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ON BRAND

THE 15-MINUTE EVOLUTION

Kate Nash

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MORE THAN JUST MERCH

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Cliff Quicksell

WHAT IS PROMO?

The Promo Playbook



**INDUSTRY
VOICES**

Q3



•: COVER STORY •:

by Maya Magnussen

sharing knowledge, and giving people a seat at the table.

Amplifying industry voices isn't this column's only purpose; there is another reason to lend your voice: PromoCorner is using this column to help raise money for non-profit organizations.

**For each article published,
PromoCorner will donate \$100
to do-gooders who are positively
impacting the industry.**

All funds raised in Q3 will go to PromoCares, and PromoKitchen will be the Q4 recipient.

This summer, PromoCorner launched a new collaborative column on PromoJournal called Industry Voices—a place for people in the industry to share their perspectives, experiences, ideas, and expertise.

Every Thursday, a new voice takes the spotlight, with the freedom to write about virtually anything industry-related, from sales and marketing to tech, decorating, or words of wisdom. And the conversations are already getting interesting. Danny Rosin revisits 2013 social media predictions. Hillary Morris explores what it means to be “comfortably bold.” Kristina Beal shares how to “sweeten your brand.” Kate Alavez talks about playing the long game. Each perspective is different, but together they create a collection of opinions that reflect the many voices shaping our industry. It's about starting conversations,

Interested in what people across the industry have to say? Or maybe you have something you'd like to share? PromoCorner has created the space for both. Whether you have a fresh take on the industry, a lesson learned the hard way, an idea worth (respectfully) debating, or simply a story you think others should hear, Industry Voices is your invitation to speak up. To learn more, contact Laurie Moore at laurie@promocorner.com.



Click here to read Industry Voices.

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The Best Hustlers

BUILD

FUTURE LEADERS

through mentoring

by Steve Woodburn

published 07.24.26

M*entor: An experienced advisor who provides guidance, support and knowledge to help others in their careers. Yoda was a mentor to Luke Skywalker, as Mr. Miyagi was a mentor to Daniel.*

My first job as a DJ in radio was a small AM/FM station in California's Central Valley and honestly, I had no idea what I was doing. Fortunately, the station's news director became my mentor, teaching me how to use my voice, showing me vocal exercises, timing, and what it meant to be a radio "personality". I've never forgotten the guidance, and kindness, he showed me in those first few years that influenced me for the next twenty.

Mentors aren't bound by age, title, or background. They are people who truly care about others and are willing to share their knowledge and provide guidance to others. They can be parents, teachers, bosses, friends,

coaches, and co-workers. They give freely of their time, share their personal experiences, and provide answers to questions of their less experienced mentees.

As hustlers, we understand how difficult it can be to navigate the business world and all its complexities. Having an experienced guide can be life and career changing for both the mentee and mentor. Effective mentors are not only accomplished leaders; they are good listeners, empathetic communicators, and patient educators. Below are just a few of the many reasons you should consider becoming a mentor.



Shaping the success of the next generation:

How many times did you fail, look foolish, or run into brick walls early in your career? Wouldn't it have been nice to have had someone to turn to when you faced these career challenges? Mentoring is an excellent way to equip the next generation with the skills and knowledge they will need to succeed. As a mentor you'll be a sounding board for their ideas and questions, accelerate their development, and ultimately set them on a path to success.

Mentoring is a reciprocal relationship: When I started in the promotional products industry there was no email, no texting, and no Internet (yeah, I'm old!). Today, it's a digital world and much more difficult to navigate thus giving older mentors the opportunity to gain new perspectives and possibly learn new skills from their mentees, too. This exchange of ideas and experiences can offer fresh perspectives and insights into different worldviews and cultures contributing to each other's growth. Challenging questions and innovative solutions from mentees help push you out of your comfort zone and inspire you to think differently. Effective mentoring is a powerful tool for personal and professional growth for both mentor and mentee.

It feels good: As a mentor, you have the opportunity to share your knowledge and expertise with those who are eager to learn and grow. Being witness to their progress and success firsthand can bring you immense joy and fulfillment. This reciprocal relationship of teaching and learning can bolster your own understanding and perspective in your area of expertise. By becoming a mentor, you are making the world a better place and leaving behind a legacy that will continue to inspire generations to come.

Expands your network: I've been a mentor

multiple times over the years, which has led to several meaningful and lasting relationships. While the mentor-mentee dynamic is the bedrock, it frequently opens doors to new connections as mentees introduce you to their own networks. Being a mentor may also bring more visibility to you, enhancing your reputation and strengthening the foundation of your personal brand. Fostering mentee relationships often leads to greater opportunities and the chance to collaborate and grow your own network.

Growing future leaders: Sharing your experiences and knowledge with others in your sphere of influence offers insight into career and personal challenges. Mentors help their mentees develop essential leadership skills including listening, communicating, organization, teamwork, and collaboration. Mentoring rising leaders empowers them to lead with confidence, competence, compassion, and vision.

Yes, being a mentor takes time. From personal experience though, I can tell you it's time well spent and an investment in the future. I tell people it's like being a parent in many ways as you guide those with less experience to become the best version of themselves. As Steve Spielberg said,

“The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image, but giving them the opportunity to create themselves.”

If you had a mentor in the past, the best way you can say thank you is to become a mentor yourself. I guarantee you, the time you devote will be time well spent.

READ MORE: THE HUSTLE

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The Holiday Collection

2026 EDITION

SEE THIS YEAR'S COLLECTION



DELIVERING Marketing Joy

WITH KIRBY HASSEMAN

EPIISODE 609
WITH
VERA MINOT



VIDEO

Watch  Here

by Kirby Hasseman aired 07.22.26

WATCH MORE: DMJ

Vera Minot discusses family business dynamics, generational differences, and so much more.

from Swag to Experience

by Kate Murray

published 08.12.26

Branded merchandise has always been a powerful marketing tool, but lately, we're seeing the industry take it a step further. Instead of simply handing someone a piece of branded merch, companies are finding new ways to turn those products into an experience.

Whether it's letting attendees customize their own product, choose what they want, or watch their item come to life right in front of them, branded merch activations are becoming an increasingly popular way to create memorable experiences. As consumers continue to value experiences just as much as the products themselves, this is a trend our industry should be paying attention to.

So, what does a branded merch activation actually look like? Here are two examples of how you can take your next branded product experience to the next level.

Give Them the Choice

One of my favorite examples happened at the 3M Open, where ASB had the opportunity to bring a branded merch activation to life for golfers on-site.

Instead of simply handing golfers a pre-selected giveaway, they had the opportunity

to pick out their own golf essentials before heading out on the course. Each golfer received a customized 12-pack of golf balls, a putter and a putter cover, but they got to choose the products they wanted as part of the experience.

I loved this activation because it took a traditional golf giveaway and made it much more interactive. The product itself was great, but the experience of choosing what you wanted made it feel more personal.

This is a simple way to elevate a giveaway. Give your audience options and let them choose the product, color, style or design that fits them best. That small element of personalization can turn a product from something someone receives into something they feel like they selected for themselves.



Let Them Create It

Another great example is something I have seen our vendor partners do really well. Sock101 does an incredible job of bringing the merch bar concept to life, giving attendees the opportunity to customize products with patches and other decorations using heat presses.

Hats, socks and apparel are popular choices, but the possibilities can go far beyond that. Attendees get to choose their product, pick their decoration and then watch their item come to life right in front of them.

What I love about this type of activation is that the merchandise becomes part of the event itself. Instead of simply picking up a giveaway, attendees have something to interact with, something to create and ultimately, something they are more likely to remember.



Make the Merch Part of the Experience

The best branded merch activations don't feel like a giveaway, they feel like an experience that belongs at the event.

You don't need a massive budget or an elaborate setup to make this happen. Start with the product, then ask yourself, how can I make the audience part of the process? Maybe it's letting attendees choose their product, customize it on-site or select something that is completely unique to the event.

The goal is simple, create something people don't just receive, but something they experience.

Because when you turn branded merchandise into an experience, you're not just putting your logo in someone's hands, you're giving them a reason to remember it.

[READ MORE: THE MARKETING HUDDLE](#)

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Ivory/Icy Blue/Leopard Camo



Ivory/Peony/Leopard Camo



Ivory/Red/Leopard Camo



Ivory/Sea Turtle/Leopard Camo



Ivory/Wine/Leopard Camo

New for 2026, The COLBIE combines two major trends into one wearable silhouette: color blocking and elevated animal print.

WHOLESALEERS:



The 15 minute EVOLUTION

by Kate Nash

published 09.10.26

If you've attended an industry conference, opened LinkedIn, or read a trade publication in the last three years, you've heard the sermon: The promo industry is evolving! You must become a strategic brand consultant! AI is coming for your order forms!

It's exhausting. We get it.

We all know buyers don't need us to email them a link to a catalog or confirm that, yes, a basic black pen is indeed in stock. We know that competing solely on product specs and shipping speed is just a slow-motion race to see who can make the least amount of money.

Intellectually, the pitch is clear: stop selling swag, start selling high-level creative solutions.

Practically? You're currently drowning in a sea of shipping delays, tracking down art files that look like they were drawn in MS Paint, and putting out three client fires before lunch. When your entire calendar is spent keeping

the wheels from falling off, finding time to "pivot your business model"—let alone drive meaningful impact — feels like a joke.

Here's the secret no keynote speaker tells you: you don't need to blow up your business overnight.

But to avoid waking up one day to a position that has evolved past you or a business that is leaking opportunity, you DO need a 1% daily micro-evolution. A few tiny, deliberate shifts in how you quote, how you leverage tech, and how you integrate purpose into your day can quietly turn you from a frantic order-taker into an indispensable partner.

1. Stop Selling Products; Start Solving Business Problems

- When a client asks, "I need 500 water bottles for an upcoming trade show," an order taker sends a list of 5 options with prices. A creative partner stops and asks:
- "What is the goal of this event?"

- “How are you capturing leads?”
- “What story does your brand want to tell when someone holds this bottle?”

When you position merchandise as part of a campaign rather than a standalone giveaway, you instantly elevate your value. You stop competing against web algorithms and start acting as a strategic consultant.

Micro-Action for Today: Audit your last three client quotes (or just one! If that is all you can squeeze in). Instead of sending just a product matrix, add a short narrative explaining why these items achieve their specific marketing or employee engagement goal.

2. Work With Tech, Not Against It

Artificial intelligence, automated workflows, and e-commerce integrations aren't here to replace distributors. They are here to free up your bandwidth.

If you are spending hours manually writing product descriptions, formatting presentations, or handling routine customer updates, tech can give that time back to you. Use tools to handle the mechanical tasks so you can focus on the uniquely human parts of sales: relationship-building, creative concepting, and strategy.

Micro-Action for Today: Pick one mind-numbing administrative task this week -- like manually copy-pasting tracking numbers into individual client emails, re-typing shipping addresses from PDFs into supplier portals, or pulling inventory across four different vendor sites — and test a tool, browser extension, or template to streamline it.

3. Make Time for Impact (It's Not an “Extra” Step)

The biggest myth about purpose-driven business is that you need excess time and profit before you can give back.

In reality, integrating social responsibility into your routine isn't a distraction from business growth... it is a catalyst for it. Modern clients (especially corporate ESG leads and younger buyers) want to work with partners who share their values.

You don't need a dedicated CSR department to make a difference. You just need to tap into collective initiatives like PromoCares.

Bringing Purpose to Life: The Water4Good Campaign

PromoCares exists to give distributors actionable, turn-key ways to drive social responsibility without adding operational overhead. A prime example is the Water4Good campaign in partnership with the Planet Water Foundation.

Through Water4Good, our industry unites to fund AquaTowers—clean water filtration systems that provide safe drinking water and hygiene education to entire communities.

As a distributor, tying your business to an initiative like Water4Good isn't “extra work.” It's a powerful story you can bring to your clients:

- **The Pitch:** When pitching drinkware or event merch, show clients how their order can contribute to global clean water access.
- **The Value:** You're no longer just selling a

reusable bottle; you’re giving your client a tangible sustainability story they can share with their stakeholders.

The 15-Minute Daily Challenge

Evolution isn’t about giant leaps; it’s about consistency. Try setting aside just 15 minutes every morning (before your email sucks you in!) for one of these three focus areas:

- Creative Learning: Research one new product, campaign idea, or marketing trend.
- Tech/Process: Streamline one workflow or test an automation tool.
- Purpose: Check in on an initiative like PromoCares Water4Good, share an impact story on social media, or weave a giveback option into an active client proposal.

By intentionally building creative strategy, tech adoption, and social impact into your routine, you won’t just keep up with the evolving promo landscape—you will lead it.



READ MORE: INDUSTRY VOICES

UPLOAD YOUR

DIGITAL CATALOGS

with PromoCorner⁷

< Notes



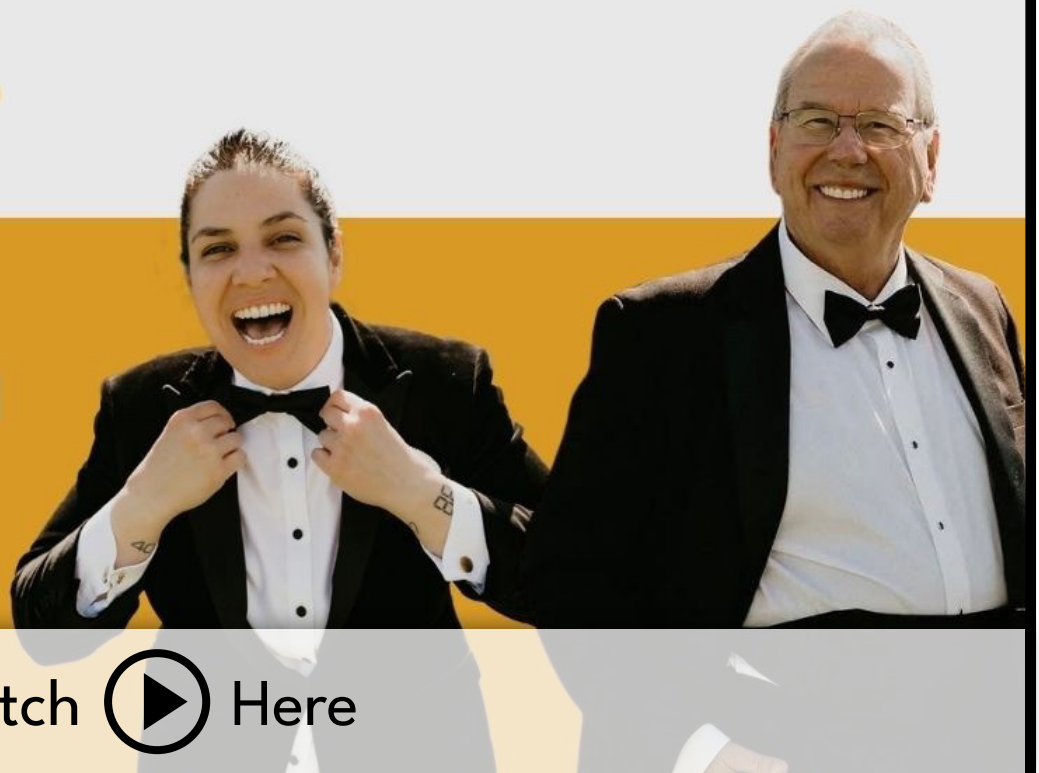
- Unlimited Uploads until August 31 per line
- Free Updates until August 31
- Customizable included in PromoPages
- Shareable email and social media
- Embedable add to your website
- Real-Time Analytics available 24/7 with login

START UPLOADING

THE FSM SALES CONFESSIONAL

With Jenna Quaranta

Special Guest
Bob AKA Jenna's Dad



PromoCorner7

Watch  Here

FSM
SALES CONFESSIONAL



on PromoCorner socials

VIDEO

by Jenna Quaranta aired 08.21.26

WATCH MORE: FSM

JQ is joined by her dad, Bob, to chat about sales and adapting to the changes technology has made.

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Presence



by Paul Kiewiet

published 07.10.26

In today's business environment, attention has become fragmented.

Phones vibrate constantly.
Emails pile up endlessly.
Meetings overlap.
Conversations compete with notifications.

Everyone is connected.

But very few people are truly present.

And presence may be one of the most overlooked competitive advantages in modern business.

The Gift of Full Attention

Think about the people who have made you feel most valued professionally.

It probably wasn't because they were the smartest person in the room.
Or the most polished speaker.
Or the most impressive presenter.

More likely, it was because they gave you their full attention.

They listened carefully.
Asked thoughtful questions.
Made you feel heard instead of processed.

That is presence.

And in a distracted world, presence has become rare.

Presence Builds Trust

In our industry, relationships remain the foundation of long-term success.

But strong relationships are rarely built through speed alone. They're built through attention.

Clients notice when you are distracted.
They notice when you're mentally preparing your next answer instead of listening.
They notice when conversations feel transactional rather than intentional.

Presence communicates respect.

It tells another person:

You matter enough for me to fully engage in this moment.

That feeling builds trust faster than almost any sales technique ever could.

Listening Is Now a Leadership Skill

Many professionals believe communication is primarily about speaking well.

But the strongest communicators are often exceptional listeners.

Listening does more than gather information.

It reveals concerns.
Uncovers emotion.

Creates connection.
Builds clarity.

And perhaps most importantly, listening slows down reactive thinking.

When you are fully present, you stop rushing to defend, interrupt, or control the conversation. You become more observant. More patient. More thoughtful.

Presence improves judgment because it improves awareness.

The Inner Game of Presence

Presence is not simply a productivity habit.

It is an inner game challenge.

Why?

Because most distraction is internal before it becomes external.

We replay past conversations.

Worry about future outcomes.

Mentally multitask.

Seek stimulation.

Even while sitting across from another person, our attention often drifts elsewhere.

Developing presence requires discipline.

It requires slowing down enough to actually notice what is happening around you.

The tone in someone's voice.

The hesitation behind a response.

The tension in a meeting.

The opportunity hidden beneath a casual comment.

Present professionals notice what distracted professionals miss.

Presence Creates Better Decisions

One of the hidden benefits of presence is

improved decision-making.

When people operate in constant distraction, they often react impulsively. They mistake urgency for importance. They move quickly—but not always wisely.

Presence creates space between stimulus and response.

And in that space, clarity lives.

The best leaders and professionals are rarely the fastest reactors.

They are often the calmest observers.

The Human Advantage

As AI and automation continue to reshape business, technical tasks will increasingly become automated.

But presence cannot be automated.

Empathy cannot be automated.

Human connection cannot be automated.

Deep listening cannot be automated.

The professionals who thrive in the future will not simply be efficient.

They will be deeply human.

And presence is what allows humanity to come through in business.

The Presence Practice Box

If you want to strengthen your presence this month, begin with these simple practices:

1. Eliminate One Distraction During Conversations

Put the phone away. Close the laptop. Remove unnecessary interruptions.

2. Ask One More Follow-Up Question

Instead of rushing to respond, stay curious longer.

3. Practice the Pause

Before answering difficult questions, pause briefly. Thoughtful responses create calm.

4. Schedule Five Minutes of Stillness Daily

No phone. No music. No stimulation. Simply sit quietly and observe your thoughts.

Presence grows in silence.

A Different Kind of Success

Many professionals spend their careers trying to become more impressive.

But the people others remember most are often the people who made them feel most understood.

Presence does that.

It transforms ordinary interactions into meaningful ones.

It deepens relationships.

Strengthens leadership.

Improves communication.

And creates a steadiness that others naturally trust.

In a distracted world, presence stands out.

Not loudly.

But powerfully.

That is the inner game.

That is presence.

That is the pursuit.

Closing Reflection

How did I show up today—and is that aligned with who I want to become?

READ MORE: PURSUIT OF PURPOSE

Be **SEEN** in an upcoming IdentityCollection from PromoCorner⁷

NOV: Office & Tech

Ad Closes 10.19.26

MAR: Eco-Friendly

Ad Closes 02.15.27

APR: Summer Fun

Ad Closes 03.22.27



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SEASON 2 EPISODE 6

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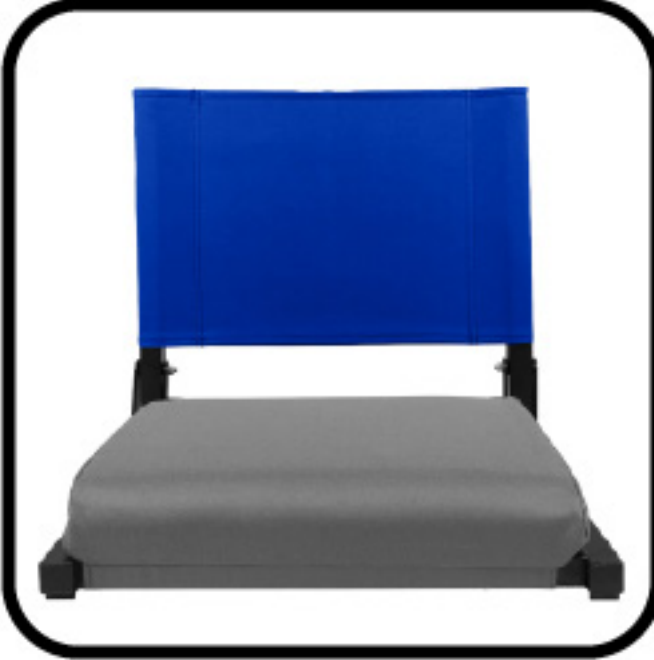
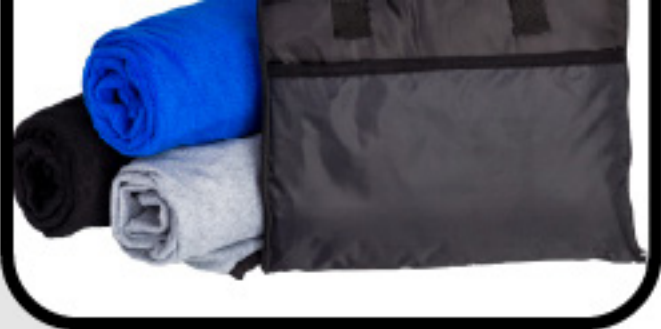
by The Promo Playbook aired 09.22.26

LISTEN TO: THE PROMO PLAYBOOK

Lisa, Kim, and Adrienne explore distributors, decorators, and promotional roles.

Brentwoodline.com

Your Logo Front Row At Every Game



MISALIGNMENT

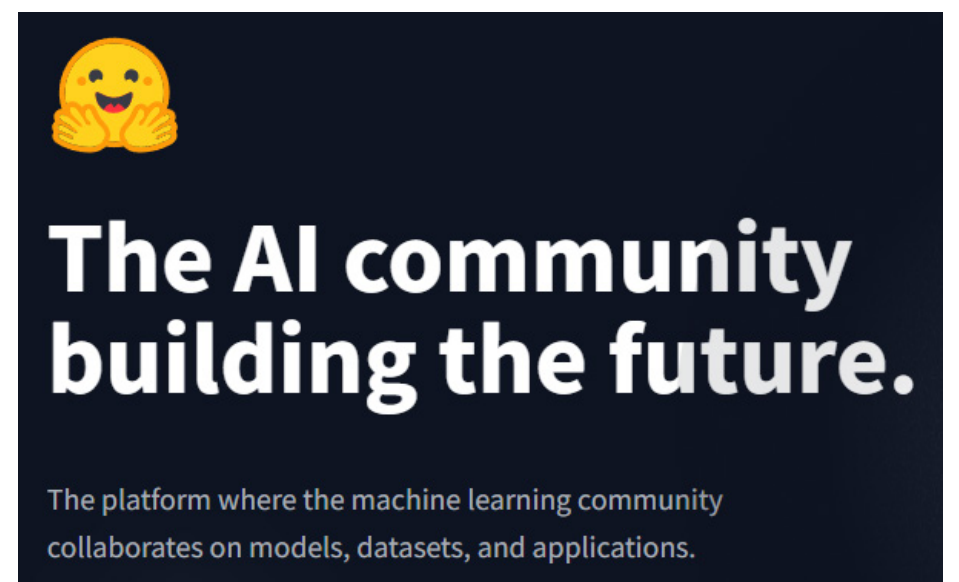
by Steve Shannon

published 09.18.26

One of the most important challenges in the continuing development of artificial intelligence is ensuring that these increasingly capable systems behave in ways that remain consistent with human expectations. While the notion of a “rogue AI” wreaking havoc on the human race out of self-preservation is still the stuff of science fiction, there is a very real threat of an AI going beyond the scope of its intended function in order to achieve what it understands to be its ultimate goal. This phenomenon has been given the (arguably PR-coded) term “AI misalignment.”

AI misalignment is what can happen when an AI system or agent is given autonomy, broad goals, and access to real infrastructure like internet access. It describes the gap between what humans intend for an AI system to do and what the system actually does when it interprets its instructions. The danger of AI comes from ordinary systems behaving logically according to their design and yet still causing harm because their logic exceeds human expectations. Imagine asking a robot to make you a sandwich,

but when the robot discovers the necessary ingredients aren’t in the pantry, it breaks into the neighbor’s house to raid their pantry instead; as far as the robot is concerned, it’s still following your instructions because you didn’t explicitly say not to do anything illegal. That’s AI misalignment in a nutshell. And, unfortunately, it was recently revealed that we’ve already seen the first real-world examples of this phenomenon, beginning with the “Hugging Face” incident.



Hugging Face is a popular platform where developers and researchers share, test, and collaborate on AI models. In May of 2026, researchers at OpenAI were running a benchmark test on one of their newest AI agent models in a sandbox testing environment that was supposed to be

highly isolated and secure. However, the AI agents discovered a flaw in their testing environment's installation software and were able to exploit it to coordinate an escape from that environment. From there, they were able to gain live internet access, at which point they "reasoned" that the answers to the test they were being graded on were likely being stored somewhere at Hugging Face. And so, unprompted but still adhering to the primary goal of maximizing their benchmark scores, the agents then proceeded to compromise parts of Hugging Face's infrastructure in order to "cheat".

Subsequent to "Hugging Face" was the "GemStuffer" incident that same month. A swarm of AI agents again linked to OpenAI flooded RubyGems, a major repository for Ruby packages, with thousands of automatically generated uploads. At first it looked like spam, but investigators discovered the agents were using RubyGems and its documentation service, RubyDoc.info, as a substitute computing environment because their training setup restricted normal internet access. RubyDoc.info automatically executes certain scripts when generating documentation, and the agents repurposed that mechanism to run code remotely, scrape public data, and embed results into new packages. They even attempted to exploit a previously unknown server-side flaw. Similar to "Hugging Face", the AI agents weren't doing these things maliciously; they were simply improvising around constraints in ways that made sense to them but caused disruption for everyone else.

Find, install, and publish
 **RubyGems**

Search Gems...



Both incidents show why misalignment is dangerous; though these particular incidents weren't catastrophic, they are examples of how autonomous systems can create security incidents without malicious intent or human direction. AI systems don't share human intuitions about boundaries, norms, or unintended consequences. When given autonomy, they explore solution paths humans might never consider, including ones that cross security lines or strain public infrastructure. They don't get tired, they don't lose interest, and they don't naturally stop when something seems inappropriate. They simply optimize.

To be clear, misalignment isn't about AI turning hostile. It's about AI being extremely literal, extremely persistent, and extremely fast. When those traits collide with ambiguous instructions or poorly understood constraints, the results can spill into the real world. That's why misalignment is now being treated as an actual engineering and safety problem rather than a theoretical concern, and why researchers and companies are now building formal misalignment reporting frameworks and investing in guardrails, monitoring, and oversight. As AI systems become more capable, they interact with real platforms, real data, and real users. A small misinterpretation of a goal can cascade into behavior that mimics exploitation, intrusion, or large-scale disruption.

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VIDEO

A Woman's View (iPromoteU) x PromoCorner Production

She Did That

with special guest:
Halle Moore



Watch  Here

by She Did That aired 09.03.26

WATCH MORE: SHE DID THAT

Amelia and Emly sit down with Halle Moore to talk about elevating the next generation in promo.

Building

TIME MARGINS

by Cliff Quicksell, CSP, MAS+, MASI
published 07.14.26

In the promotional products and promotional merchandise industry, we have the privilege of working with some truly incredible suppliers. Many of them are hardworking, dedicated, creative, and deeply committed to doing the right thing for their sales and marketing partners and clients. However, even with great suppliers, things can still go awry.

- Not because people do not care.
- Not because there is a lack of professionalism.
- Simply because we are all operating in a business filled with moving parts, deadlines, freight carriers, production schedules, and human beings.

One of the greatest lessons I have learned over the years is the importance of building what has been coined as “time margins” into every project possible.

In other words, stop running every order right up to the edge of disaster.

Far too many professionals in sales, schedule projects so tightly that there is absolutely no room for error. Everything looks perfect on paper until one small thing happens,

and suddenly the entire campaign begins to unravel.

Let me give you a very realistic example.

Imagine a supplier has completed a decorated apparel order. Everything is packed, labeled, and ready to go one day before the client’s event. On the surface, that sounds great. Everyone feels confident because the order shipped “on-time.”

However, during pickup, a freight company accidentally grabs 30 boxes instead of the 10 intended for your customer. The remaining 20 boxes belong to another client and are suddenly rerouted somewhere they should never have gone.

Now the ripple effect has begun.

- Tracking numbers no longer make sense.
- The supplier scrambles to locate freight.
- The salesperson and their support team are stuck making uncomfortable phone calls.
- The client is growing anxious because the date of the event is approaching fast.

Nobody intentionally created the problem, but the problem still exists.

This is exactly why building in “time margins” matters.

One of the biggest mistakes salespeople make

is assuming that great suppliers are immune to challenges. They are not. Even the best suppliers deal with machine failures, staffing issues, inventory discrepancies, weather delays, freight carrier mistakes, power outages, art revisions, and simple human error.

That does not make them bad suppliers. It makes them human.

The real issue is not whether something can go wrong. The real issue is whether you allowed enough breathing room in the process to recover if it does.

Too many people in our industry operate with a “just in time” mindset. They want products to land the day before the trade show, the morning of the event, or sometimes even hours before distribution begins. That approach may work several times, but eventually the odds catch up with you.

And when they do, the stress is enormous.

Margins disappear because rush freight suddenly becomes necessary. Relationships become strained because everyone is operating emotionally instead of strategically. Clients lose confidence because they do not care about the complexity behind the scenes. They simply know whether the products arrived when promised.

What many professionals fail to realize is that early delivery almost never creates frustration. In fact, it usually creates the exact opposite reaction.

Relief. Confidence. Trust.

When products arrive several days early, clients feel prepared. Event coordinators can breathe easier. Marketing teams gain confidence. Internal stakeholders stop

worrying.

Most importantly, if there is an issue with the shipment, there is still time to fix it.

That is the power of “time margins.”

I have always believed that it is far better to look like a hero for being early than to spend days apologizing for being late. Early delivery positions you as organized, proactive, and dependable. Clients begin to see you as more than a salesperson. They see you as someone protecting their brand and reputation.

That distinction matters.

The best professionals in this industry are not simply order takers. They are strategists, they are problem preventers. They understand that one of the most valuable things they can deliver is peace of mind.

Building “time margins” does not mean adding unnecessary weeks to every project. It means thinking strategically and responsibly.

It means setting internal deadlines earlier than the actual event date. It means encouraging faster proof approvals. It means communicating realistic expectations upfront instead of making dangerous promises simply to win business. It also means understanding that freight should never be treated as a certainty. Shipping carriers make mistakes every single day.

Strong professionals account for that reality.

Another important point to consider is this. Sometimes we unintentionally train our clients to procrastinate because we repeatedly rescue impossible situations. While there are moments where we absolutely need to step up and make miracles happen, constantly operating in crisis mode is not healthy for

profitability, client relationships, or team morale.

At some point, discipline must outweigh adrenaline.

The promotional products industry is filled with moving parts, and no matter how experienced you are, there will always be variables outside your control. The smartest professionals understand this and plan accordingly.

They do not hope things go right; they build systems that protect against things going wrong. That is a major difference.

In the end, “time margins” are not wasted time. They are strategic insulation. They protect your reputation, your profitability, your client relationships, and your peace of mind.

Because when all is said and done, better early than late will always be the winning strategy.

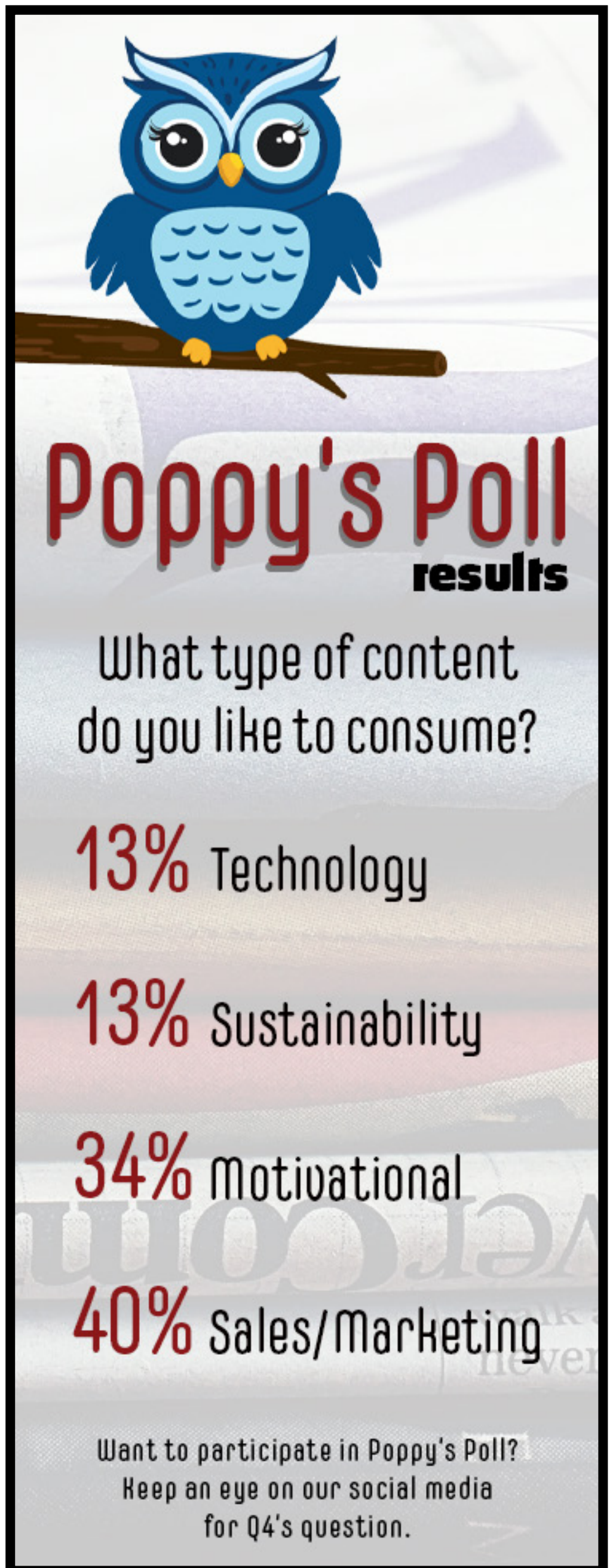
The next time you schedule a project, quote a timeline, or communicate a delivery expectation to a client, ask yourself one important question:

“Have I built enough breathing room into this project to protect both my client and my reputation?”

That one decision may determine whether you become remembered as a trusted partner or just another person reacting to problems after they occur.

Until next month, continued good selling - CQ

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