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>> **MARKETING**

Puff Pieces

UNMARKED BOXES, CRYPTIC ONE-LINERS AND FUN TOYS EQUAL A MEMORABLE MESSAGE.

It had been a tough year, so John Sonnhalter's business-to-business communications firm gave its industry and media contacts a hand ... and a bulldozer ... and a forklift.



The trio of squishy, stress-relief tchotchkes arrived in separate, unmarked boxes — all pieces of a message that became clear once all three packages were opened.

It was Sonnhalter's way of generating buzz for his eponymous business, which wanted to highlight that it was more focused on the trade and industrial markets than its B2B competitors.

"Most of our clients are manufacturers who are looking to go after the professional tradesmen — people who use their hands to fix things and to build things," Sonnhalter explains.

He wanted to reposition his Berea-based firm as "B2T," or "business-to-tradesman," as a way to show that the 30-year-old company knows its clientele. Looking for a fun way to communicate that shift, Sonnhalter went for the difficult-to-put-down stress ball.

"This has been a stressful year for everybody," he says. "We thought that people would get it and would use it."

A yellow bulldozer was the first in the series, accompanied by a note card that communicated the first of three messages: "Not afraid of construction sites." The second toy was a forklift with the message, "Not afraid of factory floors." The payoff mailing was a foam hand with a note bearing Sonnhalter's repositioning slogan, "Not afraid to get our hands dirty."

Company president Matt Sonnhalter calls the mailing "a good start," but sees it as just part of a larger effort.

"Over the next 12 to 15 months, we're going to continue to reinforce that," he says.

— CI



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