

## **Distribution America and PRO Group Host First Virtual Executive Planning Conference**

(November 23, 2020) – To provide attendees with invaluable one-on-one interactions amidst the pandemic, Distribution America and PRO Group, Inc. have hosted the first ever virtual Executive Planning Conference using the Zoom platform. From November 16-19, distributor and vendor attendees had the opportunity to meet in 1,818 private, pre-scheduled appointments through the breakout rooms function. It is through this unique virtual experience that industry leading suppliers and distributors tackled the challenges of the year and outlined opportunities moving forward into 2021.

“The Virtual EPC was a tremendous success! Both wholesaler and manufacturer participants engaged in the training process to ensure they were able to communicate effectively using the Zoom breakout room platform,” said Steve Synnott, President and CEO at PRO Group. “That preparation led to meaningful one-on-one appointments that will shape new and expanded business in 2021.”

Within the breakout rooms, manufacturer attendees had the capability of sharing documents, presenting program information and demonstrating new product as they would during an in-person event. In addition, new manufacturers to the Distribution America and PRO Group programs had a vital opportunity to forge new business relationships during a time when travel is not feasible.

“I applaud DA and PRO leadership for pivoting to a virtual EPC this year to allow for safe and productive planning sessions with the distributor members,” said Ryan Vasquez, National Account Manager with Stanley Black and Decker. “The EPC is an immensely valuable opportunity for us to connect with members and build customer-specific strategic plans. By utilizing all the tools available on the Zoom platform, we could walk through detailed presentations with better visuals than we were typically able to offer. This year’s format ensured that we were more efficient with our time and more adaptable to specific requests since we were in our offices with all of our resources at our fingertips.”

Sarah Lee, Vice President of Blish-Mize commented that the 2021 Executive Planning Conference was a welcomed event at a time when it was most needed. “Planning for 2021 on the heels of the year we've had is crucial. Now more than ever we need vendor support and communication. The virtual platform provided the best way to do that. The Blish-Mize preparation for the conference was standard in regard to building a meeting agenda tailored to each participant, including sales and inventory updates. This year we had the added benefit of connecting vendors with Blish-Mize personnel from multiple departments who wouldn't normally attend this conference including our President & CEO, Sales & Marketing and Distribution Center staff.”

Ed McKinney, Vice President of Purchasing at Wallace Hardware, mentioned how economical the virtual format was. “The DA/PRO EPC is a perfect platform to bring together upper vendor management with distributor management and their buying teams to examine the year’s business performance and look for opportunities for growth. The beauty of the Zoom format is that it can save precious time without having to travel and the travel expenses saved allows a very economical opportunity to visit with the many different business partners and prospects during the 3-day period.”

In addition to the scheduled appointments, EPC attendees were also invited to attend a general session with keynote speaker Catherine Putney from ITR Economics. During her interactive presentation, Putney

covered economic trends and what effects COVID-19 will continue to have into the new year. Attendees were also able to participate in Supplier of the Year awards and a digital vendor showcase which allowed distributor members to view and vote for the best showcase. These additional virtual events ensured that the centerpieces of every EPC were present despite the extraordinary shift in industry events this year.

“This pandemic has caused all of us to do business differently,” added Dave Christmas, President and CEO at Distribution America. “This year’s EPC attendees adapted to a new normal of virtual events. We concluded another highly successful conference after countless hours of preparation and the support of our distributor members and the vendor community. We were able to exchange new business concepts and forward-looking strategic plans at a time meeting in person was not feasible.”

The following are the winners of the Vendor Showcase and the Suppliers of the Year for Distribution America and PRO Group.

**Distribution America Vendors of the Year:**

Plumbing: B&K Products

Tools: Stanley Black & Decker

Paint: WM Barr

Lawn and Garden: West Chester Gear

Specialty: Gardner-Gibson

Electrical: Southwire

Hardware: Spectrum HHI National Hardware/Kwikset

Partnership Award: Century Drill & Tool

**PRO Group, Inc. Key Suppliers of the Year:**

Plumbing: Oatey SCS

Tools: Great Neck Saw

Paint: WM Barr

Lawn and Garden: Ames Companies

Safety: Honeywell Safety Products

Electrical: World & Main (H2 Brands)

Hardware: Spectrum HHI National Hardware/Kwikset

Overall Key Supplier of the Year: DAP Products Inc.

**Vendor Showcase Awards:**

Hand and Power Tools: Stanley Black & Decker

Hardware: World and Main

Plumbing: B&K Products

Electrical: Duracell

Lawn and Garden: The Ames Companies

Safety: Honeywell Safety Products

Paint Sundries: DAP Products Inc.

Housewares: Rubbermaid (Newell Brands CCS Division)

New Vendor: Coleman Power Sports

Overall: Zep

###

The Charlotte, North Carolina-based Distribution America ([www.daonline.com](http://www.daonline.com)) is a multi-billion dollar buying and marketing organization, covering 50 states and international markets assisting retailers and distributors with merchandising and marketing programs including Priced Right Everyday®, Sentry, Trustworthy Hardware and Golden Rule.

PRO Group, Inc. ([www.pro-group.com](http://www.pro-group.com)) is a multidivisional international merchandising and marketing organization with corporate headquarters in Denver. Its operating units include PRO Hardware, GardenMaster, FARM MART and GOLDEN-LINK. With over 70 distributors operating over 140 distribution centers serving all 50 states, the Group's combined sales volume exceeds \$6 billion through its member distributors and an alliance with the VAL-TEST Group.