Products that promote

Promotional products or advertising specialties have been around for quite a long time. Wikipedia claims that there were commemorative buttons for George Washington back in 1789. The Promotional Products Association International (PPAI), the trade association for the industry, was founded more than 100 years ago in 1904.

Promotional products should be part of any marketing campaign. According to research by the PPAI, promotional products help create a positive brand image. As for hard numbers, according to a PPAI research study, 52% of business travelers who received a promotional product did business with the advertiser. *That is more than half*. That same study found that three quarters of respondents recall the advertiser name on a product that they received. And last year, the industry set a new record by selling $19.4 billion in promotional products. This sales volume indicates that promotional products outperform other marketing communications such as sponsorships, cable TV, and outdoor advertising.

According to Sean McColl, vice president at PromoCorp, Inc., an Alexandria, VA based promotional products company, “having something tangible in hand is increasingly a way to be noticed.” Sean points out that we are being bombarded with electronic communication—everything from radio ads to text messages—so the coffee mug emblazoned with a company logo sitting on your desk stands out. It isn’t going anywhere, and chances are, you may be using it on a daily basis. It can certainly help with brand awareness and recognition.

In order to be effective, a “promotional product should be the right product for the right target market. Something that the user will hold on to,” says Sean. For instance, a recent college graduate is interested in different products than a CEO. Sean counsels his clients to be creative and to use a

tiered approach for products. For instance, at a trade show, you should have an inexpensive piece such as a pen or customized candy for general consumption. If you talk to a prospect for a while longer and you think the prospect may be interested in further discussion, you could hand him or her a slightly more expensive item, say in the $5 range. And finally, if you speak to a decision-maker with whom want to have a more in-depth conversation, you may give him or her a $20-$25 specialty. This approach makes sense. It gives customers several ways to remember you and it gives you as an advertiser, a way to reward potential business.

Sean says that promotional products are an integral part of a marketing campaign and can be used in many ways. They can be used as a thank you gift, or a follow up to a trade show, they can be a leave-behind or an introduction. A very popular product right now is known as the "sticky drive." This is a flash drive pre-loaded with information or a link to a website. The drive also has plenty of space to store your files, and a logo on the outside. More and more, companies are getting creative with the look of the flash drives. There is one shaped like a ballpoint pen, that is indeed a working pen, with an LED light, and a pointer. What a great idea in today's multi-task oriented world.

Since there are thousands of items to choose from, you should consider how you will use the product and how you will get it to your prospects. The old stand-bys—stress balls, mugs, pens and apparel—may still be the most effective. But as shipping prices go up, you may want to consider flat items that can be mailed via the regular mail. Because of shipping cost considerations, Sean says a popular item for Christmas this year is a customized CD, featuring the name of your company and offering a selection of music.

All in all, my favorite promotional products are pens. As Sean says, they are inoffensive, useful and inexpensive. I bet you have company pens on your desk right now—I do.

Which promotional product do you prefer?

- Pens
- Mugs
- USB/Flash Drives
- Mouse Pads
- T-Shirts
- Candy
- Music CDs

View Results

poll by twiigs.com

This post is based on a live interview with Sean McColl of PromoCorp, Inc. PromoCorp Inc. can be reached at 1-888-385-2162.