



## **ASI Show Fort Worth 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.

**“Beyond Apparel: Expand Your Business With Custom-Decorated Merch,” presented by Lizz Riedy, Stahls’ (asi/88984)**

- Personalized merchandise like tumblers, backpacks and umbrellas can create new revenue streams beyond decorated apparel.
- High-quality heat transfers can be applied to many non-traditional surfaces, often without a heat press.
- Using interchangeable heat-press platens makes it easier to decorate items with unusual shapes or sizes.
- Offering custom merchandise can help your clients’ brands stand out and create repeat business opportunities.
- Learning new techniques for decorating non-apparel items keeps your business competitive and adaptable.

**“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.

**“Exclusive Data From Counselor's State of the Industry Report,” presented by Tara Lerman & C.J. Mittica, ASI**

- Nearly 9 in 10 distributors increased prices in 2025, and suppliers have signaled that broad-based price reductions remain unlikely even after the Supreme Court struck down certain tariffs.
- ESP data shows that brand-name drinkware and wellness products ranked as the fastest-growing search categories last year.
- In the Counselor State of the Industry Report, half of distributors said client projects are taking longer than in years past, underscoring the need for proactive planning and clear communication throughout the sales process.
- Searches in ESP using the “Made in the USA” filter rose over 20% in 2025 compared to 2024 – momentum that's expected to continue as the America250 celebration approaches.

- Three in 10 client orders now require a 5-day-or-less turnaround – up for the second consecutive year.

**“From Quote to Completion in ESP+,” presented by John Young, ASI**

- *Collections* make Quotes easy, and that means shortening the discussion cycle.
- *Quotes* make Orders easy, and that means closing an agreement quickly.
- *Orders* make Invoices easy, and that means getting paid.
- Keep everything in one place to minimize pivot.
- Keeping collections clean and tidy means effortless client discussions.

**“Fulfillment Unlocked: Scaling Promotional Product Programs With On-Demand Technology,” presented by Dave Conner, Stahls’ (asi/88984)**

- Position everything from single orders to full merch programs to create recurring revenue and deepen client relationships to solve common problems.
- Use templates based on customer markets to save time and scale offerings without manual setup.
- Utilize integrated fulfillment systems to reduce manual work, prevent errors and make your operation more profitable and scalable.
- Position yourself as a strategic partner by selling control, automation and inventory risk reduction – a full merchandise program, not just products.
- Unlock predictable revenue through program fees, fulfillment margins, gift cards and white-label stores while future-proofing your business and allowing customers to buy the way they want. On-demand is about convenience.

**“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.

**“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.

### **"Maximizing Efficiency With ESP+ Stores," presented by John Young, ASI**

- Got a collection? A store is a few clicks away.
- Got a quote? A store is a few clicks away.
- Got an order? A store is a few clicks away.
- Maximize the amount of time not spent re-keying information between platforms
- Stores are sticky, meaning repeat business, and they're easy to duplicate, meaning new business.

### **"More Custom Headwear With Less Hassle," presented by Lizz Riedy, Stahls' (asi/88984)**

- Custom headwear is rapidly expanding in demand, making it a strong revenue opportunity for distributors looking to diversify their offerings and attract new clients.

- A wide range of popular hat styles – including trucker hats, snapbacks, dad hats and beanies – allows distributors to serve a variety of markets, aesthetics and price points.
- Heat-applied patches and emblems offer a retail-ready look that elevates the perceived value of headwear compared to standard decoration methods.
- Heat printing makes hat production easy and consistent. No sewing, no headaches – just profit.
- Adding eye-catching, on-brand patches helps clients increase visibility and impressions, making decorated headwear a powerful promotional tool that delivers real ROI.

**“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.

**“Reimagining RFPs in the Age of AI,” presented by Jason McCracken, Eagle Promotions (asi/185320)**

- If your value is typing, formatting and chasing spreadsheets, AI will beat you blind. But if your value is strategy, story and leadership, AI turns you into a machine.
- AI doesn’t just make responses faster, it makes them smarter. Use it to speak directly to executive pressure points, not to crank out prettier sentences.
- Executives don’t care about your catalog or capabilities; they care about results. AI lets you map your offer to real ROI, risk reduction and business transformation – and that’s what wins.
- Accuracy, security, brand voice, approvals – these aren’t limitations, they’re the reason people trust you. AI becomes unstoppable when the human judgment behind it is disciplined.
- Every week you wait, someone else is feeding AI their playbook and gaining an edge you can’t see yet. Get in now, learn quickly and own the space before someone else rents the room you think you deserve.

**“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 Smarter: How To Find the Real Decision-Maker & Close the Deal,” presented by Jason McCracken, Eagle Promotions (asi/185320)**

- 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.

**“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.

**“Small Orders, Streamlined Sales: Harness the Power of Print on Demand,”  
presented by Dave Conner, Stahls’ (asi/88984)**

- Reframe small and one-off orders from interruptions into a profitable, repeatable revenue stream by designing systems that price, produce and fulfill efficiently.
- Stop losing margin on small runs by pricing for complexity, speed and convenience, not just product cost. When you sell a solution, price becomes less of an objection.
- Reduce administrative friction by replacing manual quoting, proofing and follow-ups with clear rules, automation and self-service ordering experiences.
- Automation gives you a better process and customer experience, along with adding more time back into your day. Instead of updating spreadsheets and chasing vendors, you can focus on business growth and building customer relationships.
- Position on-demand as more than webstores or self-service portals with artwork stored. Access to integrated catalogs gives clients the power.

**“Winning With Presentations: Turn Product Searches Into Sales in ESP+,”  
presented by Ryan Beletz, 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.