is a skill you can systemize. You don't need to be a natural storyteller, you need a simple structure: Challenge or fear, something happens, outcome. When you consistently collect and use client stories, "saved the day" moments, lessons learned and real examples from your work, storytelling becomes a repeatable business advantage – not a marketing chore you avoid.

“Niches Make Riches: How To Stand Out in a Crowded Market,” presented by Kevin Baumgart, Sales Ink

- The fastest way to grow is to get laser-focused on a niche. Figure out where your biggest wins and best clients are coming from, and double down there.
- Once you’ve picked a niche, speak their language. Use messaging, proof and outreach that show you get their world better than any generalist ever could.
- You need systems if you want predictable results. That means clean lists, a dialed-in CRM and a plan you actually follow.
- If you want to win in a niche, show up and go deep. Get to the events, invest in the vertical and become known as the go-to person in that space.
- Pick one or two strategies, assign ownership and take action. Don’t wait – momentum only builds when someone’s accountable and things start moving.

“Partnering for Success: Building a Trusted Printer Network,” presented by Allee Bruce, PRINTING United Alliance

- Strong printer partnerships start with asking the right questions up front, including about capabilities, capacity, turnaround expectations, proofing processes and communication style. Clear vetting helps prevent mismatched expectations and production issues later.
- No single printer excels at every application, so building a diversified network based on specific print needs reduces risk and increases flexibility. Having trusted backup partners allows distributors to handle peak demand, rush orders and unexpected challenges with confidence.
- Clear communication before and after an order is placed is critical to keeping jobs on track. Standardized purchase orders, artwork instructions, approval processes and documentation help minimize errors and create predictable outcomes.
- Well-managed printer relationships enable distributors to scale their business without adding production overhead. By leveraging trusted partners, distributors can position themselves as knowledgeable print consultants who guide clients toward better results.
- Promotional product distributors may not print in-house, but the quality, consistency and reliability of their print partners directly impact client satisfaction and repeat business. Choosing the right partners is a vital strategic decision.

**“Scroll-Stopping Strategies: Make Social Media Work for Your Company,”
presented by Nicole Lavelle, PCNA (asi/66887)**

- Social media can influence decisions before a sale. Social isn’t just about posting – it shapes buying behavior even before a customer reaches out. Your presence matters, whether you plan for it or not.
- The most effective content meets your audience where they already are. Understanding needs, interests, and intent – and matching content to platform mindset – is more important than being everywhere at once.
- Trends are tools, not requirements, and not every trend is worth chasing. The ones that work are timely, on-brand and adapted – not copied.
- Consistency comes from smarter planning, not more effort. You don’t need to start from scratch. Repurposing existing content, using trusted sources, scheduling ahead and letting analytics guide you makes social media sustainable.
- Small, repeatable actions drive the biggest impact. Sharing industry insights, using supplier assets and experimenting with simple video like unboxings are easy wins that build visibility, credibility and engagement over time.

“Sell Print With Confidence: Debunking Myths & Growing Your Client Base,” presented by Denise Gustavson, PRINTING United Alliance

- Print is not a niche or declining medium – it is a large, growing and evolving industry that plays a central role in modern branding, marketing and communication.
- Many common objections to selling print stem from misconceptions, not reality, and can be overcome with clearer language, better framing and trusted print partners.
- Clients don’t just care about price; they care about outcomes like durability, brand consistency and perceived value when those benefits are clearly explained.
- Promo distributors don’t need to be print experts to sell print confidently – they need to know the right questions to ask and how to guide clients through decisions.
- Distributors who embrace print as part of a broader solutions-provider model consistently unlock larger opportunities, deeper client relationships and long-term growth.

“Selling Uniform Programs to Top Markets: Unlock a Repeatable Revenue Stream,” presented by Caleb Churchill, Workwear Outfitters (asi/98258)

- Uniform programs create reliable, repeat revenue that far exceeds one-time corporate-apparel orders, since teams typically need multiple sets per person and replenish over time. That repeat cadence can bring five times (or more) the value of a comparable merch-giveaway program.
- The opportunity is big and reachable, as roughly 23% of employees wear uniforms and U.S. workwear spend exceeds \$20B, with billions flowing through distributor channels. This widens your target market without changing your core business model.
- Modern tools make programs easy to run: online company stores, allowance/allotment features and virtual sizing can shorten setup and admin time from days to hours. What used to be a manual, spreadsheet-heavy process is now streamlined for distributors and clients alike.
- To open a uniform opportunity, start with accounts you already serve in uniform-heavy fields like automotive, construction, HVAC, manufacturing, custodial, transportation and landscaping. You can offer wear trials, discuss common pain points (fit, comfort, selection, service) and demonstrate a simple ordering experience.
- Don't overlook bottoms! Pants account for about 48% of uniform sales, and they don't always need decoration to be profitable.

"The Small-Order Profit System: How To Stop Losing Money on 'One-Offs,'" presented by Dave Conner, Stahls' (asi/88984)

- Small orders can be profitable when the process is built for smaller, faster and more flexible buying behavior. The order size is not the main problem; manual workflows, hidden labor and too many touchpoints are what reduce profit.
- Customers increasingly expect smaller quantities, faster turnaround, easier reorders, less inventory risk, convenient ordering and multi-location shipping. Distributors need systems that match how customers want to buy today.
- Soft costs can turn a simple one-off order into a losing transaction. Time spent on quoting, artwork, vendor coordination, approvals, updates and invoicing needs to be included when pricing small orders.
- Automation helps make small orders scalable by reducing manual work in order entry, artwork proofing, quoting, production, shipping and payments. Fewer manual steps can also reduce errors and make profitability easier to track.
- Customers value quality, consistency, reliable turnaround times, customization, flexibility and clear pricing. A strong system helps deliver

those benefits while making small-order programs easier to repeat, manage and grow.

“Strategy First: How To Build Decorated-Apparel Programs,” presented by Lizz Riedy, Stahls’ (asi/88984)

- Decorated-apparel programs are stronger when they are built around a clear strategy instead of a single product order. The goal is to create repeatable brand programs that encourage customers to come back.
- Successful apparel programs have a defined audience, a specific purpose and a reason for ongoing engagement. Products work best when they support a larger goal rather than standing alone.
- Discovery should happen before decoration decisions are made. Understanding who the program is for, what outcome it should achieve and how long it will run makes product selection, decoration method, pricing and fulfillment easier to plan.
- A strategic sales approach focuses on what the customer wants to accomplish, not just what they want printed. This positions the distributor as a program partner who can support engagement, consistency and business results.
- Collections can create more value than individual products. Offering coordinated apparel and promo options can increase average order value, provide more style choices, encourage repeat visits and make the program feel more intentional and branded.

“Trend to Strategy: Matching Decoration Styles to Program Goals,” presented by Lizz Riedy, Stahls’ (asi/88984)

- Promotional products are most effective when they are selected based on the program goal, not just the product itself. Decoration style, design approach and product choice should work together to support a specific outcome.
- Awareness programs need bold, readable designs that are easy to see and simple to produce at scale. High visibility and broad distribution are the main priorities.
- Engagement programs depend on comfort, wearability and long-term use. Soft finishes, subtle branding and retail-inspired styling make products more likely to be worn repeatedly.
- Revenue-focused merchandise needs strong perceived value. Premium finishes, texture, dimension and cohesive collections can make branded products feel more desirable and worth buying.

- Strong customer recommendations start with the right questions. Understanding the audience, purpose, distribution plan and desired experience leads to better product and decoration choices.

**“Winning With Presentations: Turn Product Searches Into Sales in ESP+,”
presented by Joan Miracle, ASI**

- ESP+ is designed to streamline product sourcing by offering enhanced search features, AI-powered tools and a library of over a million promotional products. The platform aims to improve efficiency, speed and ease of navigation to meet the evolving needs of industry professionals.
- ESP+ Presentations simplify setup by auto-populating company information, logos and links, reducing tedious manual work. This efficiency helps users produce polished, professional materials much faster.
- Built-in AI capabilities support users by generating product summaries, drafting emails and writing personalized introductory notes. These features make outreach more effective and help tailor proposals to client needs.
- The client portal provides real-time interaction, notifications and collaboration tools that keep clients engaged and informed. This setup makes it easier to act quickly on client interest and understand what resonates.
- Virtual samples, customizable displays and options for real-time updates make it easy to present accurate, compelling product visuals. Combined with print-friendly sharing options and integrated tracking, the system strengthens communication and turns presentations into conversion-ready sales tools.