



# REAPING REWARDS

Think promotional products are all about throwing money towards unquantifiable objectives rather than cold hard results? Think again. **Tami Dower** shares some insights gleaned from judging this year's Australasian Promotional Products (APPA) Awards.

Promotional products were once considered a cheap and cheerful way to burn some surplus budget at the end of financial year – fuzzy feel-good gimmicks, justified by intangible objectives like ‘brand awareness’ and ‘goodwill’. Few marketers saw them as anything more than an add-on to the ‘real’ marketing strategy, and even their proponents would duck for cover at the mere mention of ROI. But times have changed. Promotional products are now cementing their place as solid performers in the overall marketing mix. And, as the recent APPA Awards demonstrated, the proponents are now proudly proclaiming their successes with direct reference to the bottom line.

“There is no question attitudes have changed and people are now investing their resources in this medium,” says Nathan Schipper, director of Tangibility. “In 2006, below the line advertising – which includes promotional products – exceeded above the line expenditure for the first time ever.” Ross Stevenson, general manager of promotional marketing at Corporate Express, attributes the shift to the availability of better quality promotional products. “In the last decade, the

promotional marketing industry in Australia has matured considerably. Clients now look to promotional merchandise as a key component in achieving their marketing objectives,” says Stevenson.

## BRINGING HOME THE BACON

At the heart of most marketing strategies is an imperative to increase sales. This objective was clearly demonstrated by one of this year's Gold Award winners in the APPA Awards' Consumer Programs category. Corporate Express Promotional Marketing SA knew that its client, Mitsubishi Motors Australia, needed to inject some excitement into its dealerships' corporate merchandise sales. So, with just 24 hours to pull something together, the promotional products company came up with a strategy to capitalise on the imminent guest appearance of six-time winner of the Paris-Dakar Rally, Stéphane Peterhansel, at the 2006 Sydney Motor Show.

The 11th hour plan involved air-freighting 100 Ralliart Racing Caps and setting up an appointment to meet Peterhansel, who fortunately agreed to sign all the caps before leaving for Europe the next morning. Rather than





just merchandise the caps as they were, Corporate Express saw a further opportunity to increase the caps' value. The company designed a limited number of showcases and mounted the caps in individually-numbered special edition wall displays. The promotion increased the client's merchandise sales by 30 percent within the first three months.

Taking out a Silver Award in the same category, Wompro designed and developed a range of premium gifts to be used as a gift with purchase program for Hennessy Cognac. Aimed at a target market of male consumers with high disposable incomes, the gift packs included silver-plated cufflinks, a playing card set encased in a faux-leather gold-embossed hinged case, and a dice cup set. As a result of the initiative, the client achieved record sell-through rates for its Father's Day and Christmas promotions.

In a co-branded promotional product initiative, which won a Gold Award for the Limited Budget (Under \$5) category last year, *Men's Health* magazine partnered with Pure Blonde beer to increase sales of both the magazine and the beer. The companies worked closely with Sands Promotions to create a retail-driven gift with purchase program that tied in with *Men's Health's* 100th issue. Sands Promotions designed and manufactured the keyring bottle-opener, which was attached to the front cover of the magazine. A backing card encouraged readers to 'Get a six-pack on us', inviting them to present their card at any BWS outlet, buy a six-pack of Pure Blonde and get another six-pack for free. The campaign generated a response rate of more than 12 percent.

### FISHING FOR INFORMATION

Promotional products can also be very effective in initiating customer contact and collecting data. This can either be done by rewarding the customer with a gift for responding or by providing them with a hook to pique their curiosity and prompt them to make contact. Taking on the latter approach, The Lifting Company (TLC) built an air of intrigue

among its customers through a series of three interactive puzzles. BrandConnect WA designed the puzzles to engage TLC's customers, but also convey a message that would prompt them to respond. The puzzles bore the tagline 'There is always a solution'. The enclosed card thanked the recipient, promoted the business and invited them to contact TLC should they require the puzzle's solution. A month later, the program had contributed to a sizeable increase in extra business and TLC continues to receive requests from clients for the other puzzles to complete the set. The campaign attracted a Silver Award in the Business to Business Program category in this year's APPA Awards.

In a similar vein, promotional products company Tangibility recently completed a targeted marketing campaign that drew consumers in by presenting them with an incomplete dartboard set. The dartboard was delivered minus the darts, and arrived with an attached card that simply stated "marketing solutions that hit the target". The card encouraged the customer to call to arrange a meeting and receive the missing darts. An impressive 82 percent of recipients called to set up a meeting.

### DRIVING TRADESHOW TRAFFIC

Promotional products are often given out at tradeshows, but an opportunity that is commonly overlooked is using them to actually bring people to your tradeshow stand. "Done well, promotional products can not only drive traffic to a tradeshow stand, but reinforce the marketing message long after the show is over," says Jason Bradbury, managing director, Wompro.

The key is to develop an idea that is relevant to your audience and creates a point of difference. "A competition offering prize packs of merchandise is a great way to get people to visit your stand," suggests Corporate Express' Ross Stevenson. "Prior to the show, send an invitation out to your target audience with a coupon that has to be redeemed at the stand, which goes in the draw to win a prize."

InFocus Merchandising put a novel spin on this approach for its client PMI, in a campaign that attracted a Silver APPA Award for Tradeshow and Conference Programs in 2006. InFocus created individual 'parking meters' with alarms that would go off when the next draw was about to happen, giving visitors a reason to revisit the stand. The parking meters came with metal discs that were used as individual prize draw tickets. The metal discs were able to be used for future events and tradeshows, to encourage clients to keep them indefinitely. The alarms went off every 30 minutes during the conference, generating a buzz among attendees and brand awareness for PMI. More than 80 percent of exhibition attendees visited the stand to enter the disks into the competition.

### ENTICING EVENT-GOERS

With so many events, conferences and corporate functions vying for a portion of people's limited time, a creative invitation can make all the difference. "A promotional item can be used as a 'teaser' to ensure people attend an event or as an incentive to register early," says Clive McCorkell, director of Arid Zone. "For instance, there could be a series of tropical items to entice



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## 2007 APPA PLATINUM AWARD FOR OVERALL EXCELLENCE: SIDS AND KIDS RED NOSE DAY

Now in its 20th year, Red Nose Day has a well-established pride of place on the Australian fundraising calendar. Each June, SIDS and Kids raises millions of dollars in Red Nose Day merchandise sales. The secret to its success, says Wompro's Jason Bradbury – the man behind the hundreds of thousands of foam red noses, awareness bracelets, magnets, plush toys and light-up pens – is that “SIDS and Kids approaches its fundraising like a retailer rather than a charity”.

Since Wompro supplied its first consignment of promotional lapel pins to SIDS and Kids seven years ago, the Red Nose Day campaign has developed significantly. “Originally, SIDS and Kids sourced products from several suppliers, but because we’re now contracted to supply the lot, we can bring together a more coherent and well-planned campaign,” says Bradbury.

Wompro begins by scouring the globe for emerging product and lifestyle trends that will define the range for the following year eight months in advance. “We can’t pick up a hot new product at the last minute, so we have to anticipate what will be cool,” Bradbury says. “Wompro collaborates with international experts – creative talent, global supplier partnerships, industrial designers and trend analysts – people who can recognise a must-have product or, even better, design one.”

This philosophy has seen SIDS and Kids introduce a series of merchandising firsts for Australian charities, including awareness bracelets, plush toys, lip balms, car magnets and even a designer Luigi Colani pen.

Aside from their appeal, products must meet stringent quality and safety standards. Products and packaging that made the shortlist in 2007 were then tested using online surveys of 3800 people and focus groups. Those selected face a battery of quality-control tests.

For Bradbury, SIDS and Kids is a source of great personal and professional pride. Not only has team Wompro won the industry’s most prestigious awards in recognition for its Red Nose Day campaigns, but also work with the charity brings other immeasurable rewards. “We provide our creative and IT services pro-bono to SIDS and Kids because we get such a buzz knowing we’re helping them raise the money needed to save babies’ lives. That’s the bottom line that really counts.”



people to attend a convention or conference at an exotic overseas destination.” The critical thing is to make an impact. “Perception is reality and first impressions count – so make the invitation unique,” advises Tangibility’s Nathan Schipper. “Why send out an invitation to a dinner or function on paper when you can do it on a customised serviette or wine glass?”

Or a maraca, perhaps? One of Strive Corporate’s clients wanted to invite its own clients to a Christmas party that had a calypso theme, so it printed the invite on maracas. “The maraca invitation showed a real point of difference and engaged customers prior to the event. The event filled quickly, the clients were excited and as a result they spent more money than ever before on the silent auction!” quips Strive’s general manager Natasha Mahar.

As a company that prides itself on creative promotional products, Wompro was determined to create something to get tongues wagging with its own invitations to this year’s Spring Racing Carnival. “We created a series of three very unique invitations that told a story,” explains Bradbury. “The first piece was housed in a personalised golden box featuring a Melbourne Cup lapel pin. Inside was fake turf, a themed invitation and a bottle of Moët, plus a horse and branded pen to convey the essence of the Spring Carnival.” In part two, invitees received a red box containing a feng shui coin, fortune cookies, a money clip complete with a mystery bet, a faux \$100 note and a betting calculator. “The grand finale was hand delivered in a custom silver box containing a pair of binoculars to view the day’s racing and, of course, other VIPs,” adds Bradbury. All the company’s invitations were apparently accepted, despite the fact that many of the clients had been invited to other marquees.

## EDUCATING THE MASSES

Whether the message is directed towards a select audience or the community at large, promotional products can be a far-reaching and cost-effective way to spread the word. “Promotional products have the ability to communicate educational messages effectively due to their tangibility and relevance. For example, what better way to encourage



consumers to limit their showers to three minutes than giving a shower radio with a built-in three-minute timer?” poses Schipper.

The National Heart Foundation of New Zealand took its message of health education skipping across primary and intermediate schools throughout New Zealand with a digital skipping rope. Developed exclusively for the Heart Foundation by High Impact Marketing, the skipping rope counts distance, calories and skips. Children would receive the skipping rope as a thank you for taking part in the Jump Rope for Heart fundraising program. Not only did the campaign raise donations per school by 54 percent, it also educated kids about the importance of exercise, while raising awareness of the National Heart Foundation.

### ALL FOR A GOOD CAUSE

One of the biggest growth areas for promotional products in recent years has been in fundraising. One only has to consider the ubiquity of the red poppy on Anzac Day, the pink Breast Cancer Foundation ribbon or the now iconic SIDS and Kids red nose, to realise how powerful promotional products can be in raising funds, and indeed awareness, for charitable causes. The benefit of having a promotional product that can be worn is that it reinforces the loyalty of existing supporters at the same time as promoting the cause to others.

One of the major considerations to take into account when embarking on a fundraising effort with promotional products is price. “Essential to maximising the profit raised is keeping the cost as low as possible,” says Schipper. “To this end, plan well in advance. This allows for the product to be manufactured abroad, keeping costs low and maximising profit.” Other critical factors are visual appeal and relevance. Corporate Express’ Ross

Stevenson advises choosing a range of merchandise that appeals to a wide age group to broaden the pool of potential community support.

### BUYER BEWARE

As all of these examples demonstrate, a well-executed promotional product campaign can be an invaluable component of the marketer’s arsenal. But it’s not as simple as just sourcing the cheapest products on a last minute whim. A successful promotional product campaign generally takes a fair bit of planning, foresight and, most importantly, a reputable supplier.

While it’s important to keep a lid on costs, rock bottom cost can often equate to rock bottom quality. “If a cheap product is used it may end up in the bin before it has the chance to transfer the message,” says Bruce Jones, account executive, Sands Promotions. “Probably one of the main reasons a promotional product program doesn’t work is due to lack of time given to the distributor to come up with a suitable solution,” says Jones. “This may lead to the use of whatever is available rather than an item that is specifically suited to achieving the right response.”

The final caveat, and perhaps the most obvious, is to closely consider the product’s relevance and suitability to the target audience. “If the message being communicated has no relation to the item being given, the impact will be minimal,” warns Schipper. “Choose promotional products that have a strong correlation with your company’s products, services or target market.”

And lastly, adds Schipper, be creative. “A stubby holder with a logo is a stubby holder with a logo – it’s no different to the 100 other stubby holders already sitting in the recipient’s bar. Think outside the square – and be prepared to push the boundaries.” **M**

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The advertisement features a central image of a woman's legs in red high heels sitting on a red box with the text 'OUT A BOX' on it. To the right, there are three smaller images: the top one shows a crowd of people at an outdoor event; the middle one shows a green umbrella and a green bag, both with the 'Cooper's' logo; the bottom one shows a woman sitting on a red box with the 'NOVA' logo. At the bottom, there is a blue banner with the website 'www.outaboxaustralia.com.au' and the 'OUT A BOX' logo. On the far right, there is a vertical text 'JARVIS OUT6541'. At the very bottom, there is a color calibration bar.