

How to Build Brand Awareness With Specialty Advertising and Promotional Items

A Step by Step Guide

By BizMove Management Training Institute

Other free books by BizMove that may interest you:

[Free starting a business books](#)

[Free management skills books](#)

[Free marketing management books](#)

[Free financial management books](#)

[Free Personnel management books](#)

[Free miscellaneous business management books](#)

[Free household management books](#)

Copyright © by BizMove. All rights reserved.

Table of Contents

[1. Introduction](#)

[2. Why Specialty Advertising Works](#)

[3. Elements of a Promotion](#)

[4. Typical Promotion Applications](#)

1. Introduction

For years business owners have been putting their names and logos on such things as calendars, notepads, ball-point pens and keytags and giving them to customers and prospects. Not intended simply as an act of business generosity, this is advertising specialty advertising to be exact. The problem is that many small business owners don't know the fine points of this form of advertising and don't maximize the advantages it offers. This guide explains why specialty advertising works and provides illustrations of how small business firms have applied this targeted medium to specific promotional objectives achieving some remarkable results.

An industrial film studio once ran an ad headlined: It's more important to reach the people who count than to count the people you reach. That is a handy maxim for business owners to keep in mind when they plan their advertising, because money spent on reaching the people who don't count-non-prospects-is money wasted.

This fact is acknowledged by your life insurance agent who gives you a calendar each year or by your bank that gives you a ball-point pen with the bank name on it. As a policyholder and as a depositor, you count with these businesses, and they give you these promotional items-properly called advertising specialties-to let you know it.

The fact these items are given away shouldn't be misinterpreted as purely an act of business charity. There is a reason for presenting specialty advertising gifts. When used properly, specialty advertising can be one of the most effective means of promoting a small business. The trick is to use it properly. But first business owners must understand what it is and what it can and cannot do for their companies.

[Go to Top](#)

2. Why Specialty Advertising Works

Advertising specialties are defined as useful articles of merchandise that are imprinted with an advertisement and are given to customers and potential customers without any strings attached. Unlike premiums, they are not earned or awarded in exchange for a purchase. Sometimes the ad on these specialties is no more than the name or logo of the sponsor. Everyday one comes across cigarette lighters, ashtrays, paperweights, ball-point pens and T-shirts that meet this description. These are just a few of the estimated 15,000 different types of merchandising items that are used in the medium called specialty advertising.

All advertising media offer users specific advantages-and all media have their limitations. You must be familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the various media in order to make the right choices for your business.

Let's look at some of the advantages offered by specialty advertising.

Unlike newspapers and television, which are mass media, specialty advertising is one of the targeted media. Newspapers and television are fine when you want to deliver your message to the most people you can possibly reach. But in this mass audience are many people who are not interested in what you have to sell. Consequently, you must also look for promotional efficiency. This is provided by the targeted media-direct mail, trade press and specialty advertising-because they can deliver your message only to prospects, thereby saving you the expense of buying non-productive circulation.

Notice that specialty advertising products are defined as useful articles of merchandise. Because they are useful, at least to varying degrees, they are kept and used by recipients. Each time the items are referred to, the advertiser's name and message get exposure. The recipient doesn't always consciously note the ad, of course, but the

message is entered into the individual's memory and can be recalled at the appropriate time.

Advertising recall is important, but so often advertisers don't achieve this sought-after benefit from the media they use. What good does it do when the TV viewer chuckles over a clever commercial but can't remember the name of the sponsor?

When it comes to ad budgets, small businesses obviously cannot compete with corporate giants. Budget limitations severely restrict the small entrepreneur's use of some of the costlier mass media. Fortunately, specialty advertising comes in a lot of price ranges. There are, remember, 15,000 different types of specialties, some costing several dollars and some only a few cents apiece. So there are specialties available to any advertiser, regardless of how small the budget.

How consumers react to your advertising is important. If they are offended or indifferent to it, you have not gained from your promotional investment. Specialty advertising, however, carries with it an ingratiation factor. People like to get something for nothing, regardless of how inexpensive the item may be. They tend to look favorably on companies giving them free specialties. There is statistical evidence that people prefer to patronize businesses giving specialties as opposed to those that do not, all things being equal.

Another unique attribute of specialty advertising is that it permits advertisers to personalize the message. Suppose out of all your customers and prospects there are a hundred or so key ones you want to concentrate on. Because you probably can identify them by name, you can give added value to the advertising item you send them by imprinting their name on it. The favorable reaction to this kind of message enhancement can never be overstated.

As you can see, there are several advantages offered by specialty advertising, some of which cannot be found in other media. Specialties also have some limitations. One has to do with the amount of copy space available. On a ball-point pen, for example, there usually isn't enough space to imprint more than the advertiser's name and address. To overcome this deficiency, advertisers often distribute a printed companion piece with the specialty, and this flyer or brochure contains the reasons to purchase.

Another liability is the comparatively long production and delivery time sometimes required to implement a specialty advertising promotion. Even stock items ordered right out of a manufacturer's catalog sometimes take four to eight weeks for delivery. Consequently, the business owner who plans to hold a clearance sale the following week may find his or her purpose better served by using newspaper ads and TV or radio spots.

Another drawback worth mentioning is the difficulty one finds in measuring the results of many specialty promotions. Of course, this is a problem with other media, too. Unless a method of evaluation is built into the specialty promotion, the business owner may have no evidence the promotion is doing him or her any good. Indeed, some types of promotions offer no practical means of measuring their effectiveness. This doesn't mean

the promotion shouldn't be undertaken. A simple promotion to achieve goodwill for the business owner may do just that, but it is difficult to weigh that goodwill and translate it into sales.

[Go to Top](#)

3. Elements of a Promotion

You should not confuse a planned promotion with a simple distribution of specialties. Promotions require considerable forethought and work and, consequently, they are likely to be much more productive. Promotions are composed of a number of elements:

Establishing objectives

Defining target audiences

Adopting a distribution method

Developing a theme and copy

Selecting the appropriate specialties

Implementing the promotion

Evaluating the results

Objectives. No one advertises without a reason and an expectation of accomplishment. However, sometimes the reasons and the expectations are not clearly understood and stated. Unless you set forth at the beginning realistic objectives, consistent with your budget, you become a traveler embarking on a trip without any conception of how or where you're going.

Target audiences. These are the prospects for your business. Sometimes they are qualified on the basis of probable use of your products or services: heavy users and light users. Greater promotional weight may then be applied to the heavy users' group that will produce more revenue for your business. You may recall the adage that 80 percent of a firm's business comes from 20 percent of its customers.

Distribution method. Specialties are distributed to the targeted prospects in a number of ways: over the counter in the advertiser's place of business; by a second party whose business is related in some way to the advertiser or its customers; by direct mail solicitation; and by sales people calling on prospects.

Proper attention to distribution is essential, because the promotion will fail if the specialties don't reach the right people.

Theme and copy. The theme is what gives a promotion an identity, ties it together and makes it memorable. The copy that appears on the specialties and the accompanying product or service literature should relate to that theme. If you are mounting a full-

fledged campaign involving other media, be sure you coordinate the specialties with the over-all campaign theme.

Selection of specialties. This is a key element that should not be slighted. It involves much more than examining a couple of catalogs and choosing a specialty that catches your eye.

In making your selection, you must first, of course, consider your budget. Suppose you've allocated \$1,000 to purchase specialties and you have in mind a target audience of 1,000 persons. This means your choice is limited to specialties costing no more than \$1 apiece. If you think a higher-ticket item will be more effective, you can reduce your intended target audience to, say, 250 persons, thus allowing for a \$4 item. Another alternative is to increase your budget. You can also make a stratified distribution, whereby the higher priced specialties are directed to the best prospects and the lower-priced items are distributed to lesser prospects.

The next thing to be examined is the desired audience reaction. If you are simply trying to get noticed, an attention-getter is required. This can be anything from a balloon or novelty item like the giant Styrofoam We're Number One fingers. On the other hand, if you want to be remembered over a period of time, choose a specialty that is more useful and practical and, hence, more likely to be retained by the recipients.

Your distribution method must be considered, too, when you select specialties. For example, if you intend to mail the specialties to your target audience, you should either consider the weight and size of the articles or add to your postage budget.

Whenever possible, the specialties should be related in some way to your product or service, to your target audience, or to your promotion theme. This is why optometrists often use packets of eyeglass lens tissues to promote their practices and why auto dealers give keytags to prospective car buyers. The association between the specialty and the advertiser or the item and the audience usage has the effect of triggering audience recall.

Implementation. This is the point where the promotion strategy is executed. It involves not only distributing the specialties to the target audience but also securing whatever information and cooperation is needed to make the promotion work. Examples of implementation will be described in the next section covering typical promotion objectives.

Evaluation. This is something that is often ignored because it is either impractical in relation to the promotional investment or because the response is difficult to measure. Yet whenever possible, business owners should try to get a reading on the promotional efficiency of all media they use because it helps them determine whether the promotion should be repeated, revised or discontinued and whether or not the budget is sufficient. Promotions employing a direct mail solicitation, for example, are easy to measure. All you need to do is make a split-run mailing in which half the audience gets the specialty and product literature and the other half gets only the literature. Then you compare the response rates between the two audience segments.

4. Typical Promotion Applications

There are hundreds of applications for specialty advertising. These are some of the most frequent uses by small businesses:

Celebrating grand openings or special events

Building store traffic

Developing or qualifying business leads

Promoting image and maintaining customer goodwill

Introducing new products and services

Opening doors for salespeople

Grand openings and special events. Whether a business is brand new in town or has been around awhile, it needs to make prospects aware of its existence. One of the best ways is to bring prospects to the establishment so they can see for themselves what the firm's capabilities are.

Example: Management of a welding and metal fabricator wanted a large turnout at its open house and wished to assure that guests saw every phase of production. The invitation promised each guest an unidentified gift for attending. In addition, prizes were to be awarded at random. Since it was impossible to give each guest an escorted tour, prize stations were set up in each work area. Guests were given their gift, a pewter letter opener embossed with the advertiser's logo, and an itinerary showing the prize stations. At each station was an RFD-type mailbox containing an envelope that could be slit with the letter opener. The message inside indicated if guests had won a prize or should try their luck at the next station. Of the 797 persons invited, 575 attended and toured the entire facility.

Store traffic. Specialty advertising can help develop patronage. All it takes is a little imagination.

Example: Owners of a restaurant specializing in French cuisine and fine wines believed the best way to increase their patronage was to go after the affluent market. They targeted 500 upper income families new to the area and sent them a linen wall calendar on which was imprinted the recipe of the restaurant's famous shrimp Creole. Recipients were told they could get a free cocktail for each member of their party with purchased meals if they presented the hanger string of the calendar. Fifty-two percent of the targeted households took advantage of the free cocktail offer, and many respondents became regular customers.

Developing leads. Who is really in the market for your product or service? They need to be identified and made aware of what you have to offer.

Example: A personnel placement agency ran an ad in a business journal announcing The Grant Texas Type-off in which secretaries and other typists could compete for a prize trip to Acapulco. Specialties were chosen to conform to the promotion's western theme. Agency employees wore T-shirts imprinted with the Wanted-poster theme of the Type-off, and name badges resembling sheriff's stars were issued to the fast-typing finalists, judges and members of the press. Media reporters were also issued theme-imprinted tote bags and T-shirts. The competition produced good media coverage and 400 entrants. The sponsoring agency obtained 100 new placement candidates and 50 new companies for its client list.

Promoting image and goodwill. Reliability, quality products, fair prices, fast service; concern for customers are typical images businesses like to portray. Specialties can help, too.

Example: A plumbing supply company mailed a survey questionnaire to plumbing contractors. Copy on an accompanying cartoon explained the firm valued the recipients' business and wanted their opinion of the company's performance, because We want to be sure to measure up. To elicit a response, the mailer contained a logo-imprinted tape measure, chosen because of its association with the theme-Measure Up. The mailing generated a 35 percent return, enabling the company to correct service deficiencies.

Introducing new products and services. When you're offering prospects something they haven't seen before from you (or perhaps from anyone else), you've got to tell them about it.

Example: a purchaser of a materials-handling equipment distributorship quickly sought to divorce itself from the previous owner's reputation for poor service. The new owner mailed to 425 prospects a card introducing a cartoon character, Super Hustler, who was described as being faster than a speeding piston, more powerful than a C-500, and able to cut overhead in a single call. The new service policy was amplified in a second mailing that guaranteed a repair man on the scene within three hours of a call. Imprinted on the enclosed specialty, a shoulder phone rest, was the number to call for service. The final mailing promised another specialty, a coffee mug, for those who returned a reply card. Approximately 50 percent of the recipients requested a coffee mug, which was delivered by a salesperson. The new service policy and its imaginative proclamation helped increase the distributor's service business 27 percent.

Opening doors for salespeople. Few salespeople are so presumptuous as to think prospects are waiting to receive them with a brass band. More often, the prospect is "in conference," "out of town," "can't be disturbed," or is otherwise unavailable to the salesperson. And when direct mail is used, often there is a secretary who is screening the mail. What is needed is a door opener.

Example: Telephone solicitation was being used by a sales training organization to arrange appointments for its salespeople. Because it was securing only four

appointments for every ten calls, the company decided to try something else. The firm's specialty advertising counselor recommended designing a custom specialty-an 11 ounce bar of chocolate molded into the shape of a giant baby pacifier. The item tied in nicely to the accompanying copy: Instead of trying to pacify salesmen whose sales are declining, show them how to improve. Attractively gift-wrapped, the pacifier was delivered to the target audience without the sender's name on the box so the recipient would have to open the package to find out who sent it. The idea worked. It achieved for the sales trainer a 90 percent appointment rate, and these calls produced an 80 percent closing rate.

Success stories like these do not come about by accident. These advertisers wanted results and looked for someone who could deliver them.

[Go to Top](#)

* * * *