



UNDER THE IMPRESSION

ASI polled 100,000 consumers globally to learn what leaves a lasting mark. Our exclusive study offers remarkable insights about the effectiveness of promotional products.

By C.J. Mittica
Research by Nate Kucsma

Are promotional products effective? Of course they are – a \$22 billion industry has been built around that very premise. But how can distributors convince skeptical prospects? What data exists to support their case? What can the curious public discover when it wants to know more?

That was the premise that ushered in the first Global Advertising Specialties Impressions Study nearly a decade ago. Since then, ASI has continually expanded the scope of the study, broadening its findings globally and deepening its insights.

This year, we went big, engaging 100,000 consumers across the United States to find out what promotional products mean to them. From the study's hundreds of conclusions, you will find many of those fascinating findings here in three categories (Age, Geography and Value), along with a deeper dive into what the numbers truly mean. Call it our best impression.

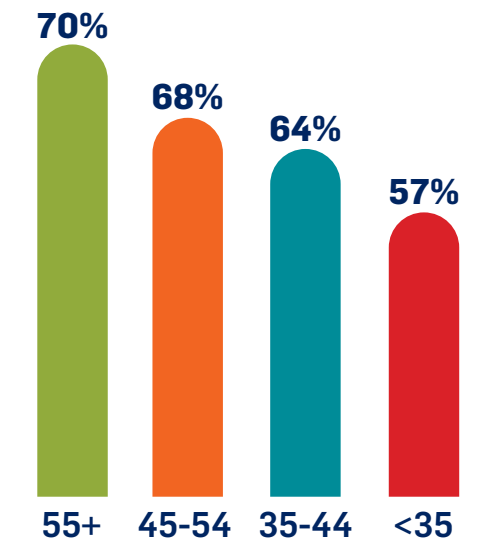
– Email: cmittica@asicentral.com;
Twitter: [@CJ_Counselor](https://twitter.com/CJ_Counselor)

AGE

How Often Promo Products Are Given Away

In our disposable culture, most consumers don’t give a second thought to throwing things away. Promotional products, however, seem to be the exception to the rule. After end-users are finished with an item, only 20% throw it away; two-thirds will give

Younger Consumers Are Less Likely To Give Away an Item Than Are Older Consumers



Percentage of consumers who give away a promo item they're finished with.

Most Influential Product by Age

USBs and tech products hold the most sway over AARP members? It’s not an anomaly. Boomers aren’t far behind millennials and Gen Xers when it comes to tech literacy. On average, they spend 19 hours a week online. Over 70% use social media daily. A Pew Report found that boomers lagged just a few percentage points behind their younger counterparts in ownership of cellphones, computers and tablets. Just one of many reasons the tech product category continues to grow explosively.



it to someone else. But those figures offer diminishing returns as they slide down the generational ladder. Only 57% of millennials give away a product once they’re done, while 22% simply throw it away. What’s wrong with these young whippersnappers?

Don’t blame generational ethos. Susan Strasser, author of *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash*, traces the rise of modern-day consumerism from the beginning of the 20th century. Baby boomers on down have grown under this collective mindset of abundance, and so on the broadest level, it’s difficult to point the finger at younger generations for their consumption habits. “I don’t really think those of us who are older should be casting any aspersions on how younger people are living,” she says.

The problem, perhaps, is that a good number of promotional items fail to speak to millennials and their core beliefs. In fact, products may not move millennials at all. “Millennials tend to prefer badge experiences to badge products,” says Jeff Fromm, president of Futurecast and co-author of multiple books on millennials. Before, the “badge” was a name-brand item worthy of consumer lust. Now, Fromm says, creating an experience with an item (instead of reveling in the item itself) is what matters. And the cohort’s opinion of a brand carries much weight. “In a world where oftentimes product, service and price differences are really small,” Fromm adds, “belief is something that separates one company from another.” Translation: active brand management (through social media and digital as well as other avenues) ensure a better chance of

What Happens After Recipients Are Finished With Promo Products

Areas Interviewed	United States	Canada
Throw it away	20%	18%
File the item away	17%	18%
Give the item to someone else	63%	64%

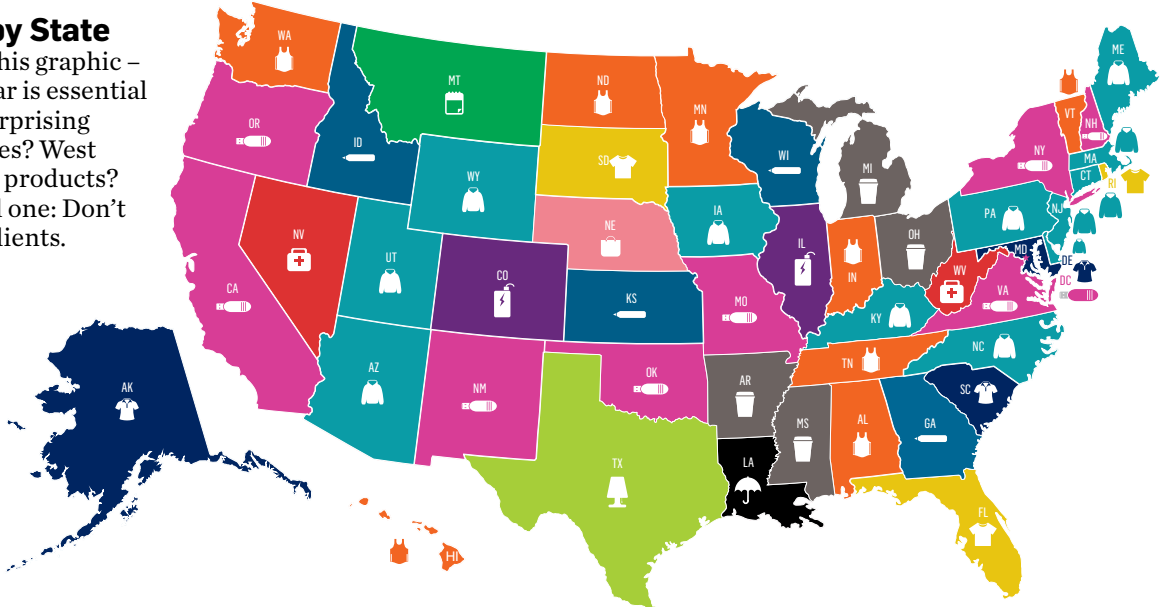
promotional products staying in use. The effort will be worthwhile. As a group, millennials represent a quarter of the U.S. population and boast \$200 billion in spending power (and growing, as the demographic fully enters the workforce). Equally important is that the majority of millennials fit the under-35 age group, which has been a continual object of lust for marketers. “Ad agencies love to sell to 18-35 because that’s where there is the most changeover in lifestyle choices,” says Dr. Margaret J. King, director of The Center for Cultural Studies & Analysis. “That period of time is the most mobile period in anybody’s life stages.” King lists the multitude of changes – everything from jobs and places of residence to partners and interests. In essence, the quality that makes current millennials so attractive (their ever-shifting affinities) is also what makes them so inherently difficult to capture.

GEOGRAPHY

Most Influential Product by State

For every predictable result from this graphic – T-shirts thrive in Florida, outerwear is essential in Wyoming – there’s an equally surprising finding. Texans love desk accessories? West Virginians prefer health and safety products? The lesson is a simple but powerful one: Don’t rule out any product category for clients.

- OUTERWEAR
- T-SHIRTS
- UMBRELLAS
- USB DRIVES
- WRITING INSTRUMENTS
- DESK ACCESSORIES
- DRINKWARE
- HEALTH & SAFETY
- BAGS
- PERFORMANCE WEAR
- POWER BANKS
- CALENDARS
- POLO SHIRTS



VALUE

Influence of Advertiser Opinion From Eco Products

As the latest wave of environmental concern, “Going Green” surged less than a decade ago and significantly broadened the promo industry’s eco offerings. Consumers say their support hasn’t flagged; one survey by Nielsen found that 55% say they would pay more for products and services from companies committed to social and environmental causes. (In North America, the figure is 42%.) Is the truth real or simply convenient?

Proponents of the category notice a maturing market filling with educated users. “We are seeing the number of well-informed, eco-conscious customers steadily increase,” says Kriya Stevens, brand manager for apparel company Econscious (asi/51656). “Talking and thinking about making sustainable choices are now mainstream. As compared to say, five years ago, the kinds of questions we get asked have changed from ‘what is organic?’ to ‘what are the benefits of organic farming practices?’”

However, others have not seen the same appreciable gains. Wes Witt, an account director for www.leaderpromos.com (asi/287087), estimates that about 10% of clients will ask for eco options. Even if corporate clients may have sustainability

**In TOTAL,
42%**

have a more favorable opinion of an advertiser if the Promotional Product they received was **ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY.**

requirements in place, they don’t extend them to promotional spending, he says. And while Witt will often quote those products to give clients a range of choices, “they very rarely will choose it unless I steer them directly to it,” he says. “From a client perspective, they like to know the options are there, but they don’t want to pay for them.”

Positioning helps with the issue of price; Stevens says Econscious has been successful with its organic and eco apparel offerings because they compare favorably to premium brands. But price doesn’t have to be an insurmountable hurdle. Michelle Sheldon, president of Eco Promotional Products Inc. (asi/185797) says in most cases the company’s prices are equivalent, or even better than other distributors. “We are fortunate in that we’ve been in the busi-

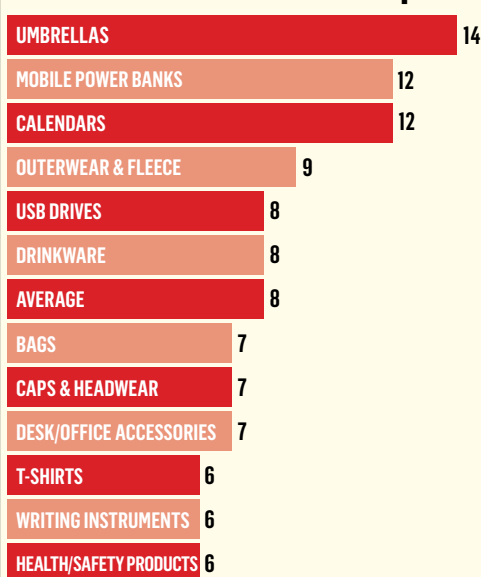
ness for over seven years and have established ourselves with our closely vetted suppliers,” says Sheldon, who saw (and still sees) a lack of environmental initiative in the industry. “We have grown our business and earned better pricing.”

If consumer demand increases, the eco category will continue to grow. Data from the Ad Impressions Study finds that young consumers 35 and under value eco products the most. But are those signs of changing cultural norms, or simply starry-eyed idealism perma-baked into younger generations? Distributors and suppliers agree that younger buyers gravitate more to eco items, but it’s not always a blanket truth; Sheldon says that with her government and corporate clients, interest is consistent across a much broader span of ages.

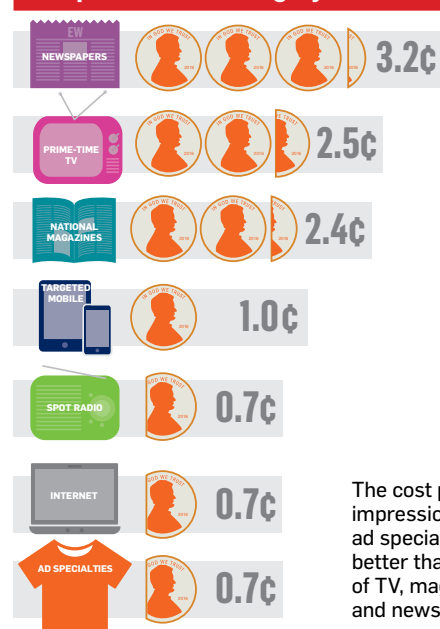
Cost-Effectiveness of Promo Products

Distributors don’t have to be sold on the power of promotional products, but sometimes prospective clients do. “I do run into this discussion at times, especially for new businesses where limited marketing dollars are to be stretched for maximum impact,” says Anita Brooks owner of Geiger affiliate ASB Marketing (asi/202900). Her talking points? The lower cost per impression compared to other advertising mediums and the targeted approach compared to the broad “casting the net” tactic of media ads. “In addition,” she says, “I emphasize the versatility of having some promo items on hand – how they help in targeting new prospects, thanking customers, engaging stakeholders and much more.” Not to be forgotten: how long promo products are kept, including at least half a year for many popular categories and a year or more for items like umbrellas and mobile power banks.

Number of Months Promotional Items Are Kept



Ad specialties are highly cost-effective



The cost per impression of an ad specialty is better than that of TV, magazines and newspapers.