

reps interested.”

After coming home from the Show, the two quit their jobs and Blue Q was born. After adjusting their prices to accommodate reps, Blue Q gained its first customer.

“That Christmas season, Bloomingdale’s was our largest customer—they bought a ton of these things,” Seth said. “They were not only selling them; they were using them in their window as decorations for their Christmas windows in the flagship store in Manhattan.”

After the Flat Cat’s success, Blue Q expanded the line to include Instant Infant, Flat Fido and more. Within a few months’ time, Blue Q was selling product across the U.S. and had expanded into Canada. As the company grew, the brothers moved their headquarters from Boston to Pittsfield, Mass., with hardly any growing pains.

“We learned a lot about what kinds of reps we wanted, what kinds of shows we needed to be attending (and) what kind of products resonate with stores and buyers. One of the things we learned that we still laugh about today is that if you put a cat on anything, it will sell,” Seth said. “We’ve made various products over the years with cats on it and they all sell. It’s just crazy, but it’s a lesson learned.”



Mitch and Seth Nash hope to move their Blue Q office into their warehouse by summer 2018.

Flat-Out Good Samaritans

The Nash brothers never had to learn how to hire good people and do good work. Blue Q hires people who are mentally disabled in partnership with the Berkshire County Arc, an organization that provides those with disabilities opportunities to expand their quality of life.

“A lot of our products still continue to need packaging or assembly that is a good match for their skills, and it’s really an important piece of our business,” Seth said. “They’re an integral part of our workforce, and it’s also just a good thing for all of the other workers at Blue Q, too, who many times have never been exposed to people with disabilities.”

In addition to the outdoor garden and art classes Blue Q provides for its employees, the brothers explained that hiring those with mental disabilities doesn’t save them a penny—an important fact they reiterate to all employees. With employee titles like Rodeo Rider and Cackling Unicorn, the Blue Q culture doesn’t take itself too seriously and follows a horizontal hierarchy originally created by Toyota.

“We’re strong believers that everyone should have a say in how things work and how things can work best,” Seth said. “It’s one of our beliefs that every employee here is responsible for the success of the company. We make it really clear to everyone that if you have something to say in some area that can be improved, then speak up.”

For retailers who speak up about being uncomfortable with selling products that include profanity, Blue Q remedies the issue by providing “G-rated” products that are just as successful. The company spends an exhaustive amount of time designing displays to assist retailers in branding the Blue Q product so that it can stand out to consumers.

“We have many, many stores that just go around all the R-rated stuff and pick out the G-rated stuff, and that’s who they are and that’s who the customer base is. Invariably, I’d say most of the time they start selling our G-rated stuff, they’ll come to the shows, and they’ll say, ‘That stuff is so funny, but I could never sell that,’ and another retailer will be standing there and they’ll say, ‘Oh, you should just do it; my store sells a ton of that and have never gotten any complaints,’” Seth said. “So some



The People I’d Like To Meet tote is for the non-people person who loves their dog. Blue Q. blueq.com

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people get talked into the slightly more racy stuff—but not by us. They have to feel comfortable with what they’re selling.”

If retailers aren’t comfortable with the R-rated products, they can find comfort in the fact that every Blue Q product benefits a charity in some way. If a reusable plastic tote bag is bought, proceeds go to a nature conservancy. If a pair of socks is purchased, money is donated to Doctors Without Borders. Oven mitts? Hunger awareness.

“There are endless articles about large businesses being just profit hungry and not really giving back to the public, and we feel like that’s not really the way a company should be placed in the world,” Seth said. “We employ people, we pay people, we make money and hopefully we can give back in a number of ways to society. That’s how it should work. That’s just our belief.” •

Blue Q won Gift for Life’s 2018 Industry Achievement Award, which will be presented this summer at the Retailer Excellence Awards in New York.