

# TRADE SHOW PROMOTIONAL ITEMS

By Eric Windholz

A 2010 study (conducted by Google through Ipsos OTX) of over 600 B2B professionals from a variety of industries revealed how businesses spend their marketing dollars and evaluate their ROI. On average, businesses spent 28% of their marketing budget on industry events and trade shows. The study also noted that businesses invested 13% of the same budget in magazines/trade publications, 9% in direct mail, and 8% in e-mail marketing.

This leads to the three most important reasons for utilizing promotional items within your trade show marketing campaign:

1. A very cost-effective solution and best value for ROI
2. Effective method of company branding and messaging
3. Creates a lasting impression

Obviously, the goal for using promotional/specialty items is to drive more traffic to your booth, which encourages face to face interaction. Increased interaction means more leads and, ultimately, more sales of your products or services.

The Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI) conducted a cost analysis of promotional products in July and August, 2010. A team of ASI interviewers completed a total of 3,332 surveys in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Respondents were asked if they received any promotional products from trade shows within the last 12 months. The results might surprise you.

The top five items received *and kept* were (in ranking order): writing instruments, embroidered shirts, calendars, bags, and caps/headwear.

The reasons for keeping these items were: 75% of respondents thought the item was useful; 27% believed the item was attractive, 19% noted the item was enjoyable to have, and 6% kept the item to refer to company information (phone number, website, etc.).

On average, 60% of respondents conducted business with the advertiser after receiving an item! The following results measure the breakdown: 71% after receiving recognition/ award, 70% after receiving glassware/ceramics, 65% after receiving embroidered shirts, 65% after receiving calendars, 59% after receiving bags, 57% after receiving caps/headwear, and 57% after receiving writing instruments.

However, the breakdown of items *not kept* in the study included: 22% items were thrown away, 15% items were placed somewhere else and never noticed again, and 62% items were given to someone else.

Keep gender in mind when you select promotional items for your next trade show or event. Men and women have their preferences. 56% of women favored writing instruments and 26% favored bags. 42% of men were more likely to keep shirts and 20% hang on to caps/headwear.

People ages 45-54 own the most promotional products on average (9.8) than any other age group.

Some new ideas for the promotional products that have been well-received by trade show attendees include pre-loaded usb drives and aluminum water bottles. These items typically run between \$5.00 – \$9.00 each. If you have a lower budget to work with but still want a bang for your buck, hand sanitizer and lip balm are always useful; logo cookies are a big hit; and an adhesive screen cleaner for I-pads and smart phones have been really popular! These items cost about \$0.75 – \$2.00 per item.

There are a few items that I wouldn't recommend. Key chains, stress balls, flashlights, beverage holders, and sunglasses are not only out-dated, but most attendees don't value (won't keep) these items. More importantly, proper branding using these items is also difficult.

You may already be aware of QR codes, also known as Quick Response Codes. If used correctly, this is a great way to embrace the latest technology and to create a buzz for your promotional item (and your booth). QR codes also add more opportunity for company branding with no additional costs. Some examples of utilizing QR codes on a product include: ceramic coffee mugs, note pad covers, and even screen cleaner cards.

However, if you're going to utilize QR codes, it's wise to request a product sample from your supplier. It may cost a little more for a proof, but it's worth the expense to test out and scan the code to make sure it works. Also keep in mind that the code must be large enough for a ¾" square and include a white "quiet zone" around the perimeter. There's nothing worse than placing a QR code on a product and not having it scan properly! This can be embarrassing, and it doesn't make a good first impression for your company!

If you have a larger budget for promotional items, consider incorporating several types of products into your marketing plan. Recognize key clients, leads, or even employees with these items: 4-color logo process on a wood-handle umbrella, custom usb drives in the shape of just about any company logo or figure, pad folios with a company embossment, gift baskets, or a bottle of wine including a custom case. These items range from \$7.50 per item to over \$100.00 per item.

Promotional items can be a valuable addition to your trade show marketing campaign. Use them to make an impression and deliver your message. Determine what items will be useful to potential clients/customers. Watch your marketing dollars return, in the form of sales.

**Eric Windholz** has worked in the trade show industry for over a decade. Formerly an Account Executive for *Freeman Exhibit Services*, he served as a point of contact for show organizers in sales and event production. As an Operations Manager for *Primemedia Publishing's* Trade Show Division, he handled trade show management. Currently, Eric uses his past experience of "being on the other side" of the trade show industry to provide mobile and promotional item marketing to his exhibiting clients.