

Inc. 500 | 5000 Newsletter

Produced by the Inc. 500|5000

APRIL 2010

COMPANY SPOTLIGHT: MARKET FORCE

The Mystery Market



Men of Mystery: How the founders of Market Force are putting a masked industry on the map

These days, the customer means everything. Companies pay big money to figure out just exactly what consumers think when they make buying decisions. The people at [Market Force Information](#), a five-year-old company headquartered near Boulder, Colorado, have made it their business to shed light on a customer's ultimate "moment of truth." Modern companies,

especially the big ones, use a variety of ways to get that insight. For Market Force, though, it was a highly fragmented, dated and anonymous industry that paved the way to the firm's immense success over such a short period of time.

Karl Maier, Co-Founder and CEO, says, "I was looking for something new and didn't want to be a 'turn-around guy' anymore for companies." He wanted to start a company that could "find consolidation opportunities in an 'off-the-radar' industry," delivering "new products and technologies to transform the industry without missing a beat." Co-Founder Paul Berberian had the answer, and it was mystery shopping... *[story continued at the bottom of the page]*

Applicant of the Week

We'd like to shine a spotlight on some of the companies that are applying to be included in our ranking of the fastest-growing private companies in America. Every week our editors select a new applicant to be specially featured on Inc.com to be the [Applicant of the Week](#).

[Apply now](#) for the Inc. 500|5000 to be eligible for the Applicant of the Week featured spot on Inc.com.

Recent Applicants of the Week:

- Jamie Latshaw of [Lexicon Consulting](#) - a woman-owned language services company
- Stephen Jackson of [Smashing Ideas](#) - a Seattle-based interactive agency
- Gregory Lilien of [IguanaMed](#) - a scrubs and medical apparel company

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Flashback 5000: We Knew Them When

Five years ago, a relatively unknown clothing manufacturer and retailer called [American Apparel](#) made its [debut](#) at No. 218 on the Inc. 500|5000. Two months earlier, *Inc.* had run a [feature](#) on the firm's colorful and controversial CEO, Dov Charney ("He is...commonly said to look like a 1970s pornographer, and that is the sort of comparison that makes him very, very, happy.")

What started out as a primarily wholesale business was soon one of the country's well-known retailers. American Apparel went on to make the 2006 list at [No. 308](#), and the



DEADLINE: NEXT FRIDAY, APRIL 30

"3 years running, our continued growth is a direct result of being included on this prestigious list."

-Matthew Brosious
CEO and Founder
FreightCenter (Inc. 500|5000 honoree)

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We're here to help: Feel free to contact us at 212-389-5505 (toll free at 800-248-0308) or by email at feedback5000@inc.com.

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inaugural 2007 Inc. 5000 at [No. 1,409](#). In December of 2007 the firm completed a merger with Endeavor Acquisition Corp., a publicly-traded shell firm known as a specified purpose acquisition company, or SPAC (read *Inc.*'s coverage of the story [here](#)).

Charney still has a ways to go in order to reach the goal he announced in 2005 of 1,000 stores by 2008—there are currently 281 stores in the U.S., Canada, and 18 foreign countries—but his firm saw \$559 million in revenue last year, better than a fourfold increase from 2004, and is one of the largest-if not the largest-clothing manufacturers in the United States.

Some of the companies on this year's Inc. 500|5000 will be the American Apparels of 2030. Is one of them yours?

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Coming Out on Top: Top Lists Recognize Private Company Growth on a Local, Industry and Community level

The Inc. 500|5000's mission is not only to recognize private company growth nationwide – but also to highlight the most successful companies in top metro areas, industries, communities and other areas of leadership. Each year, [Inc. 500|5000 top lists](#) are both a tribute to the top companies in various categories and a show of collective private company might.

Represent your company and your community on the Inc. 500|5000.

Examples of past [Inc. 500|5000 top lists](#):

- [Revenue](#)
- [Employee count](#)
- [Woman-run](#)
- [Minority-run](#)
- [Industry](#)
- [Metro area](#)

Top List Teamwork: [The National Association of Women Business Owners \(NAWBO\)](#) and *Inc.* have partnered in 2010 to bring female business owners and CEOs special recognition and resources. Boasting over 7,000 members and 80 chapters across the country, NAWBO is a one-stop resource to propelling women business owners into greater economic, social and political spheres of power worldwide.

From the Inc. Community: Venissimo



You can't fault this [Inc. community](#) company for having a cheesy business model. Meet Gina Freize, co-founder and president, aka "Cheese Wiz," of [Venissimo](#), a chain of four cheese shops in southern California, plus an online store. Co-founded by Freize and her husband Roger, Venissimo's mission is to do for cheese what Starbucks did for coffee, "making Camembert as recognizable as cappuccino."

Currently Freize is evaluating three different models for expansion:

franchising, bringing in outside investors, or making acquisitions. She says the expansion plans will be finalized this summer.

Sampling is Venissimo's biggest form of advertising, and the firm keeps a database of customers' purchases, "like a cheese journal."

FAST ON THE DRAW

Congratulations to Inc. 500|5000 applicant [My1Stop.com](#), winner of our weekly Drawing!



Michael Del Chiaro
CEO
[My1Stop.com](#)

Winner of two tickets to the Inc. 500|5000 Conference and Awards Ceremony

Company snapshot:

A first-time Inc. 500|5000 honoree (debuting at No. 704 on the 2009 list), [My1Stop.com](#) is a Cary, North Carolina-based company that sells custom printed products, promotional items, printers, and office supplies from an online store.

Weekly drawings made possible by Inc. 500|5000 supporting partner, [Rothstein Kass](#)

Featured Inc. 500|5000 Partner: BizBuySell

BizBuySell is the Internet's most active marketplace for businesses and franchises for sale and has successfully connected over 30,000 sellers with buyers who purchased their business.

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In an effort to celebrate and honor growing private companies everywhere, [Click here to help us spread the word about the Inc. 500|5000.](#)



Got a Good Story?

Attention Inc. Private

Companies: If you think you've got a great story or idea for us, email us at pitches5000@inc.com. We refer to this email box for our newsletter stories, social media coverage and other Inc. community opportunities.

Mystery Market (continued)

Berbarian's father had been a **mystery shopper** (a paid shopper who visits a large brand's stores and reports on various aspects, such as service, cleanliness, etc.) as a part-time job. Berbarian suggested that **mystery shopping**—a 40-year-old industry that at the time consisted of 400+ scattered companies and appeared to be in desperate need of consolidation and renovation—would be a good place to start. The idea was hatched, Market Force founded, funds raised and soon the company acquired their first mystery shopping provider, Shop'n Chek. After the acquisition, it became clear that mystery shopping itself was only one piece of a larger picture—customer intelligence. Thus, a new mission emerged for the company: to consolidate and provide multiple kinds of customer experience information from every possible angle, allowing brands to "see their stores through their customer's eyes." This meant adding direct customer feedback, in-store merchandising and advanced new analytics to the already profitable mystery shopping.

Today, Market Force has grown from just four employees in its first year of business to 325. Of course, that kind of aggressive growth didn't happen without jumping a few hurdles and taking a few risks along the way. Rushton McGarr, Co-Founder and VP of Products & Communications, recounts, "As we were getting ready to buy our first company, the week before Christmas, Maier came to us [the four initial employees] and said the money had run out and we couldn't afford to pay ourselves. We weren't expecting to hear this kind of news, or to have to tell our spouses—all just before the holidays and before our first acquisition had gone through." Somehow, though, they made it through the holidays, stretched the cash and raised more funds. A month later, the acquisition closed.

From a founder's perspective, Maier says, "The company has moved forward with the motto, 'What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger.'" And as for the usual growing pains, the company relies on "relationships, breakthroughs, and thoughtfulness" to continually reinvent the culture, the company and the industry.

With over 180 large clients (including some of the largest name brands in the world), double-digit growth and a new technology platform launching soon, Market Force looks to continue along the same growth trajectory over the next five years. New products and even more mergers are on the horizon. No longer a "turn-around guy," Maier and Market Force are solving the ultimate mystery for their clients – what, why and how their customers buy.

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Inc. would like to thank the following partners for their support of the 2010 Inc. 500|5000:



We also use experiences and feedback from our community in our testimonial campaign. If you have an experience with the Inc. 500|5000 or Inc. community you would like to share with us, please send it to testimonial5000@inc.com. Your testimonial could be included in an email blast, on our website or on our social media pages.

KEY DATES: INC. 500|5000

- **Inc. 500|5000 application deadline**
NEXT FRIDAY, APRIL 30, 2010
- **Inc. 500|5000 verification deadline**
Friday, May 14, 2010
- **Inc. 500|5000 honoree notification**
Summer, 2010
- **Inc. 500|5000 list published on Inc.com and the top 500 in Inc.s magazine**
Tuesday, August 24, 2010
- **Inc. 500|5000 conference and awards ceremony**
September 30-October 2, 2010 - Washington D.C.

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Brian Cullen, CEO, SingleSource Property Solutions, No. 141, 2009

Deadline
is Friday,
April 30!