

A Canvas for Good

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We talk to Pat Noonan, Chief Product Officer of Better Buying Champion Subscriber SanMar Corporation, on how working with Better Buying is supporting the company to live up to its motto, of being “a canvas for good” around the World

Tell us briefly who SanMar are, and what you do?

Family-owned since 1971, SanMar Corporation is a national supplier of 21 retail, private label and mill brands. We supply apparel and accessories to screen printers, embroiderers, promotional products distributors, athletic dealers, industrial launderers and more, whether they are outfitting a Fortune 500 corporation or the local bowling team.

SanMar’s vision is to create “a canvas for good.” We use blank apparel as our canvas to improve the lives of more than 100,000 people around the world, to positively impact our employees in the U.S. and to enable our customers who are often touchstones in their communities.

Why did you decide to engage with Better Buying?

Because we believe in strong, fair partnerships with our factories and we want to make sure we’re doing everything we can to help our vendors succeed.

At SanMar, we believe business is personal and Better Buying is a remarkable tool, helping us gain insights into how we can be a better partner to our global vendor base. We particularly like the totally anonymous nature of Better Buying as it makes sure there is no pressure on vendors to be anything other than completely open in their reviews of us.

SanMar expects all our suppliers and factories to operate in full compliance with local laws and regulations and to adhere to SanMar’s Global Operating Principle (our Code of Conduct). But we also understand they can only do that if we are equally responsible for our actions, and how we do business with them. Better Buying acts as that tool for us, helping us verify our purchasing practices from our supplier’s perspective.

How do you use Better Buying’s tools and resources to support your business goals?

Honestly, we’re still trying to figure out how to best use the resources that Better Buying provides. We began our partnership in 2019 and received our first set of scores in early 2020.

Now that our marketplace is recovering from COVID we’re going to lean on our Better Buying results to help identify and prioritize some of our key improvement initiatives. For example, our results indicated that a balanced vendor scorecard would be helpful to our global partners and that is something we’re working really hard to pull together in the year ahead.

One thing we absolutely have done with the results is share them broadly across internal stakeholders. Our product development and sourcing teams are all well aware of the results and know that we want to target underperforming areas for improvement.

In 2019, we learned that our vendors felt an integrated scorecard would be helpful, so we're in the process of developing one to rollout in 2022.

In our 2021 Scorecard, we did well in planning and forecasting, improving on our 2019 score and scoring above the industry average, but it was still the most mentioned area for potential improvement, so we are definitely going to put some focus there.

Our 2021 Company Report identified other opportunities, such as committing to capacity in advance and pulling together an integrated vendor scorecard, and I'm really looking forward to diving into these in the year ahead.

Lastly, we found from this year's data that it's important for us to refer back to our CSR/environmental/compliance commitments more frequently when working with our partners, so we know that is an area to target as well.

What benefits and 'wins' have you seen as a result of working with Better Buying?

The obvious win is that working with Better Buying provides a very clear indication to our global partners that we are truly focused on building long-term, sustainable relationships with them, and really want to steer away from business as usual transactional relationships. Our vendor base understands our commitment and that results in them working much more closely with us than if we were purely transactional in approach.

The less obvious win is with our internal teams - when employees witness our commitment to industry-leading tools like Better Buying, it really drives home to them that SanMar is a place they want to stick around. We all want to know that our hard service is going to a company that we can be proud of, and working with Better Buying reinforces that SanMar is more than just another place to work.

What specific business challenges you have been able to solve thanks to your engagement with Better Buying?

The first is how to concretely demonstrate our commitment to being great partners. Words are one thing, but concrete actions - like partnering with Better Buying - really help demonstrate to our partners that we're 'walking the talk.'

How have you secured C-suite buy-in to the use of Better Buying data and resources?

San Mar's owners and leadership set the standard that business is personal. Everything starts and finishes with our ethical foundation of telling the truth, being fair, and behaving responsibly. Better Buying aligns and supports that ethos and goals.

Are there any additional products or services you would like Better Buying to offer?

As the platform grows, the more granular our results and feedback can be, the better. The more we can compare ourselves with companies that look like us (apparel companies sourcing in the same geographies), the more actionable and specific your feedback will be. I'm just excited for the post-COVID world when we can get back to some core continuous improvement initiatives and start using our Better Buying results to show if our actions have had an impact for our partners.

What's your vision of success when it comes to working with Better Buying into the future?

For SanMar to be a top-tier scorer on the platform. Acting as an evangelist to bring more companies on board so we build an even richer tool. By bringing others to the platform, we think we can help drive meaningful change in the way apparel companies work with their vendors beyond just SanMar - moving the needle for the industry, that will be success for us.

We know that when we're a better partner to our factories, they are able to more consistently meet our needs with on-time, first quality production. It's truly a virtuous cycle to continuously improve the way you work with your vendors and SanMar is so fortunate to have the Better Buying tool as part of our solution set.

We believe transparency and leadership are essential to being a great partner to our global vendors. And that's why we have agreed to share our Better Buying 2021 Scorecard, and Company Report.