

Promotional Advertising Can Make You Money

Information That Can Put Money In Your Pocket

By Leslie Joseph And Rick Ebel

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Last summer, LJ Market Research, based in Irving, Texas, orchestrated an extensive series of interviews of passengers and other visitors at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport. Engaging an audience primarily of businesspeople, the researchers elicited the attitudes and behavior of consumers toward promotional products and business who use them in advertising and for promotional events.

Interviewers asked more than 500 airport visitors—travelers and others—a series of questions to determine how and why they received promotional products, how often they used them, how long they kept the items and what impact the items had in establishing a positive connection with the advertisers. Interviewees participating in the study were those who had one or more promotional products in their possession (meaning on their persons, at home, at their workplace or in their vehicles) that they had received in the previous 12 months. Naturally, almost all adults approached were able to identify at least one item meeting these criteria.

Many questions related to the promotional products that respondents mentioned first, which most frequently was a wearable. This is not surprising since this product category accounts for almost a third of all distributor sales. The second and third-most-mentioned items, respectively, were writing instruments and office/desk/business accessories. This sequence also coincides with the industry's product category rankings.

TABLE 1: TOP SIX CATEGORIES OF ITEMS RECEIVED

First Items Mentioned Frequency Percentage

Wearables 93 17.4 %

Writing Instruments 77 14.4 %

Desk/Office/Business Accessories 62 11.6 %

Sporting Goods/Leisure Products/Travel Accessories 43 8.0 %

Housewares/Tools 42 7.8 %

Calendars 38 7.1 %

Categories aside, the single item most frequently mentioned by respondents was a pen; next in order were calendars and headwear. Some popular promotional items such as pocketknives, letter openers, box cutters and pipe reamers were conspicuous by their absence. Blame it on those picky-picky TSA airport screeners charged with keeping the friendly skies friendly.

REMARKABLE RECALL

The DFW Airport Study produced two major accomplishments. First, the data obtained bolstered the findings of earlier research, most of which was secured from much smaller population samples. Second, it affirmed distributors' claims about the effectiveness of promotional products, which can now be based on fact rather than wishful thinking.

For example, one of the touted strengths of imprinted promotional merchandise is the ability to install the advertiser in the customer's memory bank. The report of the DFW Study states, "Consider the paradox that gives advertisers fits: Viewers, listeners and readers rave about the ad presentation—but when asked, they can't remember the sponsor's name."

This issue is minimized when promotional products are the medium of choice. When asked, slightly more than three-fourths (76.1 percent) of the respondents in the DFW Study correctly recalled the advertiser's name or message on the promotional item they mentioned first as having in their possession.

Particularly impressive is that 76.1-percent stat when compared to other print media. The airport subjects were also asked if they had read a newspaper or magazine in the previous week. Sure, said 80 percent of the respondents. But when asked to identify two advertisers appearing in the publication they remembered best, only 25.3 percent could do it, and 53.5 percent could recall only a single advertiser. You have to admit, the 76.1 percent-within-a-year versus 53.5 percent-within-a-week statistic is downright annoying if you're paying \$103,000 for a non-bleed, four-color full page in Business Week.

The remarkable recall findings for promotional products are most likely attributable to another set of industry assumptions involving exposure—that recipients tend to keep promotional items for a long time and use them frequently.

As the researchers stated, "More often than not, businesses try to pick promotional products that are likely to be kept and used a long time. None of this blink-and-it's-gone exposure that so limits the advertising effectiveness of some other media." Six out of 10 respondents at DFW (see Table 2) said they generally keep promotional products up to two years. And the main reason they keep them—so said 75.4 percent of the airport subjects—is they find the items useful.

TABLE 2: LENGTH OF TIME PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS ARE GENERALLY KEPT

Retention Period	Frequency	Percentage
Up to two years	322	60.5 %
Depends on the item	205	38.5 %
Until item wears out	5	1.0%
Total	532	100%

The absence of utilitarian value is the most likely reason that 19 percent of the respondents said they never use the first-mentioned item they had received. But the four-fifths majority that did use the item tended to do so frequently. More than a third said they used the item at least once a day!

INFLUENCING BUYER ATTITUDES

The study also explored the ability of promotional products to influence buyer attitudes and willingness to do business with the advertiser. People prefer to do business with people they know and like—now that's an axiom fundamental to the concept of promotional products. So, the research findings pointing to the effectiveness of promotional products as a change agent of opinion do not come as much of a surprise.

— Nearly three-fourths of the respondents said they were familiar with the advertiser before they received their first-mentioned item. Most were already customers.

--- Almost half of the respondents claimed their impression of the advertiser was either "somewhat" or "significantly" more favorable after they had received the item.

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