



DON'T LEAVE PROFIT ON THE TABLE:
SELLING PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS

BY HEIDI TOLLIVER-WALKER



Are your clients trying to break into high-value accounts? Are they exhibiting at trade shows, putting on seminars, and meeting with clients one-on-one? Are they planning store openings or employee appreciation events? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you should consider selling promotional products.

Promotional products (also called “advertising specialties”) are cost-effective yet high-impact advertising channels that integrate well into traditional print, email, and multichannel campaigns.

What makes them of such high value?

- They can gain your clients thousands of additional impressions.
- Multiply that by hundreds of items distributed at an event or used, worn, or carried by recipients over days, weeks, or even months, and you’re looking at incredible reach.
- Radio-controlled cars, personalized gadgets, and other high-end novelties can get past gatekeepers and help land your message in front of key prospects.
- Once someone receives a promotional item, studies consistently show that they’re more likely to accept phone calls and meet with someone from the company that gave it to them.*

- When people are finished with promotional items, they’re more likely to give them to someone else than throw them away. In the United States, 63% of consumers say they will give away a promotional product rather than throw it out (20%). This increases the reach of your client’s message even further.**

But wait! There’s more.

Having a promotional product increases not only the likelihood that a prospect will take your client’s phone call but also of them making a purchase. One consumer behavior study found that before receiving a promotional product, 55% of people had done business with the advertiser; after receiving a promotional product, 85% of people had done business with the advertiser.²

Influence varies by type of promotional item. The Advertising Specialties Institute (ASI) found, for example, that . . .

- 51% of consumers said they’d be more likely to do business with the advertiser that gave them an umbrella.
- 60% of consumers said they’d be more likely to do business with the company that gave them a power bank.
- In the West and Pacific regions, 53% and 54% of consumers, respectively, said they’d be more likely to do business with an advertiser that gave them promotional drinkware.

Similar results can be found in all the ad specialties categories. What a gift to your clients!

* “The Influence of Promotional Products on Consumer Behavior” (Promotional Products Association International, 2012)

** “Global Advertising Specialties Impressions Study” (Advertising Specialties Institute, 2016)



UNDERSTANDING PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS

Promotional products are a \$24 billion industry. While growth in traditional print has been slowing, IBIS reports that sales of promotional products are on the rise — 2.5% for the past five years (2013-2018).*

Which promotional items are most popular? In the United States, the branded products consumers are most likely to have received in the past 12 months are as follows:

- T-shirts
- Drinkware
- Writing instruments
- Carrying bags
- Outerwear

Other top items include USB drives, desk accessories, caps and headgear, polo shirts, and calendars.**

Before jumping into the sales of promotional products like these, it's important to understand the key promotional product categories, their primary benefits, and for which target audiences they're most effective. Treat promotional products as you would any other marketing channel.

For example, if a client's primary goal is **cost effectiveness**, you might choose promotional pens. According to ASI, cost per impression with promotional pens is less than one-tenth of one percent. If you're giving away pens in a political campaign in the Southeast, it's a particularly good value. While 50% of consumers in the U.S. own a logoed pen, this rises to 74% of Democrats and 65% of Republicans.

If you're trying to maximize **impressions**, however, you might want to look at promotional bags, which generate more impressions than any other promotional item — 5,700+ impressions per bag. Bags are especially effective when marketing to women. While 42% of men own promotional bags, this rises to 52% of female shoppers.

If you're going for **longevity**, you might want to go with promotional umbrellas or calendars. Umbrellas are kept an average of 14 months where as calendars are kept for an average of 12 months.

However, if you want recipients to use promotional items to **reference** your clients' phone number, web address, or social media accounts, you might look to branded calendars or desk accessories, where there's room for additional information to be displayed.

If your client is looking for **door openers**, look to high-value items that relate to the product being sold. If your client is selling networking services, for example, consider a branded USB drive or memory stick. If they're selling commercial real estate out west, consider a branded belt buckle.

For high-value prospects, also consider personalizing the gift with their name or company name.

* <https://www.ibisworld.com/industry-trends/market-research-reports/professional-scientific-technical-services/professional-scientific-technical-services/promotional-products.html>

** "Global Advertising Specialties Impressions Study"

DOs AND DON'Ts OF PROMOTIONAL PRODUCT SALES

What do you need to know to be successful selling promotional items?

1. **Know your client's marketing goals.** Does the client want to build inexpensive name recognition (pens)? Does it want to build brand recognition with a full-color logo and mission statement (logoed t-shirt)? Does it want a quick and easy reference for contact information (calendar, desk accessories)? Is it looking for a high-value item to get past gatekeepers (branded belt buckle, radar-controlled toy car)?
2. **Know your product options.** Not all promotional items have the same impact. For each type of marketing goal (visibility, branding, influence), understand where different promotional items shine.
3. **Play matchmaker.** How do the sub-segments within each demographic group respond to each type of item? Individual demographic groups may respond quite differently than the demographic as a whole. For example, 41% of Americans own promotional headgear, but in rural America, this rises to 52%.
4. **Start early.** Unlike print, where burning the midnight oil can enable you to turn projects around within seemingly impossible timeframes, lead times for promotional items are much longer. It's not unusual for ad specialties to require six to eight weeks. When your client is planning a campaign, make sure promotional items are included in the early stages.
5. **Keep it simple.** Most promotional items don't give your client much real estate to add messaging. In many cases, they may only have one color and limited space for company logo—maybe a phone number—and not much more. Help clients use that space wisely.
6. **Don't forget distribution.** When you're helping a client price any promotional item, remember to include the cost and logistics of distribution. It might only cost \$0.50 a piece to add that promotional paperweight into the marketing budget, but if you're doing a mailing campaign, the package size and postage necessary to deliver the item might not be in the budget.
7. **Don't give cheap junk.** Overwhelmingly, the characteristic of promotional items that people value the most is their usefulness. Cheap plastic that breaks the first time you use it isn't useful. Nor does it send a message that your client produces a quality product. If your clients are going to give out a promotional item, encourage them to invest in the higher end of the quality scale for that type of item.

Promotional items are more than just novelty giveaways; they have tremendous value and should be considered as part of a broader marketing campaign. Think about them as you would any other marketing channel. Get to know their strengths and weaknesses and the audiences and marketing goals for which they're the most effective. Start incorporating them as you would any other new channel, and you might find yourself wondering why you didn't do it earlier.



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