

BUSINESS REVIEW

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Re-gifting takes on new identity

By Mark Sanchez

marks@mbusinessreview.com

Scrap fabrics from producing modular office panels that make up cubicle walls go to make gift bags.

The leftover leather from an office furniture maker is reused for small toy bears, tote bags and pouches.

And the blueprints a construction company once used on a job are cut up and reused to make notebooks.

Each of the products comes from **Promotional Impact**, a Grand Rapids company that custom designs corporate gift products from used materials.

As the sustainability movement progresses, it's driving new business opportunities for Promotional Impact.

Few clients five or six years ago requested gift products that use recycled materials or were based on sustainable principles, President Karen Scarpino said.

Now, Scarpino said, nearly every client is doing it.

"It's accelerating," said Scarpino, showing off a paper gift bag that a client wanted produced with at least 60 percent post-consumer recycled paper and water-based glue and soy-based ink.

"Customers are pushing the envelope for what they want," she said. "Before, customers



"Customers are pushing the envelope ...," Scarpino says. |

Photo by Jeff Hage/Green Frog Photography

never asked. They only looked at price point and style."

And, Scarpino added, clients are willing to pay a little more, "because it matters."

Scarpino runs the business with her husband, Lou. They recently moved the company into new offices in the Brass Works building on North Monroe Avenue in Grand Rapids.

Among their clients is the **Grand Rapids Art Museum**, which wanted "high-design"

sustainable products to sell in the gift shop when it moved last year into its new LEED-certified facility downtown. An apron made from organic cotton is just one of the many items the company developed for the museum.

Employing six people, Promotional Impact has annual sales in excess of \$1 million and growing.

"Last year was our best year ever, and we're blowing it away" this year, she said.

As greater demand emerges for sustainable gift products, materials also are much more readily available from companies — a major turn from the past when "there wasn't much out there," Lou Scarpino said.

"The market is actually advancing now. We have a lot to offer," he said. "Enough folks have come along. There's more raw materials available and more folks willing to listen and be flexible."