

Sales Promotion Prompts Customers to Spend



When buyers clutch their wallets tightly in a tough economy, it's more necessary than ever to think strategically about sales promotion.

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Whether you're a retailer or service provider, invest in outreach that actively prompts customers to give whatever amount of money they spend – be it a little or a lot – to your business. Active sales promotion will help you do this.

Promotional products are one of the least expensive and most effective ways to drive sales. In fact, a recent study by the Advertising Specialty Institute found that more than 8 out of 10 respondents remembered the advertisers of the promotional products they received. Even better – most respondents (62%) had done business with the advertiser on the promotional product after receiving the item.

You can use imprinted products in a variety of sales promotion techniques. In this special report, we're sharing some interesting consumer data and a few effective mechanisms for promoting sales – ways you can loosen your target audience's tight purse strings by keeping buyers close to you.

Get social and virtual

For example, promotional products make the intangible tactic of online marketing more tangible and personal. Blogs and online networking/social communities like Linked In and Facebook are excellent tools to “socialize” with your customers and prospects, building trust and brand recognition and ultimately sales. According to a Yankelovich study, consumers trust friends (67%) above experts (27%) as they consider product recommendations. Making personal connections and sharing your expertise gives you the benefit of both relationships – friend and expert.



Imprinted advertising specialties work to keep your blog, web site or other online presence top of mind. Imprinted desktop products or computer accessories with your URL remind customers to go online to check out your newest products, services or events. Once a customer is at your blog, motivate them to purchase. B2B salespeople could give a discount for orders of a specific product or service mentioned in their blog post. Or offer an incentive product to secure an appointment for a face-to-face sales presentation.

Another option is to use an imprinted tie-in to announce a new blog – handing it out at a trade show if you're a B2B marketer or at a store to reach consumers. A grocer, for example, could build excitement for a recipe/cooking tips blog by handing out an imprinted grocery-list notepad at its in-store checkout counter. The pad could provide instructions for becoming part of the grocer's online community. The blog, in turn, then drives participants into the store by announcing special events and sharing coupons, etc.



Creating a community in which users also share their favorite recipes – or information about whatever product or service you sell – stimulates user-generated excitement. Why does this matter? A 2007 Harris Interactive survey found that 90% of consumers say they have a better *in-store* shopping experience when they first research products online, often relying on user-generated content for referrals. Encourage your customers to post their positive experiences of your products or services via a contest with imprinted prizes for most creative entries. This benefits your company whether it's retail-based or a business-to-business service provider.

Don't forget, however, to reinforce relationships offline as well. Tried-and-true direct mail– be it a simple imprinted postcard or a lumpy mailer with a clever promotional tie-in – should be a regular part of your sales promotion. Just be sure to include an actionable tease such as a discount coupon for loyal customers, an invitation to a special event or bounce-back card for a sales presentation.

Build excitement through experience

This means interaction with customers and sampling of your products/services. Experiential marketing campaigns not only bring customers into a place of business, they engage prospects so that they're more likely to buy and remain loyal for the long term. Again promotional products play a vital role in this form of sales promotion.

Need inspiration? Consider a campaign from 2008 in which Hasbro partnered with Wal-Mart to host the Littlest Pet Shop Pajama Rama at 2,000 stores around the United States. More than 1.4 million invitations were mailed to girls, ages 6 through 11, announcing the one-day, three-hour “pajama parties” that showcased the newest Littlest Pet Shop toys. A carefully staged “experience” included photo stations where kids could have their pictures taken with their favorite characters. PJ-clad brand ambassadors handed out “Pajama Rama” logoed posters, stickers and tattoos for a long-term brand message. The campaign was recognized as a finalist for the *Promo* magazine PRO Awards in the “Best Retail/Co-Marketing” category.

Take a cue from this concept. For example, pinpoint areas where your target customer frequents. An ocean-side restaurant might take brand ambassadors out into the beach during peak season to pass out food samples along with custom-printed can coolers stuffed with discount meal coupons. The can-coolers – decorated with a logo and address – will be used on the beach, serving as miniature billboards for the restaurant driving more customers to the door.



Or maybe you're a B2B marketer that could partner with another non-competing company for a campaign. For example, caterers and travel agents

both target corporate meeting planners. Why not set up a special “tasting event” at which brand ambassadors from both businesses help prospects experience the services of each entity. Thematic foods from select travel destinations could be prepared. Imprinted gift bags or take-out boxes stuffed with promotional literature, food samples and logoed travel accessories take the experience back to participants’ offices to continue the sales process.



Foster loyalty

When the economy is tough, customers appreciate businesses that provide free advice and in turn loyally reward those organizations with purchases either immediately or in the future.

How-to events draw buyers into your store or business to learn about ways to save money or stretch their dollars. Home Depot has its Saturday morning workshops, teaching participants how to build, repair or garden self sufficiently. Similarly, a clothing boutique can host a makeover-on-a-budget fashion show. A technology consultant can invite clients to a free systems management seminar. An auto dealer can offer a basic car maintenance class, using the opportunity to showcase its trustworthy mechanics’ expertise for more involved upkeep and repairs.



Send participants home with a tangible reminder of your company’s effort after any occasion. The mechanic, for example, could provide a logoed maintenance schedule/car insurance document holder that serves to remind car owners of the need to visit an auto shop. This useful gift regularly brings customers back for services.

Finally, provide incentives to shop with you via loyalty programs. According to a December 2008 Ipsos Public Affairs/SoundBite Communications survey, 62% of respondents focused their holiday shopping at retailers offering loyalty programs. Furthermore, 7 in 10 of those surveyed looked for a “deal,” a “sale” or a “coupon.” A great way to keep customers focused on your good deals is to provide an imprinted calendar with perforated coupons to be used each month.

B2B marketers can just as easily leverage the power of loyalty programs by offering incentives for length of service contracts, packaged deals or rewards for purchasing specified amounts. Imprinted products can announce and promote the program or, in the case of brand-name luxury items, work as the loyalty reward.

The main message with all these methods of sales promotion is to engage your target audience and build trust and relationships. By doing so, you’ll be the lucky recipient of the dollars they spend on vital products and services.