

Tokens of appreciation

From hand-guns to fluffy toys, **Kevin Kevany** discovers there are almost no limits when it comes to finding the perfect promotional product or corporate gift.



Bill Kestin (left) and APPA president Peter Stillianos (right) present the top APPA award, Life Membership, to Greg Armstrong of Auckland's Promotional Source.

Legend has it; when the tough times come around, the deal-makers and promoters thrive. History would tend to support that too. So, it was hardly surprising to hear that a US auto-dealer was recently offering either a free hand-gun or US\$250's worth of petrol vouchers with every car or ute purchased.

Neither was it unexpected to learn, in the words of the dealer, the promotion had exceeded expectations. He would not be drawn on whether the gun or the vouchers dominated purchasers' choices.

Meanwhile, back in New Zealand, Andrea Thomas, doyen of the local promotional products and incentives business is adamant that "any gift should be appropriate to the target market, give added-value and portray the quality of the brand/company".

We felt it unfair to ask her opinion on the gun versus vouchers' choice though.

More appropriate to the New Zealand

market, is proving to be – a banana-yellow, fluffy toy monkey – a segue to stun any would-be arms-dealer, for sure.

Scott Russ, GM national accounts for OfficeMax New Zealand Limited, believes that too many companies and organisations can get carried away with trying to outbid each other for customer loyalty.

"We have had ongoing success with giveaways, from lollies to fluffy toys, particularly our now-iconic, fuzzy little guy, called 'Max the Monkey'."

OfficeMax does two monthly promotions; one to their walk-in, cash customers and the other to account holders.

"Products and price are normally the same, but broadening the range and the product mix gives us the opportunity to be creative. Face facts, buying stationery is sometimes viewed as a nuisance-purchase; so we want to bring a little fun to our regular customers, which range from small businesses to multi-national companies.

"We are also showing we don't take ourselves too seriously, and while the economy might be tight, let's not let it get us all down. Life goes on," Russ adds. Other incentives are as simple as a bag of jelly beans, toffee bars and, of course, our simian friend.

"It's not as if we are giving away a car, like some of our competitors do, on occasion."

A by-product of the Max the Monkey promotion is a photo competition, which encourages anyone to submit a photo of the fluffy toy.

"Folks have taken Max with them on their travels and take a picture of him doing something exotic or just being some place interesting. So far Max has been snapped in Paris and London, amongst other places, with the person submitting the photo going into a monthly draw to win a shopping voucher from a clothing retailer," says Russ.

"The response to Max the Monkey has resulted in plans for new versions later in 2008."

Recipients of the fluffy creature take them home to their children or have them on their desks – a subtle presence that isn't as heavy-handed as a branded mug stand – giving Max yet another positive tick.

Russ will not divulge the cost of the promotions, but rather coyly says "they do cover their costs".

Will it be long before other marketers are seen making their way down to the local zoo for "a strategy session"?

What's hot?

Max the Monkey, sadly, would not make the current list of trendy promotional items doing the rounds. According to Bill Kestin, CEO of APPA (Australasian Promotional Products Association) and Vice President of IFPPA

(the international federation), GPS navigation systems, iPods, digital photo frames, and “pamper packs” (aroma therapy and spa items) are on the list. And the fashionable way to make a green statement is with bamboo clothing and shower timers.

Andrea Thomas, who is the key account manager at the 20-year-old Auckland and Wellington-based agency, Crippz, believes the major trend nowadays is to eco-friendly products.

“Not so much the obvious like plants and trees, but more eco-friendly clothing, pens made from corn starch (which breaks down), recyclable bags – this is huge. A look at the local Ecoapparel website will show you what I base that on.”

Indeed, the imported (ex Canada) range of bamboo clothing available from Avondale, Auckland-based Ecoapparel is setting the local benchmark with its claim to give punters the choice to wear “a more environmentally friendly, less harmful, alternative product”. The company is a member of Bluesign Technologies AG (Switzerland), the body which evaluates a product’s environmental, health and safety issues (compared to “the best available technology”) as well as against the 10 principles of the UN Global Compact (www.unglobalcompact.org). It also awards an “eco mark” to approved products.

The clothing is stylish and contemporary and made from a two-thirds bamboo, 28 percent cotton and six percent Spandex blend – so, no, you won’t find it at all scratchy.

The explosion of interest in bamboo



If you want to make an eco-statement that lasts forever – how about a native tree or plant from ‘Trees Please’ (www.nztreesplease.com). Complete with wooden box they make a popular corporate thank-you gift.

comes from its almost fairy-tale properties when it comes to sustainability. According to Ecoapparel managing director Simon Morgan, a bamboo plant can grow up to nearly a metre in a day and reach maturity in less than four years. More importantly, as it grows at these phenomenal rates, it processes more CO₂ and releases 35 percent more oxygen than a comparable stand of trees.

“Bamboo is grown without pesticides or chemicals and protects the air we breathe. Combined with Spandex and cotton, ‘Eco///Bamboo’ feels soft against the skin, providing unsurpassed flex and fit. It contains a natural agent, “bamboo kun”, which prevents bacterial growth and has inherent temperature regulating properties, keeping you cool in the heat and warm in cooler environments.

“We know that a product’s “eco-footprint” is not the only factor in a customer’s decision to purchase an item of clothing. Which is why our eco clothing also



offers a better alternative when it comes to style, quality and value,” says Morgan .

He cautions purchasers to use accredited and reputable promotional product companies to ensure they are not “green washed” (sold fake eco-friendly products).

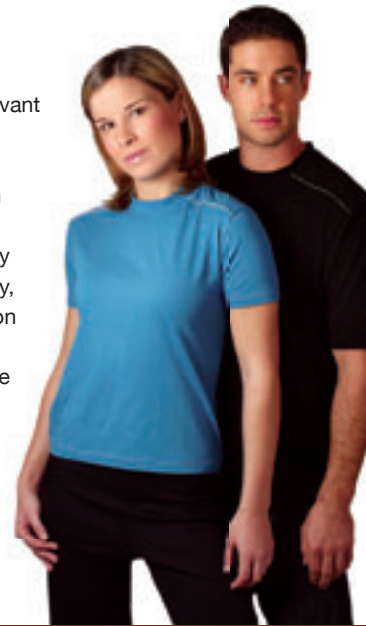
Make it relevant

Ann Thornton, events organiser at PeadPR, believes there is a danger of grabbing at irrelevant products or events.

“We ensure everything we do enhances a client’s product, highlights a selling

feature, or is a relevant “teaser” to draw attention to it. We involve the team in a brain-storming session prior to any promotional activity, always focussing on relevance.

“Issues like the need to reduce unnecessary packaging and use eco-friendly and natural products are a key focus, where



6 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS COMPANY.

- 1 How long have they been in the promotions industry?
- 2 What is their policy on return of products?
- 3 What is their policy on timely delivery of goods?
- 4 What is their policy on quantity-short product deliveries?
- 5 How long have they been APPA Members?
- 6 Have they received any APPA awards for creativity?

appropriate. We do not use polystyrene chips or plastic packaging. All our boxes are reusable and we aim to use wood wool, shredded paper and natural tissue paper wherever possible,” Thornton says.

Leading by example, PeadPR selected a client’s premium olive oil and sent it out in a black hessian bag with bamboo handles, for its Christmas gift to clients and media.

“It looked visually stunning and the feedback from our clients and media was overwhelmingly positive.”

That’s all very well, you might say; but how effective are promotional products and events? Answering that is not as simple as it might seem. The professionals in the industry are proud of their work and can prove how successful it is, but often their clients refuse to allow publicity.

APPA’s Bill Kestin, however, has all the facts and figures for our Australasian market

6 THINGS TO TELL YOUR PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS COMPANY

- 1 The audience and objectives of your promotion. (Is it to reward consumers? Increase sales? Acknowledge external business partners or internal staff? To brand or increase attendance at an event?)
- 2 The response you want from product recipients.
- 3 The brand information to communicate.
- 4 The information you want back from the recipients.
- 5 Some of the previous promotions done by you.
- 6 What you want recipients to think about your company after the promotion.

at his fingertips. The trade organisation was established in 1986 and controls, educates and honours ethical and creative practice in the industry.

“Recent research in Australia shows that in 2007 below-the-line advertising expenditure exceeded above-the-line spending for the first time. This is very significant, as more marketing spend is being put towards promotional products, outdoor and other ‘non-traditional’ formats.”

He believes effectiveness is at the nub of that change.

“Our latest survey shows that 71 percent of business travellers at an international airport reported having received a promotional product in the last year. A third had that item on their person, indicating repetitive exposure to the promoter’s logo.

“More than half kept their promotional product for more than a year and three quarters did so because ‘the product was useful’.

“Moreover, 76.1 percent could recall the advertiser’s name on a product they had received in the past 12 months. In comparison,

80 percent of participants answered ‘yes’ to reading a newspaper in the past week, but only just on half could recall the name of a single advertiser,” says Kestin.

“A product is just a product until it is linked with a promotion, when it becomes an advertisement. The most successful campaigns are the result of a planned strategy and roll out. The creativity used to elicit a response is the key to increasing profits and promoting brands,” Kestin adds.

Promotional product sales in New Zealand last year totalled \$234 million – a massive 40 percent increase since 2003.

Not unexpectedly, Kestin is quick to warn about legitimacy.

“More than 500 companies in New Zealand claim to provide promotional products. Consumers, therefore, have a one-in-four chance of dealing with a legitimate APPA member”.

So what does APPA really add, other than a handling charge? Isn’t APPA simply a cartel?

Nine out of 10 complaints APPA receives are from companies who have bought promotional products from a non-APPA member, says Kestin.

“Our members understand cultural subtleties and differences that can be crucial in the success of a promotional campaign. Asian suppliers, whose culture is markedly different to New Zealand, don’t have the essential ingredient for success – experience and knowledge of the styles, trends and desires of our own cultures.”

The risks of getting products directly from overseas are many, he warns. As many marketers have discovered to their horror – it’s possible to lose thousands of dollars by making simple mistakes.

These include:

- Sizing and quality inferiority
- Late deliveries
- Lack of duty and custom requirements
- Payment in advance without delivery guarantees
- Human rights infringements.

What are the industry horror stories? Too many to tell, it seems, although Kestin will mention a company which “rewarded” its Hindu workers on an oil rig with a leather compendium, forgetting the cow is sacred in their religion.

There is the case of 30,000 stainless steel coffee spoons, supplied through a Hong Kong company, which rusted when used in coffee. (Only the nib on the handle was actually stainless). And cheap FM radios were shipped to Japan for a promotion only to find that they would not operate on their different radio frequencies.

And what about the “Don’t do drugs” pencil, which was widely given to teenagers, and quickly sharpened down to “do drugs”?

Kestin’s point is well made. Come to think of it: let’s hope Max the Monkey is an APPA member.

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