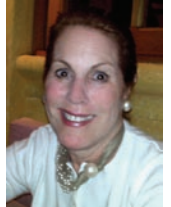


Expose Your Business: The Power of the Promotional Item

5 Questions for Ellen North
President, Concept Marketing and Promotions



Businesses often use promotional items, but very few use them well. Like any marketing activity — or expense — a promotional item should be carefully thought-out, relate to your overall brand and image strategy and fit within your marketing plan. Promotional marketing consultant Ellen North shares her thoughts on how to do this — and stay within your budget.

1. Why and how should businesses use promotional items?

Promotional items have two main uses: to thank customers for their loyalty and support and to promote the business that is giving them out. To make sure that an item is well-received, you have to consider the audience. You wouldn't buy the first — or cheapest — thing you see as a present for your mother. Don't do it for your clients, either. At the very least you should consider whether most of your intended recipients are male or female and whether you want them to use the item at home or at the office. Second, since a promotional item can be a sort of mini-advertisement, you want to select something with longevity. If you select the right item, it will remain on a person's desk indefinitely. That means that every time someone else sees the item, you're building awareness of your business and your brand.

2. What are the biggest mistakes businesses make in using promotional items?

The biggest issues I see are people who don't take the time to think about their brands, what they stand for and what's going to reinforce them. You shouldn't do anything with a promotional item that you would not do with an expensive print advertisement. Watch the usage of your logo, firm colors and other branding elements just as closely as you would under any other circumstance. And don't forget to ask for a proof and check it carefully.

3. Are promotional items still important in an economic downturn?

I would argue that promotional items are even more important in an economic downturn. Everyone is hunkered down, there's a lot of fear and uncertainty. Promotional items are an extraordinary way of reminding people that you are still in business — and you still care about your customers. In addition, your item is sure to get noticed since it will have substantially less competition.

4. *How much impact should price play in selecting promotional items?*

I'd like to say none, but that doesn't take people's budgets into account. What I will say is that value is a critical consideration. If you have \$2,500 to spend and you need 500 items to give away, that gives you a budget of \$5.00 per item. For that \$5.00, you can buy a cheap version of something flashy or a good version of something more subdued. You should always go for the best item in a category that you can afford. For example, it's better to spend that \$5.00 on a nice pen than on a cheap umbrella that's going to end up in the trash the first time it gets used.

5. *What's hot right now?*

Flash drives are very popular because people use them. In addition to bearing your imprint, they can also carry some of your marketing materials — like a multimedia presentation — on the drive itself. We also do a lot of hand sanitizers, particularly for events. The best versions of these come with belt or purse clips so the bottle can be refilled and reused. Multi-purpose highlighter pens work well for people recruiting on campus. A side note: many companies opt for consumables, such as cookies or candies. These work really well if you get creative with the container and make sure it will hang around for a long time to come.

Ellen North is the founder and president of Concept Marketing & Promotions, a full service corporate gifts and promotional products company based in NYC. The company provides imprinted merchandise designed to support client marketing objectives, budgets and deadlines. Concept Marketing & Promotions works with companies, both large and small, domestic and international, as well as advertising and public relations agencies to provide creativity and service targeted to making clients look good in the eyes of their audience. The company was founded in 1998 and is a certified woman-owned enterprise. Reach Ellen at 212.741.2319 or enorth@cmpadvspec.com.



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