

# Turn your data into information and succeed



**By Elliot Schiller**

The newly formed Apparel Development Center recently suggested that the Canadian apparel industry is in the midst of a perfect storm. With consumer mentality focused on price and an Asian workforce able to manufacture apparel with inexpensive labor, Canadian manufacturers must find a way to compete.

Despite this competitive market, many Canadian success stories exist. These successful companies share a common element — focus. They know their products, their customers, their competition — and they know how to exploit that knowledge.

About the prime condition for success, Andrew Carnegie once said, “Concentrate your energy, thought and capital exclusively upon the business in which you are engaged. Having begun on one line, resolve to fight it out on that line, to lead in it, adopt every improvement, have the best machinery, and know the most about it.” The Apparel Development Center, with the support of Industry Canada, is working to arm the apparel industry with tools to help it achieve this combination of focus and expertise.

One such tool is Apparel Marketing Manager™, a business intelligence tool (see my article in CAM’s July/August 2005 issue) that helps convert simple data into highly useful, easy-to-access, clearly presented information. Like a smart Rubik’s Cube able to sort its own colored squares into relevant patterns, Apparel Marketing Manager™ analyzes raw data and groups it as related information, generating valuable insights you can act on.

Imagine that one color on the Rubik’s Cube represents customers, another color represents products, another price, and so on. Now imagine being able to spin the sides of the cube a few times and suddenly have clear, recognizable patterns emerge instead of agonizing for hours or days trying to place in relative proximity a few squares of similar color. Apparel Marketing Manager™ does the work for you, spinning the individual squares into patterns and groups, allowing you to identify and take advantage of important opportunities.

You own the data to fill up the cube; it is accumulated in the enterprise transactional business system you use to manage your business. Every time you develop a line for the upcoming season, every time a customer orders goods from that line, every time you establish shipping dates, prices for the goods, every time you receive inventory into finished goods, and every time you establish a cost for the goods, you could be building your smart Rubik’s Cube.

Many apparel companies formerly in the private label business recognize that they need

to better promote their own brands to avoid being forced to compete on the basis of price alone. One such company, having embarked on a marketing campaign to increase its market share in Canada and make a significant move into the United States, was pleased with its initial success but needed a tool for measuring the ongoing effectiveness of its efforts. Apparel Marketing Manager™ is the ideal tool for such a company, since it can help ensure that both the company’s established and new customers will be optimally serviced. Use of the tool allows the company to proactively manage its sales representatives and agents by identifying key performance indicators, such as which of them capitalize most on leads, which cover the most accounts or which achieve the highest margins. Apparel Marketing Manager™ further allows this company to assess how well its marketing campaigns are working, including where such campaigns are most or least successful — or where they are having little effect at all, allowing the company to react before undue money and resources have been squandered.

Consider the example of a sewn products manufacturer with a large customer base in both Canada and the United States. Before implementing the tool that allows it to spin its Rubik’s Cube in various ways, this company relied heavily on traditional sales reports and was constantly frustrated by an inability to detect, and respond to, changes in business conditions.

With Apparel Marketing Manager™ in place, the company is now able to perform ad hoc queries by customer, product, sales rep, province and warehouse. Analysis is done by fiscal and calendar year, quarter, month — even week. As with many players in this sector, this company has access to point-of-sale (POS) data from its major customers. It has integrated the POS data into its Rubik’s Cube and now enjoys the ability to spot trends sooner, thereby continually improving its level of service. Queries using the tool are so swift and easy to perform that staff bring it to weekly planning meetings to immediately address any questions that arise.

The president of a third company — who also happens to be the company’s top salesman — recently approached us explaining that he had invested significantly over the past five years in business systems, yet his marketing department remained less than satisfied with the kind of information it was getting. He needed a new system, he said, to truly help him manage his 80 salespersons across North America. We suggested Apparel Marketing Manager™. Today he has spun his cube into patterns that benefit not only marketing but many other departments — enabling the company to better identify what is happening both outside and in.

The above examples describe cases in which data was imported from transactional business systems, as well as either Excel or Access databas-

es, or, in one case, a POS file. Apparel Marketing Manager™ can draw together data from different locations to generate an integrated Rubik’s Cube containing all the information relevant to your business and its performance.

Ask yourself how many Excel and Access databases you have supporting your business and how the data is entered. Perhaps you maintain a link from your main system into these databases, requiring that your administrative staff spend a significant number of hours manipulating the data in order to squeeze out pertinent nuggets. Or maybe you’re typing in data from an output report of the transactional business system. How many times have keying errors resulted in contradictory numbers coming from different sources?

Apparel Marketing Manager™ does away with such inconsistency, linking your data from one computer to another and updating it as frequently as you wish. The beauty of this tool is not in the ability to create new information, but in the speed and sophistication with which such information is accessed, organized and presented.

Imagine every time you wanted to learn something about a different aspect of your business, or your product line or customer focus shifted, or you wanted to explore new product areas, little more than a few twists of the Rubik’s Cube were needed — no more days or weeks necessary for formulating, designing, developing, debugging, and testing for the information you needed yesterday.

Furthermore, because Apparel Marketing Manager™ requires no implementation delay or cost for additional development, it allows you to “what if” your business — even while on the road. Now, when you’re in Asia sitting in front of your supplier, or back in your hotel room analyzing your opportunities, you can spin the cube, rather than spinning your wheels, and feel fully confident in the solutions you offer.

Apparel Marketing Manager™ helps you avoid slogging through endless data by bringing to the surface clear, organized, highly valuable information to help drive better informed, more strategic decisions every day. By showing you what is happening right now in your business, this tool allows you to take advantage of opportunities that might otherwise pass undetected.

Isn’t that what Andrew Carnegie was talking about, after all? Know your business every way you can — and enjoy the success that results! ■

*Elliot Schiller, B.Sc., Ph.D., C.M.C. is co-founder of Teegeer Schiller Inc., management consultants serving clients in Toronto, Montreal and New York and specializing in the sourcing and securing of government funding as well as the improvement of business operations through enhanced use of systems. During the past year, clients of Teegeer Schiller Inc. have received over \$6 million in government funding.*

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## David Teeger

### Director

David Teeger C.A., C.A. (S.A.) graduated as a Chartered Accountant in South Africa, and upon arrival in Canada he obtained his Canadian C.A. designation and joined Richter & Associates, a management consulting firm, where he concentrated his practice on various business sectors including household goods, fashion, automotive parts, public associations, and retail chains. He performed many roles in his 15 years at Richter, including managing the professional services organization in North America and all business operations throughout Europe.

David's professional capabilities include computer audits, feasibility studies, system analyses and assistance in the selection, negotiation and implementation of computerized solutions.

As a founding partner of Teeger Schiller Inc., he has focused his practice on consulting to management. His team of professionals has helped businesses select and successfully install a variety of ERP business solutions and add-on systems including business intelligence solutions to give new life to existing computer systems. David's clients not only rely on him to successfully manage the implementation of their new systems, but to manage the change that occurs in their organizations as a result of the use of these new tools.



## Elliot Schiller

### Director

Elliot Schiller, Ph.D., C.M.C. began his career as a Chemical Engineer working for Grumman Aircraft, in Long Island, New York. He obtained his Ph.D. at the University of Pittsburgh with funding from the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, and, after being awarded a Presidential Fellowship, he went on to perform research and development activities at Brookhaven National Laboratory.

Since coming to Canada, he has primarily assisted consumer products and retail organizations in a variety of strategic management initiatives, traveling around the globe on behalf of his clients. In 1987, Elliot joined Richter & Associates, and it is here that he first met David Teeger.

As a founding partner of Teeger Schiller Inc., he has focused the SR&ED / Grant Division on obtaining grants and tax incentives for over 100 companies in the small to medium sized business sector. His team has provided services to the discrete / processing manufacturing, material development, textiles, apparel, automotive and computer sciences sectors. Annually, Teeger Schiller Inc. secures more than \$5 million in government funding to assist its clients in having their business initiatives supported by government funding.



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