

Promotional Marketing — The Surprise Inside!®

By Kathy Ellis, The Business Lab Marketing Coach

Receiving unexpected, special little gifts in the mail is fun — admit it. Promotional marketing is very effective at getting your message to the recipient. This is because it is out of the ordinary. Promotional marketing is more than just your usual letter or postcard — it's three dimensional, it's unique, it's perceived value. Very few people will unceremoniously toss out a box without checking to see what's inside first. It's the intrigue, the surprise, the hope of hidden treasure that will get your prospects to pay attention to your gift.

Even as effective as promotional marketing can be, promotions can take quite a lot of planning and coordination as well investment dollars. The first step in planning a promotion is to determine your audience: existing clients, ideal prospects, both, or other. Once you know who and how many will be on your list you can begin to develop your overall plan and budget.

Planning your promotion: The overall goal is to tie-in your company's products/services and unique position to the promotion. Without this tie-in, you may entertain your recipients, but you will not educate them about your products/services or help them take the next step with you. Partner with your graphic design firm, ad agency or with expert promotions companies such as Excel! Promotions (www.excelpromos.com) or Marketability (www.marketabilityinc.com).

Here are some steps to help you plan your next promotion:

1. Determine your expectations. What do you hope will occur as a result of this promotion? Where possible, quantify your expected results (i.e., we send out to 1,000 targeted prospects, follow-up, then narrow our list to 500 highly qualified prospects, with 150 of whom we intend to set sales appointments over the next year).
2. Determine your target audience.
3. Brainstorm with your team on promotion ideas. Have everyone list themes that would match your audience and be congruent with who you are as a company and how you help your clients solve their problems. Choose the theme that will best support your company and your expectations.
4. Identify all the components of the promotion — the steps involved, the time line, and how you will follow-up.
5. Create a budget. Determine all the costs involved and when they will be incurred.
6. Create your team. Promotions can involve the help and services of several companies. Determine where you will need help and who will be responsible.
7. Implement your plan and be sure to let everyone in your company know when the promotion begins so they can track responses and be informed of the marketing activities of your company.
8. Implement your follow-up plan and track your results. Share your progress and results with your team.

Promotional marketing examples: A printing company sends out a direct mailer with a call to action — Call or send this reply card back to receive up to 10% on your next printing project. When the company receives a request they schedule an appointment and bring the client a customized can (new printer ink can) filled with goodies: A Tee-shirt designed for the company's 45th anniversary, a print conversion ruler (converting inches into picas — handy tool for designers), company koozie, and candy. They go back to the shop with their new printing order and new client. Company continues to stay in touch with clients and prospects through quarterly newsletters, events and mailings. (To see a sample of this promotion, go to www.thebusinesslab.com/other.html)

A manufacturer of liquid/solid separation equipment sends out a two-part promotion to existing clients introducing their new equipment line and upgrades. The first is a custom designed box that contains candy (sweet deal) along with a business reply card asking several questions of interest on learning more about the company's new equipment. The second part was another custom designed box that contained a glass jar engraved with the company's logo/name along with a brochure and thank you note to those who responded. The company continues to send out candy to fill the jars and say hello throughout the year. (To see a sample of this promotion, go to www.thebusinesslab.com/other.html)

Tip from The Business Lab: The goal always is to match your message (which you will be delivering via your promotion) with who you are as a company. With the right message, item and audience, you will have a very effective campaign. Promotional marketing doesn't have to be expensive — stock or standard boxes can be purchased in all shapes, sizes and colors. Check out sites such as: www.uline.com, www.woodgifts.net, www.swiftbox.co.uk. You can create your own labels for standard boxes thereby customizing them and making them part of the promotion. By partnering with expert promotions companies and/or your design team, you can create the perfect (i.e., most effective) promotion well within your budget.

More Information? If you would like to learn more about this important topic or would like to receive our FREE Service Ideas Booklet, please send an E-mail to kathy@thebusinesslab.com, visit our website at www.thebusinesslab.com, or fax a note on your letterhead to 281-374-0569.

Author's Note: Kathy Ellis is a Marketing Coach and the owner of The Business Lab, a full service marketing and graphic design company. We specialize in creativity and helping you think outside the box. We then help you implement those creative ideas through programs including database marketing, websites, interactive CD brochures, company brochures, client newsletters and promotional marketing materials. We share our FREE newsletter with you to showcase powerful marketing tips, techniques, and ideas to help you improve your business. The Business Lab is based in Houston, TX, at 281-374-0170 or by E-mail at kathy@thebusinesslab.com