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Using and Choosing Promotional Items Effectively

It's no secret: There is an endless array of promotional products available to businesses today. So how do you know that you're choosing the best product to give away at the next big trade show?

Well ... it takes some work. You don't want people to throw items away or shove them in a junk drawer—you want people to use them and to think of your brand when they do. To get this kind of response, much thought should be put into choosing promotional products.

Generally speaking, the right product will forge a connection with the recipient—either enticing them to visit your business's booth or sparking conversation while at the booth. What's more, the right product is one that will keep your message top of mind, even after the trade show ends, and provides a segue to follow up with recipients at a later date.

A few things to consider when making this decision and a few ideas for success:

Before the trade show

- Include promotional items in pre-trade show mailers to let attendees know that your business will be there and where attendees can find your booth. This tactic is also a great way to create excitement or provide incentive for attendees to stop by. Use glue dots to affix a Business Card Magnet to a cost-effective postcard. Send one piece of a Writing Set to attendees and encourage them to stop by your booth to receive the other part.
- Make contact with particularly meaningful leads by reaching out to the entire office. Rather than sending a pre-show promotional item to one representative, send items to the whole office to build buzz. Try Fortune Cookies, or really wow them with T-shirts.

During the trade show

- Select multiple promotional items to stock your booth with that appeal to your different audience segments. For example, provide different products for your vendors, your customers, media representatives or industry leaders that best reflect their relationship with your business.
- Consider the time of year and the season of the trade show and let that be a guide to choosing the best promotional topic. Summer time offers the possibility of branded flip flops or sunblock pocket packs, while fall is great for beanies or mugs.

- Don't forget the aspects of a trade show that take place outside of the trade show showroom—like meet 'n greets, cocktail hours or lunches. Throw a few small branded items in your pocket or your purse to give away with your business card, like USB drives or branded paperclips that can be attached directly to your business card.

After the trade show

- Bring the trade show experience full-circle by sending promotional items as a lead follow-up. Stronger leads receive more impressive items, or items that reflect your conversation with them during the trade show, while long-shots receive a little something that says "Thank you."
- Send a personalized thank-you note to follow up and offer an additional promotional product if they call and schedule an informational meeting with you or your colleagues.

As you may have noticed, the best way to guarantee that a promotional product is the best fit for the next trade show revolves around thoughtful consideration and creativity. Take a few minutes to find the products that make sense, are fun and are memorable instead of arbitrarily choosing an item. There's a lot out there, get imaginative and be choosy!