

SSWA FUTURE LEADERS
SPONSORSHIP APPLICATION

Personal Information:

Name: Rosa Passi Date: 05/27/2025

Contact Information - Email: rperez@essendant.com Phone: 309-530-7672

Date of Birth: 09/17/1990 Years Employed in Sanitary Supply Industry: 3

Company: Essendant

Position: Category Manager

Company Mentor/Sponsor: Rebecca Zappoli

In addition to submitting your resumé, introductory video, and letter of nomination/recommendation, please complete the following information as applicable:

Volunteer Activity:

Please list the name of institution, dates of volunteer work, description of volunteer work, and why it is important to you.

Girl Scouts of America - Troop Leader, Sept 2021 - Present.

I'm a troop leader for 22 Brownie Girl Scouts who are about to bridge to Juniors (4th grade). I plan meetings and events that encourage independence, creativity, confidence, and skill-building. As a Girl Scout from age 5 to 18, I know firsthand how these experiences shape girls into strong, capable women. I feel incredibly fortunate to help guide and support their growth.

Work Activity:

Please list all current and past employment (include dates). For each job describe the nature of your position and any management positions held.

Category Manager - Essendant. May 2025 - Present. -Manager position of 4 (2 direct, each having 1 direct report)

Product Manager - Essendant. Dec 2023 - Apr 2025. -Manager position of 3 (2 direct, 1 with direct report)

Associate Product Manager - Essendant. Jun 2022 - Nov 2023. -Manager position of 1 direct report

Product Manager - Affy Tapple. Jan 2021 - Jun 2022. -Independent Contributor

Associate Product Manager - Affy Tapple. Nov 2019 - Dec 2020. -Independent Contributor

Personal Accomplishments:

Include any accomplishments that you would like to be considered in evaluating your application.

Essendant's Ascending Leaders Program, 2025-2026. Currently working through this opportunity.

Promoted to Category Manager @ Essendant, May 2025. Promoted to Product Manager @ Essendant, Dec 2023.

Girl Scout Service Unit New Leader Award, 2022. Awarded to 2 new leaders in Service Unit that have gone above and beyond for their troop and others.

ROSA PASSI

CATEGORY MANAGER

Mundelein, IL | 309-530-7672 | rosa.perezpassi@gmail.com | [LinkedIn](#)

Category Manager with 8+ years of experience in product lifecycle ownership, sourcing strategy, and cross-functional leadership in the Janitorial & Sanitation wholesale industry. Oversees a \$250M portfolio and leads a team of Associate Product Managers. Proven expert in uncovering profit levers, launching high-impact product lines, and delivering measurable financial results. Adept at leveraging data-driven insights to shape strategic decisions, drive category growth, and enhance market competitiveness.

SKILLS & SOFTWARE

- Product Development & Strategy
- Vendor Program Management
- Research & Trend Analysis
- Relationship Building & Team Leadership
- Data Analysis & Pricing Strategy
- Communication & Negotiation
- Merchandise Marketing & Brand Management
- Microsoft Office, Webframe, Power BI,

WORK EXPERIENCE

Category Manager

May, 2025 – Present

Essendant, Deerfield IL

- Own and manage a \$250M annual product portfolio across Safety, Facilities Maintenance, and Personal Care categories.
- Develop and monitor KPIs to identify profit levers, leading to ~\$750K in bottom-line contribution through strategic pricing, cost management, and assortment optimization.
- Spearhead supplier relations, contract negotiations, and sourcing initiatives, ensuring alignment with cost, quality, and service objectives.
- Drive cross-functional team collaboration with Marketing, Sales, Supply Chain, and Finance to successfully launch 3 new product lines, capturing \$400K in incremental revenue in the first quarter post-launch.
- Effectively communicate category strategy to influence stakeholders, challenge assumptions, and drive customer-focused, commercial solutions.
- Lead and mentor a category team, overseeing recruitment, training, and performance evaluations.

Product Manager

Dec, 2023 – Apr, 2025

Essendant, Deerfield IL

- Lead a \$230M product portfolio, overseeing product assortment, pricing, and promotional strategies to drive revenue and margin growth.
- Develop and execute long-term product strategies to align with business objectives and market demands.
- Manage cross-functional teams (sales, marketing, inventory, procurement, operations) to enhance B2B go-to-market strategies and optimize product roadmaps.
- Spearheaded merchandising strategies, improving category sales by 4% YOY and reducing excess inventory.
- Conduct competitive and market analysis, leading to the launch of 5 new product lines.
- Manage and optimize a \$4M marketing budget, ensuring maximum ROI.
- Own supplier relationships for 60+ suppliers, negotiating \$600K in supplier benefits to enhance profitability.
- Lead and mentor a category team, overseeing recruitment, training, and performance evaluations.

WORK EXPERIENCE CONT.

Associate Product Manager

Jun, 2022 – Nov, 2023

Essendant, Deerfield IL

- Managed a \$160M Facilities Maintenance and Industrial portfolio, spanning national brands and private label products.
- Conducted market analysis to identify new product and sourcing opportunities, resulting in successful product line introductions and private label cost savings.
- Led cross-functional teams across sales, marketing, inventory, and product management to execute B2B go-to-market plans and product roadmaps.
- Analyzed supplier cost structures and value drivers to inform negotiations and identify cost savings, cost avoidance, and service improvements, resulting in \$700K benefit in my first year.
- Created marketing collateral and product education materials to support sales enablement and enhance customer engagement.
- Directed all team management activities, including performance evaluations, recruitment, and goal setting.

Product Manager

Jan, 2021 – Jun, 2022

Affy Tapple/Mrs. Prindables, Niles IL

- Owned full product lifecycle for a \$20M portfolio spanning multiple customer channels, setting product strategy, roadmap priorities, and feature development based on customer needs, competitive trends, and revenue potential.
- Worked directly with leadership to manage the account and product strategy in aspects of growth and profitability for key customers including, Costco, Aldi, Walmart, and Levy Restaurants.
- Led pricing strategy formulation and execution, delivering profitability improvements while ensuring price integrity and market competitiveness.
- Conducted market and competitive analysis—including seasonal audits—to inform positioning, feature sets, and go-to-market strategy.

Associate Product Manager

Nov, 2019 – Dec, 2020

Affy Tapple/Mrs. Prindables, Niles IL

- Conducted competitive research and seasonal audits to support pricing and product positioning decisions.
- Created detailed product tech packs and managed development process from concept to final production, including factory engagement and on-site overseas visits to ensure quality and timeline adherence.
- Reviewed UX and design deliverables, providing strategic and tactical feedback to ensure alignment with product goals and customer expectations.

PROGRAMS

Ascending Leaders Program

Essendant 2025 – 2026

EDUCATION

Illinois Institute of Art – Schaumburg

Bachelor's of Fine Arts – Fashion Design, 2015

To the SSWA Future Leaders Selection Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm that I recommend Rosa for the SSWA Future Leaders program. I have had the honor of working alongside Rosa as her manager for over two years, and even prior to that in collaborative roles across departments. In that time, Rosa has proven herself to be exactly the kind of emerging leader our industry needs—curious, driven, strategic, and deeply committed to growth.

Rosa stands out because she never settles. She asks smart questions, challenges the status quo, and is always looking for ways to improve both processes and outcomes. She's someone whose wheels are always turning—not just to solve the problem in front of her, but to think three steps ahead.

In just the past two years, Rosa has earned two well-deserved promotions, a clear testament to her impact and potential. She manages her category with pride and full ownership. She is a humble yet confident leader—someone who knows what she wants, pushes for results, and leads with a combination of toughness and empathy that is rare and invaluable.

What truly sets Rosa apart is her ability to lead with grace, even under pressure. Her story is one of quiet strength and resilience. Raised in a rural area, Rosa built a strong foundation from modest beginnings—but she never let her circumstances define her ceiling. As a minority woman, a young mother, and someone who lives with the challenge of blindness in one eye, Rosa has continuously defied the odds. She balances a blended family, a demanding career, and personal challenges with remarkable poise and determination. She is deeply rooted, yet fearlessly ambitious—and that duality is at the core of her leadership.

Rosa negotiates with confidence, solves problems creatively, and always finds a way to get things done—while making others feel empowered in the process. She motivates her team, supports their growth, and leads with authenticity. Rosa is not just an emerging leader—she is already one. The SSWA Executive Conference would amplify her voice and her potential, and in turn, Rosa would bring a meaningful, diverse perspective to the table.

I wholeheartedly support her application for the SSWA Future Leaders program. Rosa is exactly the kind of leader our industry needs more of—and this opportunity would be transformational not only for her, but for the many she inspires.

Rebecca Zappoli

Thank you,

Rebecca Zappoli

Senior Director, Merchandising - JanSan & Foodservice

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