

Industrial Fabrics Association International INSIDERS

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Together is better.

A closer look at one of our members.

The enjoyment of growing a business

When Mary Orlando-Llewellyn's husband, a commercial real estate agent, learned about a business that was for sale, the couple acted on the opportunity and set out to learn about the fabrics industry. Their acquisition, **Swatch Services Mid-Atlantic** in Baltimore, Md., produces textile swatch cards, brochures, and sample presentation materials for a variety of markets, such as fabric used for digital printing, manufacturing protective gear, creating architectural structures, and apparel fabrics, including those for custom clothing and sportswear. They also work with linens, vinyl and leather.

It's not the direction one might guess a former video producer, and radio and television newscaster would choose to go next. But Llewellyn had also worked in sales and discovered that she really liked it, so as serendipitous as the business move might appear, it was a proper fit for her at the time. "That was a good switch for me," she says, "and now it is all sales."

The swatch niche

She quickly set about expansion. "When we first started doing some more marketing it was very clear that there was a niche to fill," she says. "We've grown into a lot of different industries—sportswear apparel, technical fabrics for firefighters, for example, caps and t-shirts—we've seen an increase in organic cottons, use of recycled materials and sustainable products." They also work with companies that produce canvases for artists and printable fabrics. "That's a very big thing now," she says.

Typically, their customers find them via their website or through referrals. "There's a wide variety of customers that we've worked with," she says—for example, a company that recycles tires into purses. "We make header cards, booklets, that they can take to their trade shows," she says.

Their flexibility and versatility have helped to build success with clients from all over the country. "I think sometimes they can't find anybody to do what needs to be done. ... I get a lot of business from people who said, 'I've called other companies and they said our job was too small.'" As a custom service company, Llewellyn recognizes the importance of working closely with the customer to provide "really good customer service," she says.

"It's a joint venture, especially the first time you work together. I think that we do a good job of providing that," she says. The best part of the job, she says, is helping her customers to successfully complete projects that increase their sales. "Our customers know that samples of actual fabrics will show the true color, feel, and texture of their products," she says.

At the end of the day

But life is more than a successful niche in the fabrics business. Keeping up with the activities of her three children, gardening, cooking, reading—and zumba dance classes, for a change of pace—are all part of her full and varied life. She hardly needs something else to do, but someday, perhaps, you might find her applying her expertise elsewhere as a volunteer. "I would probably gravitate toward doing some work with the symphony, she says, or "doing marketing for an arts organization." With two children involved in music, it could be another natural transition.

For now, she's happy to be ready for the next interesting project that finds Swatch Services. "It's fascinating to see what comes in the door," she says.



Mary Orlando-Llewellyn, Swatch Services Mid-Atlantic, has found her niche in sales and custom swatch products. Photo: Swatch Services Mid-Atlantic.