



The winds are a-changing

by Steve Grossman, CPMR
GM Partners

IHRA Founding President; MRERF / IPA Board Governor

My son sent me an internet commentary on what is probably going to happen to **Barnes and Noble**, **Best Buy** and **Sears** over the next few years. Below are my thoughts.

Even though I own a **Nook**, I think B&N is in trouble long term. It would sadden me greatly if the last large book store disappeared from the brick and mortar environment. To me, if they are to survive, they need to merge/meld with another retailer and share space to cut down their overhead. I would do extensive customer research to find the right partner.

Sears is a story unto themselves. Along with cleaning up their multi-layered buying philosophy, they need to find their niche in the market place. To me they are neither a department store nor a Wal-Mart. Maybe with the internet and all the other brick and mortar competition, they missed the bus.

Best Buy needs to follow the trail of **Apple** stores and offer a service that is almost priceless. Just like **Nordstrom's**, the customer is willing to pay more for service. How do you beat the internet pricing and stay profitable is the question.

As you know if you read my column, one of my major customers has chosen to eliminate reps and brokers from supporting them. I have agonized over whether or not to send a letter to one of their top management. And as today, probably not. As you know, I believe our function as field sales professionals is an important value to our customers and here are some of my reasons.

- Retailers who choose to keep reps out or minimize them to me have

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February 2012

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The Subject is Taxing

2012 & Forward

by Stanton B. Herzog

Applebaum, Herzog & Associates, P.C.

IHRA Accountant and Financial Consultant



We enter the new year surely unsure of the future of taxation in the United States. All of the Bush tax benefits end On December 31, 2012 unless Congress acts. It seems that the last time Congress acted was for a variety show. Hopefully I underestimate them.

Of immediate interest is that certain things already have dropped out of the tax code unless Congress reinstates them postmortem. For the past several years individuals have had an opportunity to deduct sales taxes as an itemized deduction if it exceeded their state income tax payments (a certainty for states with no income tax); this is out in 2012, as is a deduction by teachers of \$250 on page one of their returns. Also gone are the page one deduction for education, direct contributions to charity from IRAs, and the energy property credits. We commented in our last article about the limitations on depreciation. Perhaps most importantly, the additional credits against Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) also disappear, which will greatly increase the cost and the number of individuals trapped in AMT.

Incidentally there is a hidden tax increase in the payroll tax law that was passed just before the end of the year. The law requires recapture of the 2% saving if a taxpayer's earnings exceed the maximum social security amount for the months of January and February (that would be \$9,175 per month). This would be collected as an additional tax on the individual's 2012 tax return. How this will be implemented is mind-boggling; we need to wait and see.

The year 2013 is a watershed year. Besides the end of all income tax benefits of the Bush years, we encounter a new tax to help defray the costs of the Health Care law. It is based upon 3.8% of "investment income" for individual returns with Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) exceeding \$200,000 and joint returns with AGI in excess of \$250,000. Invest-

Continued on page 2 >>>>

Herzog (continued from page 1)

ment income includes dividends, interest, capital gains, and purchased annuities. All retirement income is excluded. The tax is based on the lower of investment income or the amount by which AGI exceeds the \$200,000/\$250,000 figure.

For example, if a married couple had \$50,000 of investment income and their AGI was \$280,000, they would pay tax of \$1,140 (3.8% of \$30,000) (280-250). If their AGI was \$240,000, they would pay nothing. There have been emails floating around that residences would be taxed upon sale. This is very limitedly true, since capital gains are considered investment income. But there is a “permanent” exclusion of \$500,000 of profit on the sale of a qualifying residence before it becomes taxable as a capital gain. Thus this tax on the sale of a residence, while possible, will be extremely rare.

=====

Each year the IRS adjusts certain tax numbers for inflation and tax law changes. Here are some of the adjusted numbers you’ll need for your 2012 tax planning:

- * **STANDARD MILEAGE RATE** for business driving remains at 55.5¢ a mile. Rate for medical and moving mileage decreases to 23¢ a mile. Rate for charitable driving remains at 14¢ a mile.
- * **SECTION 179** maximum deduction decreases to \$139,000, with a phase-out threshold of \$560,000.
- * **TRANSPORTATION FRINGE BENEFIT** limit decreases to \$125 for vehicle/transit passes and increases to \$240 for qualified parking.
- * **SOCIAL SECURITY** taxable wage limit increases to \$110,100. Retirees under full retirement age can earn up to \$14,640 without losing benefits.
- * **KIDDIE TAX** threshold remains at \$1,900 and applies up to age 19 (up to age 24 for full-time students).
- * **NANNY TAX** threshold increases to \$1,800.
- * **HSA CONTRIBUTION** limit increases to \$3,100 for individuals and to \$6,250 for families. An additional \$1,000 may be contributed by those 55 or older.
- * **401(k)** maximum salary deferral increases to \$17,000 (\$22,500 for 50 and older).
- * **SIMPLE** maximum salary deferral remains at \$11,500 (\$14,000 for 50 and older).
- * **IRA** contribution limit remains at \$5,000 (\$6,000 for 50 and older).
- * **ESTATE TAX** top rate remains at 35%, and the exemption amount increases to \$5,120,000.
- * **The ANNUAL GIFT TAX EXCLUSION** remains at \$13,000.
- * **ADOPTION TAX CREDIT** decreases to \$12,650 for adoption of an eligible child.

Stanton B. Herzog, CPA, principal in the firm of Applebaum, Herzog & Associates, P.C., Deerfield, Ill., serves as IHRA’s accountant and is a regular contributor to The REPorter. He participates in Expert Access, the program that offers telephone consultations to IHRA members.

You can reach Stan Herzog at 847-405-0400 or fax him at 847-405-0405, or e-mail him at sherzog@theahagroup.com.

Grossman (continued from page 1)

chosen to “throw the baby out with the bath water.” Major retailers such as Wal-Mart, Target, Sears, and Finger Hut embarked on this same strategy and all have reverted back to a balance between retailers-suppliers—broker/ reps.

- A professional broker’s or rep’s first loyalty is to their customer base
- A direct-factory employee’s first loyalty is to that company and opportunity for advancement.
- No professional rep would ever disrupt the relationship between customer and factory.
- Reps offer a knowledge of successes and failures in their marketplace
- There are numerous studies showing that suppliers using brokers and reps on their team are more profitable.
- Reps continue to get calls for assistance in contacting accounts, but when they are told the account does not allow reps, there is a potential loss to all.

As I said, the winds are a-changing, probably the only constant. See you next month at the 2012 International Home + Housewares Show.
Steve Grossman, CMPR (Steman4@aol.com) IHRA and MANA Member



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Tech Bit 72 - Start Thinking in Five Dimensions

There are the standard four dimensions: length, width, height, and time, usually represented by x, y, z and t. Add your data and you have five dimensions.

Too many computer systems collect data without any additional information.

An example is a traditional warehouse management system. It might collect the quantity on hand, derived from quantities received and quantities shipped.

When I was a manufacturers' representative, I was asked to participate in the functional requirements specification process for one of our manufacturers. The groups had decided that using portable bar code readers would speed data entry and reduce errors—common reasons to use bar codes.

Later they were trying to come up with ways the system might be used to improve warehouse productivity. The roadblock was getting the data they needed. I suggested they time stamp all the receiving and shipping barcode reads. As the database of start and stop time stamps, along with quantity received or shipped, is created, it would be possible to calculate the average times required for a given quantity. That information could be used to better schedule workers, or evaluate worker performance.

We had actually used time stamped bar code reads in our agency. As an experiment I had equipped a salesman with a Videx Timewand. It was a credit card sized bar code reader about as thick as 7 credit cards. It only had one button and a LED in one corner that served as the reader. It read relatively simple code 3 of 9 bar codes, adding a time stamp to each read. At the end of the day he would put the reader into a charger which also downloaded the data. He'd scan the customer number on the way into a sales call. At the end of the call, he'd scan the bar codes representing the manufacturers he had presented during the sales call. In addition to the times started and stopped, we knew the location (the customer's address from our CRM database), and lines presented.

Plotting the sales calls for that salesman over a week showed movement a lot like Brownian motion (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brownian_motion). It was a powerful demonstration of the need to better plan your week. We calculated that salesman could have made approximately 20% more sales calls by better scheduling of his calls to reduce the amount of driving each week; not to mention lower driving costs. These two examples show that adding time information to simple data allows additional uses for that data.

Now imagine adding time and location information to your data.

At the Defrag conference (<http://www.defragcon.com>), Jeff Jonas from IBM reported that cell phones generate about 600 Billion time stamped, geo-location data points per day. His example use was a department store that could not only figure out where their customers came from, but which aisles they walked up and down while shopping.

Smart phones add another facet to time stamped, geo-located data collection. A relatively simple app could be developed that uses the phone's built-in GPS to geo-locate data entered manually or via a bar code (think of all the square QR bar codes that are being used to direct smart phones to web sites). Coupled with the time of entry, or scan, and you have five dimensional data.

The question for you is "What can I do with five dimensional data?"

Here's a continuing feature in The *REPorter* "Tech Bits"



Gregg Marshall, CPMR, CSP, CMC, is a speaker, author and consultant. He can be reached by e-mail at gmarshall@vendor-tech.com, or visit his website at <http://www.vendor-tech.com/>

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Booth # S3356-S3357

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Person to Contact:

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Naples, FL

8 - 11
International Builders' Show
Orlando, FL

10 - 14
Ambiente
Frankfurt, Germany

18 - 21
San Francisco International Gift Fair
San Francisco, CA

27 - 29
Electronic Retailing Association Great Ideas Summit
Miami, FL

March

1 - 3
Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Expo
Atlanta, GA

10 - 13 International Home + Housewares Show Chicago, IL

17 - 19
Atlanta Spring Gift, Home Furnishings & Holiday Market
Atlanta, GA

22 - 25
Dallas Total Home & Gift Market
Dallas, TX

April

17 - 20
New York Spring Tabletop Market
New York, NY

20 - 23
Hong Kong Housewares Fair
Hong Kong, China

20 - 23
Home Products China Sourcing Fair
Hong Kong, China

21 - 26
High Point International Home Furnishings Market
High Point, NC

27 - 29
Kitchen & Bath Industry Show KBIS
Chicago, IL

May

1 - 3
National Hardware Show/Homewares Show
Las Vegas, NV

19 - 23
ICFF, Surtex, National Stationery Show
New York, NY

29 - 31
Home Products China Sourcing Fair
Dubai, U.A.E.

June

1 - 3
World Tea Expo
Las Vegas, NV

1 - 5
GMDC General Merchandise Marketing Conference
Orlando, FL

12 - 14
Licensing International Expo
Las Vegas, NV

17 - 19
NASFT Fancy Food Show
Washington, DC

20 - 26
Dallas Total Home & Gift Market
Dallas, TX

23 - 26
NACDS Marketplace
Denver, CO

July

9 - 11
Home Products China Sourcing Fair
Miami, FL

11 - 18
Atlanta International Gift & Home Furnishings Market
Atlanta, GA

19 - 25
Chicago Market
Chicago, IL

30 - August 3
Las Vegas Market
Las Vegas, NV

**If we are missing any events
you think should be on our
calendar, please let us know
at: info@ihra.org.
Thank You!**



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Fax: 847.748.8273

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