

Pitching for promo power

IT'S A SIGN OF THE TIMES AND A TRIBUTE TO THE POWER OF WHAT SOME DISMISS AS 'GIVE AWAYS', 'FREEBIES' AND 'HANDOUT GIZMOS' THAT THE PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS INDUSTRY IS ENJOYING SUCH A BOOM. AN INSATIABLE APPETITE FOR CORPORATE GIFTS AND MARKETING INCENTIVES IS FOCUSING ATTENTION ON THE VALUE OF BRANDED PRODUCTS THAT STAY WITH THE CUSTOMER LONG AFTER THE EVENT IS OVER. **HEATHER MURPHY** MEETS THE PROMO PRODUCT MERCHANTS.

Leaving any kind of trade show or exhibition, you're often laden down with catalogues and product samples, pens, magnets and stress balls. It stands to reason then that at a promotional products show you could come away with a whole suitcase worth.

In the chilly post-industrial confines of the Australian Technology Park, the Australian Promotional Products Association (APPA)'s Travelling Wintershow was a very apt name indeed for the buzzing exhibition on July 30 in Sydney. Freestanding patio heaters were strategically placed to warm up the space while around 350 people from creative promotional products agencies wheeled suitcases packed with product samples and brochures. APPA's wintershow is traditionally the halfway mark towards the main extravaganza annual show in March and is a smaller and thus more portable affair that makes its way around the country, to six cities in Australia and then a further four in New Zealand.

Proud to be promo

Logo Line's Ross Beaton is life member of APPA and was there at the association's foundation. He has been in the promotional products business for 38 years. "When I first started, the two things we sold were rulers and cufflinks. Then we expanded into pens, but they were imported pens, and then we went into printed pens," he recalled.

Today team Logo Line, headed up by Ross and Narelle Beaton, offers an extensive collection of items in various ranges including Green Conceptz, a range of recycled, natural and reusable products, and The Confectionery Collection, which features all kinds of customisable, and in some cases, branded, confectionery.

The first two pages of their 'ideas book' catalogue are devoted to new products that range from a brain-shaped stress toy to a noughts and crosses travel game. "It seems that every year there's a new category," Beaton said. He added that other growth categories are confectionery, promotional teddy bears, and Australia-themed merchandise including banners, pens and temporary tattoos.

In his four decades in the industry, he has seen the changes in society correlating directly to the kinds of promotional products he sells. One example he gave is the recent demand for Australia-themed merchandise, not just used at sporting matches but for nationalisation ceremonies and Australia Day barbeques.

"There was a big surge around the Sydney Olympics but since then it's kept up...we're finding more reasons to celebrate being Australian," Beaton said.

He also noted that while the enviro-friendly message first broke through in the 1980s, it's only started to become part of the mainstream in the last few years. "We've been selling environmentally friendly products for 25 years, but there's a new momentum around it," he added.

'Slap strapz', or slap bands, as I knew them in my childhood, are also going to be big, Beaton told me. It is part of a general enthusiasm for retro products, and perhaps for a lot of recipients it is an appeal to their childhood nostalgia. Other retro appeal products include slinkies and bubble blowing pens. If emotion is one of the biggest drivers when it comes to making purchasing decision, then it makes sense that you're going to feel warm and fuzzy about a company that can give you the warm and fuzzies with a trip down memory lane.

An ethical outlook

The trend that kept popping up, across all categories is green, eco-friendly, sustainable, and any other buzzword you can think of. In general, the message is that clients and suppliers are looking for more environmentally friendly promotional products. It seemed that every exhibitor had their own eco-friendly range on offer, from the pen men at BIC to the clothing suppliers offering apparel made out of new sustainable textiles such as bamboo and recycled leather.

Paper Scissors Rock is a specialist provider of corporate gifts, promotional merchandising and incentive solutions for Australian and international businesses. Michael Nelson said that when he consults with clients, he always aims to provide knowledgeable advice about the different enviro choices. "It's about educating the customer about what products are better for the environment, and we really see ourselves in that educative role," he said.

One standout in this green category was relatively new player 3Fish, which offers a range of sustainable fair trade promotional products, including apparel, homewares, electronic gadgets (solar and crank-powered, of course), stationery, pens, food and bags. But being fair trade is more than just a feel-good ethos: to be a licensee of fairtrade labelling, 3Fish's products have to comply to a stringent set of guidelines that cover every step from sourcing to manufacturing to packaging and shipping.

Founders Marty and Nat Dillon bring passion and a fervent desire to do good to every aspect of their company. Their catalogue features photographs taken by Marty on his visits to 3Fish's various supplier factories in India and Bangladesh. In one, Marty sits in what looks like the living room of an Indian family home, a white puff of unspun organic cotton cradled in his hands. 3Fish's clean, green and fair outlook is even felt in their hand-sewn, recycled paper brochure that proclaims, *every dollar we spend has the power to invoke change.*

Marty Dillon's previous experience in global promotional marketing and sourcing, combined with the couple's own ethical approach to consuming, is what inspired the company, the name taken from the Dr Seuss tale *One Fish, Two Fish, Three, Four, Five Fish*, beloved by their three children (all under the age of five themselves). "It is time

"It is time to make smart decisions about our promotional marketing spend and to take responsibility for the end results of our demand." — Nat Dillon, 3Fish