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Executive Profile

## Muzzillo's vision is to bring Amazon-style disruption to promotional products business

SUBSCRIBER CONTENT: Jan 25, 2018, 7:00pm EST

**Why Greg is a big deal:** *Greg and his wife, Vera, moved to Tampa from Cleveland five years ago. After college, Greg spent a year working for an accounting firm before leaving to start Proforma with a college friend. At that time, it was a distributor of printing services. They each invested \$100 and started calling on businesses. Within five years, sales grew into the millions, and by the mid-1980s Proforma was an Inc. 500 fastest-growing company three years in a row. In the late '80s, Proforma introduced a franchise program, designed to enable existing distributors to retain their business ownership, and share in sales and marketing resources, create purchasing power with industry suppliers, and offer back-office support in billing, accounting, vendor payments, cash flow and computer systems. Now, Proforma has more than 750 franchise owners and \$500 million in sales. The company has since added 60 jobs to its Tampa Bay headquarters since arriving here. It promises more jobs ahead here, and it still employs more than 100 people in its Cleveland headquarters. Muzzillo recently launched ProTalent, what he's calling the first franchise system exclusively for staffing pros. He works with his wife, Vera Muzzillo, who is CEO in the businesses. Together, they have 10 children and three grandchildren.*



NOLA LALEYE

Greg Muzzillo, founder of Proforma and ProTalent.

**Could you please explain what the business is?** It's 100 percent franchise owners. Proforma has about a half-billion dollars in systemwide sales. Our approach is not to say we are a printing or promotional products company. We're an agency without the fees. We can be an addition to your staff without being an addition to your payroll. So, we come in and try to ask good questions and find out really what are people trying to accomplish? What are their pain points as it relates to that, or creating good communication? Then we bring the printing and the promotional products and packaging to bear.

**As a franchisor, is it true that you are providing consistency so customers know what they are getting with the brand?** It's actually not true. Because we're not retail. We're business to business. Our folks can work out of our home or a small office. Some have a distribution facility. Our largest is \$40 million a year, but with our franchise owners, because they are B2B, you wouldn't deal with one Proforma in one town and then go to another town and deal with another Proforma like you might eat at McDonald's here and you might travel to Connecticut and want the same experience. It's very different in B2B franchising. In today's world, relationships are everything and territories don't make any sense. When somebody, either Proforma or in the ProTalent business now, can have a great relationship today in Tampa that moves to San Francisco tomorrow, nobody wants to hear you can't deal with them because they moved out of your territory.

**What are your plans to disrupt the industry?** In today's world, let's say you wanted a [promotional] coozie or a cup. The way the transaction works in our industry today is very inefficient. Somebody places an order and then they have to call up the supplier and say, did you get the order? Then the supplier has to call the manufacturer and say, did you get the order? Everything is time sensitive because it's usually for a trade show or a meeting. Then the client has to call up and say, is it going to ship on time? Then the distributor has to call. Sometimes, it's up to eight touches. Amazon has taught all of us we don't need to call up and ask all these questions. It's all right there online. So we're investing \$10 million to help our franchise owners deliver an Amazon-like experience to their customers in the promotional products industry which does not exist today, and that's a huge competitive edge.

### Closer look

**Name, title:** Greg Muzzillo, founder, Proforma and ProTalent

**Off time:** Spends time with his family; reads about business development; plays poker (but only when he goes to Las Vegas)

**Kids' age range:** From seventh grade to age 35

**How he met his wife/how long married:** Match.com/17 years

**Amount of franchise owners in Proforma's "multimillion-dollar club" (sales ranging from \$2 million to over \$30 million):** 40

**Other projects:** Developing a software as a service (SaaS) company to help older media companies (newspaper, magazines, radio and television) thrive in the digital world.

**Local boards:** Former trustee, University of Tampa Board of Trustees; board, University of Florida Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation

**Speaker:** Gives talks on what he calls "The Gospel of Achievable, Believable Entrepreneurship"

**Alexis Mueller**

Editor

*Tampa Bay Business Journal*

