

## A conversation with Howard Kirschenbaum



Howard Kirschenbaum

For more than three decades, Howard Kirschenbaum has sold bags and wraps to retailers across the nation, helping them develop their store brand selection in the category. Today, he is vice president of sales for Armonk, N.Y.-based Trinity Plastics, the company formed by Inteplast Group, Livingston, N.J., following its recent acquisition of Trinity Packaging's bags and wraps assets. He also serves as a vice chairman of the board of the Private Label Manufacturers Association (PLMA), New York.

**Private Label => Store Brands** asked Kirschenbaum to discuss recent developments at his company, as well as what he sees going on in the store brand industry today.

**Private Label => Store Brands: What are the most exciting store brand categories right now, and what makes them so exciting?**

**Howard Kirschenbaum:** I am a fan of store brand products that address food allergies. What I find most interesting about them is that they exemplify how much trust today's consumers have in store brand products.

**PLSB: Which categories aren't getting the recognition they deserve?**

Kirschenbaum: Bags. Right now, store brand food bags – meaning zipper and fold over – represent 42 percent market share, and store brand trash bags represent 40 percent. The savings offered to consumers far exceed other categories, and they deliver outstanding margins for retailers.

**PLSB: What is most exciting to you with regard to Trinity Plastics being an Inteplast company?**

Kirschenbaum: Without a doubt, all the resources, people, technology and financial backing. Trinity was a major player in the bags and wraps category. Now as Trinity Plastics, an Inteplast company, we are in the big leagues like never before, [ensuring] us of market strength [and] the ability to invest in new products and capital equipment. Inteplast is a powerhouse in the can-liner and film industries that acquired Minigrip, a leader in zipper bags, a little over a year ago. The advantages for Trinity customers and our company are enormous.

**PLSB: What is your favorite store brand product?**

Kirschenbaum: The answer relates to my childhood. I really like Wegmans' sparkling beverage. It reminds me of the seltzer I enjoyed so much as a kid.

**PLSB: What product demonstrates store brand growth potential in the bags and wraps category?**

Kirschenbaum: High-performance flex trash bags with odor-neutralizing scents. Consumers really like them.

**PLSB: What is your fondest memory in your career so far?**

Kirschenbaum: About five years ago, I received a call from a board member at PLMA, recruiting me to become a member of the board. They wanted a non-grocery presence. Naturally, I was flattered, but the real reason it touched me is that it made me feel like I had accomplished something with my career that others found value in.

**PLSB: Who is your greatest hero, and what makes him or her such an inspiration?**

Kirschenbaum: I am going to answer this from a work perspective. That person is Dave Gold, founder of the 99 Cents Only [Stores] chain. He built an empire from one store with a brilliant concept. He was down to earth, smart and unique.

**PLSB: If you had not gone into retail, what would you be?**

Kirschenbaum: I would have operated a vineyard in Napa – a career with true benefits.