

Your Name Here

Are you using promotional freebies to your best advantage?

If your office is like mine, not a week goes by that you don't receive a catalog or two from advertising specialty companies. If they're not in the mail, they're hand delivered by an in-your-face trinkets and doodads salesperson pushing pens, key chains, T-shirts or any one of a thousand other products that can be emblazoned with your business name or logo. You can buy these doodads by the dozen or by the hundreds. But the \$60 million question is: Are 500 magnets or mugs imprinted with your logo really going to bring in more business? If you handle their dispersion right, maybe.

Advertising specialty products have been around since the early 1800s when politicians began imprinting slogans on buttons and commemoratives to spread their name among voters. That was before radio, TV and slick direct-mail campaigns. Soon afterward, the American Manufacturing Concern started distributing rulers, yardsticks, paint stirrers, cribbage boards and paperweights imprinted with store names and advertising messages. By the middle of the 19th century, advertising calendars started to become a common sight in homes and businesses. So there must be something to it.

IT'S YOUR APPROACH

When it comes to using advertising specialty products, what determines how much more business you will get is not based on *what* you give away but *how* you give it away.

I remember a gentleman named Maury Lindenfeld who used to set up a display at various home, sport and mall shows. As you know, many people who go to consumer and trade shows like to see how many things they can take home for free.

They go around with plastic bags and almost expect you to drop something in. It doesn't matter what it is, as long as it's free. It's like an adult version of trick-or-treat.

Maury would have dozens of ball-point pens all nicely positioned in the back of his booth and, as you passed by, he'd have a couple in his hand. If you expressed interest in his product or just a pen, he'd hand you the pen. But as he handed it to you, he'd pull the cap off and keep it in his hand. Then he'd start talking like crazy to find out your name, address and whether you were a potential customer. The passersby would stand there with half a pen in their hands waiting for old Maury to release the other part. Meanwhile, he got their attention for a few, very important minutes.

Less effective was an idea from a DJ I spoke with at the Mobile Beat Show in Vegas. This particular DJ would put up a display at local county fairs. He'd give away a miniature CD key chain imprinted with his logo to anybody who stopped by. He figured that if he gave away a thousand key chains, it was a good show. Never mind if he got any bookings that day or not. In my opinion, this didn't make much sense for his business, but the specialty advertising guys sure love him.


One of the biggest giveaway items right now is the prepaid phone card. I know a DJ who uses them to get appointments with big party planners. He sends a picture of a 10 minute phone card in a letter that explains that he'll give 10 free minutes of phone time, for 10 minutes of their time. Ten minutes is all he needs to tell why he could make their next party the best ever. The prepaid phone cards get him a 65 percent response rate from people willing to make appointments with him.

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QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

In addition to how you give promotional items away, it is vital the freebie has a perceived value. A throw-away item will just be a bad reflection on your business. T-shirts are good because they turn your customers into walking billboards for your DJ service. Ball-point pens find their way into many people's hands because they are useful, and are a constant reminder of your company. The list of items that can be used to promote your business is endless. It's up to you to use them effectively.

Some DJs use advertising specialties successfully, bringing in more bookings week after week; while others have a tough time just paying for them at the end of the month. To make them work for your business, you have to have a game plan. Also, if that specialty advertising product you've had imprinted with your name, slogan, phone number and address looks like it came from the bottom of a Cracker Jack™ box, you might want to reconsider what image you are really trying to project. If you've tried everything and still don't see a worthwhile response from your specialty items, you should probably reconsider reordering.

The appeal of promotional products lies in the very human need to feel that one is coming out ahead. Everyone likes to get something for free. It's a great concept. Use it to your best advantage. 

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