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How to make money, even now

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STAFF WRITER



Even in a rough economy, you can make money if you sell something that helps businesses save time and manpower or helps them multi-task, according to New Jersey companies exhibiting this week at the National Retail Federation trade show.



NATIONAL RETAIL FEDERATION

Keith Fenton, left, of Okidata America Inc. demonstrating the features of a signage printer.

The event, held Monday through today at the Javits Center in New York, drew about 500 vendors pitching products ranging from mobile cash registers to shopping baskets that use the same technology as rolling suitcases. Traffic on the show floor appeared to be down significantly, as the 16,000 retail executives and other professionals attending the event behaved much like shoppers this past holiday season — browsing but not buying.

However, several New Jersey companies displaying new products at the show said they are seeing strong growth, bolstered by sectors

such as manufacturing and government, despite softness in retail orders.

Robert Farina, chief executive officer of Parsippany-based CyberShift Inc., a provider of workforce and cost-management software, said the company's sales were up 35 percent last year, to more than \$30 million. CyberShift said sales accelerated in the second half of 2008. Manufacturing, education and media customers have been spending more on CyberShift software, including a new product that lets employees manage time and expense forms from mobile devices, he said.

"Retail has been our soft spot," Farina said. Midsize retailers have been more likely to approve projects involving "pay as you go" software, while the big players are holding off on the major investments involving purchases of software licenses.

"Nobody's got the guts to write a check for \$1 million in this economy," said Farina.

Harian Eplan, vice president of business development for Global Bay Mobile Technologies Inc. in South Plainfield, said annual sales are up double digits. The company expects to hire 10 employees this year, after hiring the same number in 2008 that boosted Global Bay's workforce to 38. Eplan said he received three leads in the first morning of the show Monday. "We're in there with a better mousetrap," he said. "We are in a business of helping operators get more efficient, so we have a good story to tell."

Global Bay was introducing retailers to its GBMobile Retail Suite applications that allow store employees to use their existing mobile handheld devices to do inventory management, check prices and complete transactions. Luxury handbag seller Coach Inc. and footwear company Crocs Inc. are among Global Bay's retail clients.

Global Bay also has had success creating mobile devices that replace complicated inspection forms for fire inspectors, state health department examiners and other government offices.

Okidata America Inc. in Mount Laurel was exhibiting two products that respond to the needs of today's retailers to change prices and print sale and advertising banners on a moment's notice. The products are a low-cost, smaller-size printer that combines the functions of printer, scanner, fax, e-mail transmitter and graphics center; and a device that enables store employees to print out price labels and stickers from a wireless device.

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Retailers are buying, said Michael Garofola, senior marketing manager for Okidata America, "if you provide them value and you prove a return on investment. You do need to show them a return on investment, however."

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