





Ad Specialties Across AMERICA

Want proof of the versatility of ad specialties as an advertising medium? Check out *Counselor's* road trip, where we cover events in each of the 50 states to see how ad specialty items were used in a wide variety of programs.



By Andy Cohen, Betsy Cummings, Shane Dale, Ron Donoho, Kenneth Hein, C.J. Mittica and Dave Vagnoni

ILLUSTRATIONS • INGO FAST

here's one sure fact of life in America in 2009: The use of ad specialties is alive and well. We have the proof right here. ○ Welcome to Ad Specialties Across America, a special feature that

examines how ad specialty items are being used at events throughout the whole country. From spring break parties in Florida and a bowling tournament in Nebraska to an incentive trip in Alaska and an anti-drug march in Montana, we covered an event in each of the 50 states that took place within the past six months. And we asked one very simple question: How were promotional products used in the marketing or promotion of the event?

The result is not only an impressive display of the sheer versatility and usefulness of promotional products, but also a guide for the wide variety of customers that distributors can call on these days.

When's the last time you sold products for a bar mitzvah? We've got that covered – in Michigan. Looking for a way to get a foot in the door at your local school? Check out our report from

a science fair in Connecticut. Have a big carnival coming to town? Make sure to take a look at our first-hand account of how promotional giveaways are vital to corporations connecting with fans of a massive rodeo and fair in Austin, Texas.

Of course, we also have a bar opening in California, a dentist association trade show in Arizona, street teams marketing a concert in New York, and a Safari Club meeting in Colorado. Oh, there's also basketball promotions (it was NCAA tournament time in March, after all), charity drives, a political rally, and one barbecue contest in North Carolina where a pig-shaped trophy is the big prize.

Yes, we spanned the map looking for some of the most unique ways that promotional products are used at events. Turn the page and take a look at what we found.

Ad Specia Acr

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50 States,

50 Promotional Programs.

Come Along For The Ride.

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Check out the scene of pig races and a rodeo in Austin on page 84



TEXAS

Roping In Customers At A Rodeo

LuAnn Steele is a happy camper. The mother of two young kids – Tyler and Jennifer – simply can't contain her enthusiasm for a certain item she just put on her head. "I just love this," Steele says about the bright red bandanna emblazoned with Dodge Truck logos that is holding her dark brown hair in place. "I need something to hold my hair up when I'm cleaning the house and gardening. I go through these things so quickly, so I'll definitely put this to good use."

Steele is an attendee of the Star of Texas Fair & Rodeo, which took place in Austin from March 13-28. She's one of thousands of Texas locals who are bombarded by corporate messages and giveaways during the two-week event. In fact, on the night Steele came, it was Dodge Truck night at the rodeo.

The first 2,000 people to pull into the parking lot driving a Dodge truck received the very bandanna that Steele is sporting.

Mixed with a concert and Pro-Rodeo competition each night, this annual Austin staple includes a carnival for kids, livestock auctions and outdoor fair cuisine at its finest. One of the main attractions three times a day? Pig races. Yep, the little porkers run around a short track – four at a time – and the crowd gets whipped up into a frenzy. On this late March day, pig number three took home the gold medal in the 6:00 pm race. It was a popular pick, as the audience of about 200 cheered their favorite pigs on.

Oh, and of course there are companies just dying to attract the attention of these folks and the more than 10,000 people who



come to the event every day – companies like RedMan and Grizzly. The two chewing tobacco brands each had a tent at the rodeo where



FLORIDA

Spring Break More Than "Wasted" Promotions

As a gaggle of drunks milling about on a beach staring out into the Gulf of Mexico, college students on spring break don't seem like the ideal buying group. Budget-conscious is the operative term for the trek that

led them to Panama City, the tourist hotspot on the Florida panhandle. "Surf, sex and sand – that's what they're here for," says Jules Waldman, a local cabbie and resident of the area for 30 years. "And slurping too, I almost forgot about drinking." Who would want to court this group?

The answer: A lot of companies. Because the

simple reality is that the impressionable mind of the student today leads to the buying power of a working adult tomorrow. And the tightly-packed groups on vacation can quickly spread the word at the beach or back home at school. "Over the course of a week we make a lot of brand impressions," says Neil Carl, an event coordinator running a diversion-filled beach sanctuary for insurance company Geico.

The biggest surprise? It isn't the usual suspects – liquor companies, for instance – dispensing their wares. Both the Army and the Navy had the biggest presence on the sand during the last week of March. In the Army's case it is literally the biggest presence, with a 50-foot wooden tower that spring

breakers could scale after being outfitted with a helmet and harness. And it isn't a walk on the beach; staffers man safety ropes as the participants try to reach for the top. The successful ones go home with a shirt that says "I Conquered The Army Challenge."

It's one of the many promotions in Panama Beach administered by The Passion Group, an event marketing company based in Asbury Park, NJ. "We focus on providing events for the students that are interactive, that are going to leave them with a positive experience," says Mike Hollemans, director of logistics for The Passion Group.

Down at the other end of the beach, the Navy had a similarly expansive presence. Small giveaways included shirts, beach balls,





Watch Andy Cohen talk about pig races and calf roping at www.counselormag.com/USA

marketing reps hand out samples of their products, as well as some promo products to remember the company by. Call it The Battle of the Tobacco Brands.

"We're meeting 100-200 people a day here," says Rodney Smith, a representative from Mobile Marketing Solutions, the marketing firm hired by RedMan to promote its items at the fair. "It's a great opportunity to connect with consumers who are interested in our products."

And to continue that connection when consumers leave the rodeo, the two brands are handing out promo items. Grizzly is giving away pens, koozies, notepads, and plastic bags emblazoned with Grizzly logos and marketing messages so visitors can tote their



samples around. RedMan, operating out of a booth fit for a trade show, is handing out T-shirts, pens, stickers and magnets. Plus, the company has logoed guitars, sweatshirts and televisions on display in its booth at the rodeo.

Every person who comes into the RedMan booth walks away with a koozie. For this

brand, and with this audience, it's the most effective promotional product. "We've done the research on the rodeo audience," Smith says confidently. "We know they drink a lot of beer and they'll use these things to keep their beer cold. These will get a lot of use. They'll be cooling a lot of beers around Austin for the next year or so. That's good for the brand." – AC

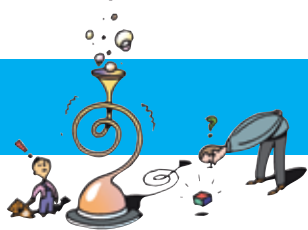


Watch C.J. Mittica talk about the new friends he made on Spring Break at www.counselormag.com/USA



water bottles and more, with activities like inflatable boxing, dodgeball and volleyball. Ethan Smith, a worker at the giveaway table, estimates that anywhere between 200 and 500 people will sign up for more informations during a day. The Navy branding extended all throughout the Days Inn hotel, including logoed elevator doors and imprinted key cards that read "We Can Open Doors For You."

Other events included spring break concerts with T-shirt giveaways and more, or tents like Geico's, which let students check e-mail and play video games. It wasn't uncommon to see spring breakers wearing Geico lanyards or GoArmy.com T-shirts, as was the case with a pair of University of Cincinnati students. Why did they decide to go for the shirts? "It's free," they say. – CJM



Science Fair Rewards Inspired Teens

It is, admittedly, one of the most respected (OK, feared) cleaning substances in any home, despite the fact that bleach, in its purest form, breaks down into simple salt and water. Still, its reputation for chewing through fabric and clearing out sinuses far outweighs its harmless chemical makeup.

To make it more consumer friendly, Alexandra Rallo and Megan Grammatico, both sophomores at Sacred Heart Academy in Hamden, CT, have dedicated the better part of their year-long honors chemistry class to finding a more user-friendly version. Would it be possible, they wondered, to alter the pH balance of bleach but still retain its power to kill harmful bacteria? They're at the Connecticut Science Fair at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, CT, with their findings, which, they say, don't reveal much.

After working with varying pH levels, "there was

no constant trend," says Rallo, a rosy-cheeked 15-year-old wearing silver hoop earrings and fleece-lined pink Uggs boots.

"The science is more complicated" than their tests would allow, adds Grammatico, also 15, in a leopard-print shirt and brown cargo pants.

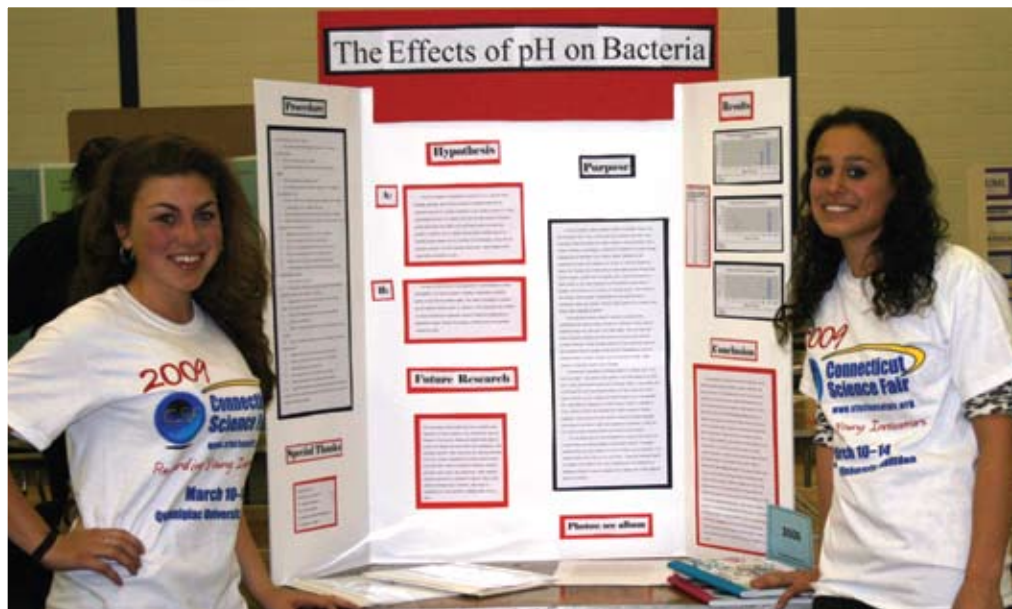
What will they get for their efforts? If their project is chosen as a winner from 500 others, the two could pick up one of more than 100 gold-columned trophies with a figurine at the top holding a medalion that says, "Science is the key to the world." Already they've both received white T-shirts imprinted with the science fair's logo on the front and the sponsoring organizations on the back.

Ad specialty items play a huge role in the 60th year of the fair, says Bob Wisner, the event's director. For 25 years, the last 10 of which have been held at Quinnipiac, fair organizers have relied on Barker Specialty Co. Inc. (asi/132690) to provide T-shirts, trophies, plaques, pen sets and other promotional items to winners, judges, volunteers and other participants.

Jeff Kolv, 14, is here to present his findings that solar power, much to his chagrin, is still too expensive to replace traditional energy sources. "You would have to have a big solar panel the size of your house," he says, to generate enough energy day in and day out.

Several aisles away, Kristin Tamuty, 15, and Nicki Angelica, 14, are hoping their tests that disprove the marketing claims of Tide-to-Go will be a winner. As it turns out, against lipstick, ketchup and other pesky stains, the supposed wonder product only removes 26% of color, say Tamuty and Angelica.

Despite the obvious enthusiasm for awards and products here, Wisner says, the fair regularly reviews the role of promotional products at the science fair. "We went through a big discussion about ad specialties" for this year's fair, including questions about whether rewards should be pared down, he says. But one thing inspired them to maintain as robust an awards program as ever: "You see the smiles on students' faces when they're clutching these babies." — BC





The Intersection Of Al Capone & Promo Items

Appearing seriously misplaced among restaurants and row homes, an unknowing passerby would wonder why a conspicuous, semi-crumbling castle sits in a flourishing Philadelphia neighborhood. Locals are happy to explain. Over 150 years, almost 80,000 people, including mobster Al Capone, lived within the building's historic 30-foot-high walls. Their visits were not exactly voluntary.

"It's such an interesting place," says Shannon Copp, a tourist from

Chicago. "It's so different than other prisons, like Alcatraz."

Towering above the street traffic and within walking distance of the famed Philadelphia Museum of Art, Eastern State Penitentiary draws hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. Even a quick stop will leave tourists with stories to tell. Escape stories. Suicide stories. And of course, ghost stories.

"Let's just say when the lights go out here, it freaks me out a bit," says Caroline Nobo, our tour guide on this day in late March.

But Eastern State offers more than just a seasonal thrill. In the past several years, buoyed by interest, exposure and success, the staff at Eastern State has concentrated more heavily on events and promotions. Informational tours begin and end every day in a slightly eerie, below-ground gift shop, filled with promotional T-shirts, mugs, magnets, DVDs, books and even tote bags.

"Anything related to Al Capone does really well," says Erin Monteiro, assistant site manager. "Shot glasses and postcards are popular. There was demand for a tote, so



now we have a tote bag. We're also working on a new product, a re-cast original prison key."

Eastern State has partnered with Kevin's Wholesale (asi/241850) to offer design ideas and provide promotional items. "We met them at a trade show and started talking," says Scott Tinkelman, vice president of sales and marketing at Kevin's.

Wanting to experience the novelty of Eastern State up close, *Counselor* joined one of several daily hour-long Winter Adventure Tours. On a sunny and mild spring afternoon, we walked through the same gate that every prisoner had to pass through. Surrounded by thick stone walls that stretch 10 feet underground, we continued into one of the many extended hallways that contain prison cells.

Of course, no Eastern State tour would be complete without a look inside Al Capone's restored plush cell. Furnished with an oriental rug, lamps, a desk, artwork and a radio receiver, Capone once described the cell as "very comfortable" during his stay in 1929. Arrested for having a concealed weapon, Capone spent about nine months in Eastern State.

After a riot in 1961, Eastern State was nearing the end of its functional use. It closed a decade later and was reopened in 1994 as a historic site. Today, its popularity as an odd, but especially fascinating attraction is at its peak. "We have to add tours all the time," says Nobo, who owns several penitentiary-branded products. "I use my Eastern State coffee mug every day." — DV





Street Team Rocks The Giveaways

The futuristic rock-pop-dance band the Cazals asks "What of Our Future?" in its album title. The question is fitting given the state of the music industry. The rise of music downloads, legal or otherwise, has sent the record industry into a tailspin. The impact has been so extreme that Virgin Megastores has called it quits. The radio industry, meanwhile, continues to see ad dollars dwindle. This makes feet-on-the-street, guerrilla marketing efforts even more essential for promoting new bands like the London-based Cazals in the Big Apple.

Handing out fliers, pins, shirts and other types of promotional products to market new artists as well as established acts "is the bread and butter of any promotional campaign," says George Xanthopoulos, general manager of Giant Step, a music and lifestyle marketing company.

For the Cazals show at New York's Webster Hall on March 6, Xanthopoulos and his team hit the streets to promote the show and the band's CD. Somewhat ironically, the first stop was the flagship Virgin Megastore in Union Square, which would soon see its windows whitewashed. Passersby were welcomed with stickers, buttons and postcards touting the band. The final stop would be outside of the club leading up to the band's opening chords.

This type of program, despite its new relevance, is old hat for Giant Step. CEO Maurice Bernstein says modestly, "every left of center band in the last 20 years, we've helped break in a non-traditional way." In the conference room at Giant Step's Tribeca-based office, the wall is lined with classic posters of then-burgeoning acts including Gnarl Barkley, Outkast, Macy Grey and others. Giant Step also helped break Radiohead, Bjork and Amy Winehouse.

"We are given the challenge each time of, how do you get the band or the brand's message

out there clearly with authenticity while at the same time creating multiple impressions," says Bernstein. The tools they use: USB sticks, LED keychains, T-shirts, lollipops and stickers.

In front of Virgin, Xanthopoulos watches as a staffer hits any skinny-panted consumer walking through the crowd (the band's target is ages 18-30). "They might not take the flier, but they always take the sticker," he says. "Everyone loves stickers."

He and his counterpart are skilled at their craft. How do they get people to accept their items even if they don't know the band? "You always have to say something because at least then you are getting your message across. Eye contact is important and you need to aim for the sternum."

They are successful as they spot a young hipster leaning against a wall. They present him a limited edition T-shirt and he poses for a picture, despite never having heard of the Cazals. When a program works, "The influencers tell 10 people and then those people tell 10 people," says Bernstein. "Sometimes it's perfect."

They recall some of their favorite stories, like the time Snow Patrol was photographed holding up coasters promoting themselves. For the movie *Blow*, they created what looked like logoed cocaine packets. "People gravitated to us because they thought we were giving out drugs," Bernstein says.

Ultimately, most well-chosen handouts work wonders for the music industry because, "in general, traditional forms of ads do not work," says Bernstein. "Music fans today want to discover the bands themselves in original ways."

This, of course, includes accepting a T-shirt that says "Life is boring" in front of a dying record store on a warm pre-spring day. — KH





Dental Conference Brightens Doc Biz

For a lot of dentists, the effort to retain patients is as much fun as a root canal. That's why Melissa Digges, marketing manager for Smart Practice (asi/328901) in Phoenix, presented her company's easy scheduling software program and several ad specialties at the annual Western Regional Dental Convention at the Phoenix Convention Center. This year's convention, which took place March 12-14, attracted 7,000 members of the Arizona Dental Association who are looking to get some fresh, new advertising ideas while completing required dental education courses.

One way that Smart Practice gets its foot in the door with prospective dental clients is its software system that makes appointment rescheduling much more efficient. "They download it to their computers and it works with their practice management soft-

ware, and it automates their recall programs," Digges says. "So, if they want to set it up to send a recall card to patients who haven't been there in 12-24 months, it automatically pulls that patient list."

That product enables Smart Practice to transition to its arsenal of ad specialties. The company offered a wide array of postcard design ideas at the convention. Each customizable card featured the logo and contact information of the dentist's office, along with a message about the necessity to schedule another checkup in the near future.

"They can pick a card and they can pick whatever message to put on the back of it," Digges says. "They can put an offer on the back if they want, like 'We haven't seen you in two years; come back in for free x-rays.'"

Like many companies, Smart Practice is following the green trend in its promotional items. At the convention, the company showed off its magnets made out of 75% post-industrial content and tote bags made out of 20% recycled materials.

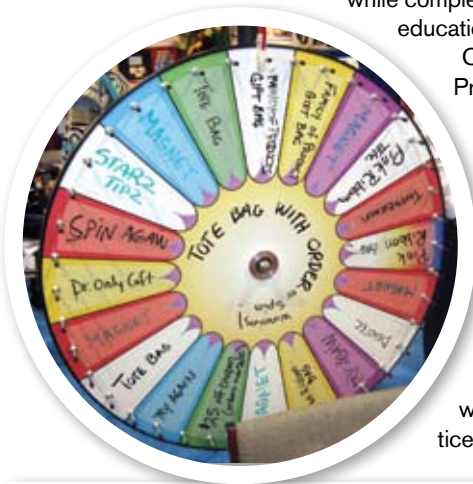
Lori Radke, scheduling coordina-

tor for Flagstaff Pediatric Dentistry and a convention attendee, has been ordering magnets from Smart Practice for three years because of their visibility and staying power. "We tell our customers, 'Put it on your fridge,'" she says. "If you need us in an emergency, our number's right there. They don't have to look us up in the phone book. They don't have to find our business card lying around. They take that over a business card any day."

Radke's young customers also enjoy the recycled bags. "We love them because the kids get a toothbrush with a timer, toothpaste, floss and whatever handouts we give them, so everything can go in those little tote bags and they take them home," she says.

Along with the card display, Smart Practice set up a Wheel of Fortune-type game at its convention booth in which passersby could spin the wheel and win any number of promotional prizes, including a tote bag or magnet. This allows Smart Practice to demonstrate to potential customers just how effective their ad specialty items can be. "We give away some of the products we have, they try them out when they get home, and then call us and place an order," Digges says.

One of the big prizes on the wheel was a logoed bag that contained all of Smart Practice's promotional items. Inside was a magnet and tote bag, along with a coffee mug, a recall card and a sticker appointment card that all carry the same company logo. "We like to convey that it's easy for a practice to brand one image across many product lines, so everything they hand out has a consistent brand image for their practice," Digges says. "Dentists realize that if they're not marketing to their patients, someone else could be. Now is the time to amp up marketing efforts." — SD





Grand Opening A Winner For Sports Bar

Now, this is a bar opening with style. All the top-shelf liquor you can imagine, plus a shrimp and sushi bar that would make even the ritziest of the ritzy jealous. Oh, and promo products are on full display as well.

The party is the grand opening of a Fox Sports Grill inside the brand new Hilton San Diego Bayfront. The 1,200-room hotel is adjacent to the San Diego Convention Center. It's enormous, but uncharacteristically sophisticated for a convention property. The property holds oversize guest rooms, offers fine dining and provides stunning views of the San Diego Bay.

Fox Sports Grill is on the ground floor of the hotel. You can also see the bay from the front door. Even better, there are tables lined up on an outside deck where you can take a seat, be warmed by fire pits and gaze out toward the glassy blue water, in search of a juvenile California grey whale that has been calling the bay home during the Ides of March.

The grand opening party takes place as March Madness is beginning to take off. The grill would love to be the temporary home of sports fans watching the NCAA basketball tournament action. To that effort, there are 26 flat-screen TVs and an integrated surround-sound system.

As sports bars go, this one leans to the upscale. The food laid out for the gala is definitely worthy

of a major leaguer. The shrimp is ubiquitous. A chef is making fresh sushi hand rolls all night. Sashimi melts in your mouth like butter.

Of course, every attendee to the grand opening party receives a black bag with Fox Sports Grill logoed on the side. Inside the bag is a bottle of Chardonnay – a 2007 from Blackstone Winery in Monterey County. Also in the gift bag is a cherry-wood box logoed with a gold plate that reads “Fox Sports Grill. San Diego. Grand Opening. March 14, 2009.” Inside the box is a trio of wine accouterments. There's a silver-and-wood-handled wine opener (with corkscrew, bottle opener and small knife); a metal wine stopper (for recorking); and silver wine ring (to help prevent dripping down the side of a bottle). – RD



ALABAMA

Recognizing that folks in the poultry industry often have their hands full, Scott Morris found a creative way to lighten their load. Morris, vice president of sales and marketing for Proforma Printed

Images (*asi/300094*) in Florence, provided 3,000 V-Mail Cards for a March 11-13 trade show for local companies in the poultry business. Each item featured a postcard with a miniature CD laminated on it. The content of each CD provided potential customers with information about each of Morris' poultry clients.

"This enables our clients to detail a lot of information about their company, and it prevents attendees from having to keep up with catalogs to have to carry home," Morris says.



ARKANSAS

For an event that was all about women's health, Amy Beth Anderson made sure that attendees looked good on the outside, too.

Anderson, promotional consultant for Trumbles Inc. in Batesville, a division of The Vernon Company (*asi/351700*), gave away 800 manicure kits for Ladies Night Out, an annual



forum on women's health sponsored by White River Medical Center and Citizens Bank. Each manicure case featured the logo of both companies.

"They are oval, zippered, padded cases," Anderson says. "The set has nail clippers, scissors, a cuticle remover, a nail file, a cuticle scraper and cuticle pusher."



COLORADO

Herb Barton, president of Applied Images (*asi/123067*) in Colorado Springs, is a regular contributor to an annual banquet for the Colorado chapter of Safari Club International (SCI), a worldwide wildlife conservation organization. This year, Applied Images provided aluminum sport bottles and Spifs, which are cloths for cleaning glasses and binoculars, for the banquet on March 14.

"As soon as they walk in the door, they are getting something," says Barton of the 400-plus banquet attendees. "The great thing about this is they always team up with a sponsor, so the SCI logo and the sponsor's logos are on the promotional products."

ALASKA

You'd think flying for a once-in-a-lifetime incentive trip to Alaska would be reward enough. Or that, once you got there, a ride along a scenic highway strewn with snow-peaked mountain ranges and lakes might be compelling enough to incentive winners. As it turns out, most companies want to offer more. So they've turned to Alaska Destination Specialists Inc. (*asi/115665*), in Anchorage, to figure out what other ways they can indulge their reward recipients. This coming August a bio-tech company will send 66 employees to Alaska for an incentive trip that will start



with not only an especially captivating scenic drive but hot towels and a \$30, silver and black thermos/mug, logoed with the company's name. The thermos, which has a carabiner attached to it, is perfect for glacier hiking, day cruises, biking and other activities, says Char McClelland, president of Alaska Destinations. "This is one way for the company to make their employees feel important and to show them that they're valued," McClelland says. "Each time they use the mug it will bring back memories."

DELAWARE

Diamond State Promotions Inc. (*asi/180198*) in Wilmington was given the charge of providing Delaware State University women's basketball fans with a promotional item that would be fun, yet safe.

"They had heard that the college students threw things on the court during the game, which is why they wanted to go with a towel," says Stephanie Webb, vice president of Diamond State, of her client in the health-care industry.

So, Diamond State provided hundreds of forest green rally towels with the company's logo and phone number printed on each one. The promotion was timed well, as the game was played on National Breast Cancer Day (Feb. 16) and was called the Women's Basketball Coaches Association Pink Zone Game, in which fans were asked to donate money for breast cancer research. The towels were a hit – the university raised over \$500 for breast cancer and Delaware State defeated North Carolina A&T, 68-66.



GEORGIA

When the Marriott Marquis, one of Atlanta's largest downtown hotels and convention centers, participated recently in a conference to help promote the state of Georgia for



future convention business, it was up to Atlanta-based Capital Ideas (*asi/157004*) to provide a big assist. "They wanted a promotional item that featured their logo but also tied in with

the Atlanta- or Georgia-based focus," says Jacqueline Caselton, account coordinator.

So, Capital Ideas sourced 2,500 state-specific mints from Amusemints/Art Coco (*asi/36950*) that featured the Marriott logo on the tin with the Georgia peach and state seal art. "The tin is a nice quality that could be refilled for continual use by the recipient," Caselton says.

ILLINOIS

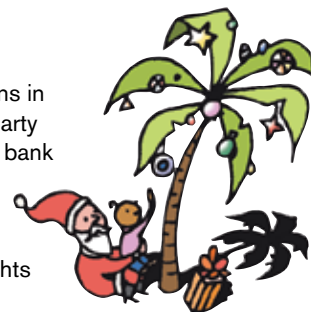


Legendary news anchor Tom Brokaw was the guest speaker as CURE (Citizens United when Research in Epilepsy) held its annual benefit at Field Museum in Chicago in March. To commemorate the event, Kathy Tuite, owner of An Executive Decision (*asi/121580*) in Chicago, supplied pens for each attendee. Each pen came with CURE's logo Web address.

Tuite says the pens were used to get people to donate. "Donation envelopes, along with the pen, were placed on each chair," Tuite says.

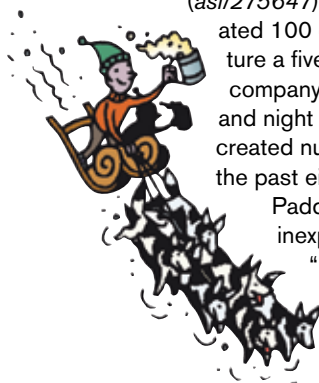
HAWAII

A holiday party hosted by a multitude of banks and financial institutions in Honolulu was themed "Light the Way." In the center of the indoor party at the Hilton Hawaiian Village hotel was a seven-foot tree. At the door, a bank client of Certified Hawaiian Inc. (*asi/160464*) gave out branded carabiner flashlights. The flashlights were built right into the three-inch metal carabiners, says Nolan Hong, vice president of sales and marketing for Certified Hawaiian. About 500 were given out, and about 100 lit flashlights were hung as decorations on the Christmas tree.



IDAHO

Troy Thorpe provided a local bar with a cheap but time-tested way to commemorate St. Patrick's Day this year. Thorpe, owner of Monogram Plus Inc. (*asi/275647*) in Coeur d'Alene, created 100 green T-shirts that feature a five-color screen-printed company logo for Paddy's, a bar and night club for which he has created numerous promotions in the past eight years.



Paddy's always has a promotion for St. Patrick's Day, but looked for an inexpensive giveaway this year. "Cost-wise, it's not that much," Thorpe says.

"Instead of giving everybody a free drink – which is actually illegal in Idaho – they gave away a free T-shirt."



INDIANA

The sports marketing department at The University of Notre Dame was looking for a way to fire up the crowd for a big basketball game against the third-ranked team in the country. So, Jeff Kuroski,

president of P.J. Marketing (*asi/382554*), supplied the school with 10,000 black T-shirts for its January 24 Blackout game between the Fighting Irish and the University of Connecticut in South Bend. Each shirt had the Notre Dame logo printed on the front and the word "Blackout" on the back via P.J. Marketing's in-house silk screen department. "Notre Dame has one or two of these types of events each basketball season," Kuroski says. "Last year, we provided 10,000 camouflage shirts for a similar type of basketball promotion."



IOWA

A rural energy co-op came to Newton Manufacturing Co. ([asi/283300](#)) looking for a creative promotion for its annual shareholders' meeting on April 15 that would promote energy conservation. "We came up with the idea to insert two foam outlet insulators and two foam switch plate insulators into custom packaging that featured their logo, installation instructions and conservation tips," says David Schaff, communication administrator for the Newton, IA-based company. "Newton produced and assembled the entire package in-house, including the packaging printing."

Schaff says the co-op is also handing out the insulators at various promotions throughout the state.



LOUISIANA

New Orleans has always held the reputation of a party city. What better promo item for a party town than a customized, insulated cooler bag to keep your drinks cold? Kevin Avery, president of Artie's Printing Inc. ([asi/125285](#)), has serviced three orders from a local newspaper called *Gambit Weekly*. The paper participates in a trade show and looks to sign up new subscribers from their booth. Representatives from the newspaper gave out the lined coolers – which hold 12-15 beers or soft drinks on ice – to people who sign up for a subscription.

MAINE

Roxanna Adams' client was holding a conference scheduled to start on a Friday the 13th. It was a group of orthopedic surgeons, and because of the date, they settled on a theme of Superstitions, says Adams, president of Atlantic Awards Inc. ([asi/126717](#)) in Bangor. At the opening breakfast of the meeting, each doctor was given a coffee mug adorned with a complicated patchwork of art – all depicting superstitions. There was a house with a number 13 painted on the door, someone opening an umbrella inside, black cats, a person throwing salt over their shoulder and a collage of other images.



MARYLAND

The Preakness Stakes – the second leg of the Triple Crown of horse racing – is one of the premier events of the year in Baltimore. Part of the pre-race-day festivities is a dinner hosted by the board of directors of the Maryland Jockey Club. The dinner this year is scheduled to be held in downtown's Inner Harbor, at the National Aquarium. There will be a "Down Under"

exhibit staged at the aquarium, and that is the setting for the dinner. To get guests in an Australian frame of mind, Badges, Buttons...Plus Inc. ([asi/129600](#)) President Richard Lederman came up with boomerang-shaped invitations. The mini boomerangs are made of wood, and fit into a standard envelope. Each one has the party details etched onto the wood.

KANSAS

Capitalizing on the green phenomenon, Wichita-based Tangible Advertising ([asi/341617](#)) provided 500 cotton T-shirts and 150 recycled bags for an annual Earth Day celebration on April 22, sponsored by Kansas State University and multiple state government organizations.

It's all part of a program called EARTH (Earth Awareness Researchers for Tomorrow's Habitat), which provides middle school students with environmental education. Each promotional item carried the EARTH logo.



"The EARTH T-shirts will be given to the hundreds of presenters and volunteers that are helping out at each of the EARTH workshop events across Kansas," says Gary Hilton, CAS, owner and president of Tangible Advertising. "They will help to distinguish them from the student participants, as well as act as an incentive for them to continue to volunteer their services."

KENTUCKY

The Pitt Academy elementary school in Louisville does a scramble golf tournament each year to raise money for its various programs. This year, the school purchased plastic water bottles from EmbroidMe of Springhurst to give out to participants. EmbroidMe owner Faith Hopper says the water bottles are filled with golf paraphernalia – tees, divot fixers, etc. – and given out to all 144 golfers. Pitt Academy's school colors are blue and white, so all the items are colored that way, and printed with golf themes and the school's name on them.



MASSACHUSETTS

We've come a long way since the Salem Witch Hunts. But at the Hawthorne Hotel in Salem, the staff can party like its 1692. Every Halloween, the property sells out its 250 rooms and hosts a party that attracts about 1,000 revelers. For this year, Blue Wave Productions (*asi/141957*) of Boston will supply the hotel with gift bags for the guest rooms, and

a few extra giveaways for party guests. The drawstring tote bags have the hotel logo and the name of the party theme. In 2007 the theme was Ship

of Ghouls. Last year, it was Carnevil. Blue Wave vice president and senior account executive says the gift bags usually contain a hat and a mug. The Ship of Ghouls hat had a skull-and-crossbones logo on the side and on the buckle. The 2008 hats had the Hawthorne's logo and were imprinted with "Carnevil Creep Show."



MICHIGAN

When a young Jewish girl reaches the age of 13, she celebrates her coming of age with a bat mitzvah ceremony and

party. Bill Prestanski, president of Cameo Promotional Products (*asi/156140*) in

Detroit, supplied one such recent event with several products to mark the life-changing occasion. The get-together took place in a large Michigan campground. Each guest for the overnight sleepover – the order was for a set of 100 – was to receive a black and gray backpack, hoodie sweatshirt and flannel gathered-waist sleep pants. Each item was embroidered with a cartoon logo that depicted the party and included the young lady's name.



MINNESOTA

Carlson Marketing (*asi/157786*) in Minneapolis had a client in the financial services industry that was putting together a golf tournament, as part of an awards/incentive program. The client's primary request, says Carlson Marketing Merchandiser Marlene Buckingham, was that all the items given out as a part of a hotel room gift be eco-friendly. To comply, 150 bags were filled with: Wilson golf balls (with recycled rubber centers); aloe-based sunscreen; organic bags of tea (made from corn); and solar chargers that use sunlight to recharge cell phones and other electronic devices. All the items were logoed with the client's company name.

MISSISSIPPI



A casino client wanted to do a promotion that showcased how much people could win at their tables and slot machines. Karen

Westwood, president of Classic Creations (*asi/162707*) in Jackson, helped the casino do a "Prospector" theme. They supplied thousands of stuffed dogs – six-inch to eight-inch bulldogs, Labradors, etc. – and gave out different versions each week of one month. The first week, the dogs had prospector picks; other weeks the dogs were holding pans, "gold" nuggets and gold claim certificates. No, the stuffed dogs didn't come attached to the extras. Westwood and her staff spent many hours gluing items to the dogs' paws.

MISSOURI

"March Madness" is a reference to the annual NCAA basketball tournament. This year, the Auto Show in Kansas City was held just prior to the much ballyhooed event. To get people to come into the Toyota booth, Executive Promotions Marketing Inc. president Paul Santoro supplied mini-basketball hoop-and-ball sets. Toyota reps scoured the floor for people who were interested in taking some shots on a five-foot version of a basketball backboard and net. If a trade show attendee made a shot, they won a mini-hoop – suitable for hanging on the back of an office door or over a trash can.



MONTANA



On February 16, Montana's capitol was flooded with 2,300 high school students, all part of an anti-meth march sponsored by Montana's Meth Project. With 55,000 signatures in hand from state residents in support of Montana's Meth Project, student

Helena H the capitol's st

Joslyn Murphy, who was in the event as a salesperson at Montana Marketing Inc. (*asi/275975*). She and other at the distributorship helped event organizers select various items to promote the group's message that day. They included placards, campaign buttons, an silicone wrist bands that said "Not even once," a phrase the group uses to send the message that trying meth even can be addictive.



NEBRASKA

In January, it wasn't enough to simply show up with bowling shoes in hand, ready to rack up strikes. Organizers of a two-day tournament at Valley Bowl Fun Center wanted participants to leave with much more than just their memories of well-deserved spares. They wanted them to leave with high quality polos, a different color for each of the five-member teams participating, says Penny Yekel, who works at Advertising Specialties Ink (*asi/113354*), a distributorship in Scottsbluff. The shirts were handed out to participants as they showed up for the event. "It's the first time we've ever done a tournament," Yekel says.



NEVADA

What concert would be complete without some promo products for sale? Pop rock band 3 Doors Down performed at the Green Valley Ranch Resort & Spa on April 3, and the giveaways and promotional items for sale were everywhere. Of course, the requisite concert T-shirt could be had for anywhere between \$15 and \$30. But, leave it to a new-age band to be offering new-age items. Concert-goers could immediately download the band's music to their iPods and MP3 players by visiting a highly-logoed wi-fi booth at the concert. And, for \$10, each concert-goer could leave with a logoed USB-drive pre-loaded with 3 Doors Down music and extra information about the band and upcoming tour dates.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Doug French would be lying if he said he wasn't a little put off when a long-time customer bumped his product for another that was almost half price. French, owner of Advantage Promotions LLC (*asi/109305*) in Hampton was sure he'd found the right product for this client's 5,000-person convention of its members. The Sticky Book, a padfolio from Prime Line (*asi/79530*) stocked with multi-colored sticky notes and other features at \$3 each, seemed like a bargain, French says. Until the client found a similar product for \$1.25 less online. That's when French lost the bid – at least temporarily. "When they arrived, the customer looked at them and said, 'These are awful,'" French says. Logos were printed crooked or smeared, and worse, the client was now way behind schedule with product delivery. French jumped in for the risk management company, not only reordering a better product, but offering to store their inferior products until the Manchester meeting was over. The notebooks, handed out to each of 5,000 internal members of the risk management company, were essential gifts so that they could take notes, make connections and otherwise network at the multi-day event.

The notebooks were essential gifts so that they could take notes.

NEW JERSEY

Want to attract hundreds of children and their parents to your new child care facility? Promotional products are a good start. At least that was the thinking behind The Jumping Jungle, a new child party facility in East Brunswick that opened in March. Besides offering party discounts and other enticements to draw families in, the facility's founders purchased 2,500 stadium cups, four-color business card magnets, color balloons and pens, all emblazoned with the site's monkey mascot and slogan, "Where Kids Can Monkey Around," says Helen Lenihan, president of Abilitees Unlimited Inc. (*asi/102270*). The products, smartly adorned with the company's Web site, were a robust offering on the opening day, but also a smart move, Lenihan says, to help not only launch the new facility but keep its logo in front of potential clients for some time to come.

NEW MEXICO

This year, Just Move It, a national organization that promotes physical activity for American Indians and Alaska natives, will sponsor one of dozens of nationwide walks for the prevention of diabetes. With nearly 30,000 participants so far, the organization is far short of its goal to get 1 million people walking throughout the country. But that small number is doing little to discourage event organizers, says Janet Hayes, one of the group's coordinators, based in Shiprock. Her event, in the northwest corner



of the state in Farmington, will likely see 30,000 people in May, all of whom will receive a T-shirt the day they walk, emblazoned with the group's logo on the front and walking course on the back. The May 13 event is expected to raise upwards of \$1,000 and will include walkers in strollers all the way up to seniors as old as 90. To motivate walkers to participate from nearby reservations as well as the general public, Hayes says, Just Move It has set up an incentive program where those who go to eight events receive additional products.

NORTH CAROLINA

It seems only appropriate that Murphy Brown, a behemoth pork and poultry producer based in Warsaw, hosts a BBQ cook-off once a year. That may be bad news for the company's



hogs, but great news for the 160 vendors who attend the annual Murphy Brown Vendor Expo every March, which offers information on the latest equipment used in the agricultural and meat processing industry as well as a chance to network with peers – and of course, a sampling of the region's best BBQ. Held in Kenansville, some 2,500 participants swarmed this year's expo on March 17.

To enhance the event, Murphy Brown asked JDS Advertising (asi/232368) to produce banners for the day and trophies for first- through fourth-place winners among the 15 teams vying in the BBQ cook-off. JDS also produced many of the pens, business cards and mugs that exhibitors doled out to visitors throughout the day. The trophy's "got a pig on it, of course," says Jeff Williamson, owner of JDS. "It makes sense in this area."

OHIO

In an Akron suburb, tucked in the northeast corner of Ohio, the Tallmadge Lutheran Church is doing its part to spread the word of God. They've found the perfect vehicle. On April 4, church reps doled out eco-friendly gift bags at the Tallmadge Community Expo. The church, aside from a place of worship, "is an outreach program and a ministry," offering services in places like hurricane-ravaged New Orleans, says Chris Tywon, a church member and owner of a Proforma (asi/300094) franchise in Tallmadge. "We needed something neat for the community so



we could share our message," Tywon says.

He suggested 1,000 tan polypropylene bags that the church eventually purchased for \$1.25 apiece. They're reinforced for multiple uses after the expo. That expo visitors may very well tote groceries in them at a later date means a wider audience than the hundreds at the Expo ... see the church's message – a bold, crimson script from Philippians 4:19 that reads, "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." Just below that on the 13 by 7 by 14-inch bags is the church's logo underscored by its Web site.

NORTH DAKOTA

It may seem counterintuitive, but farming isn't all about field labor. In fact, plenty of farming time is spent indoors, figuring out how to continue to make agriculture a profitable way of life. So, Women in Agriculture sponsored



a meeting on March 5 that included a series of seminars for female ranchers and farmers wanting to know how to market their products or communicate more effectively to potential clients. For the women who attended, conference organizers supplied them with 250 blue vinyl padfolios, each with a notepad on the inside, says Denise Larson, purchasing agent for All American Trophies Inc. (asi/117098), which supplied the promotional products for the group. On the front cover? The group's logo, which includes a "rustic looking fence," and the phrase "Strengthening Our Way of Life."

OKLAHOMA



Sometimes in business, one good turn begets another. That was the case recently with Tom Genay, a contractor and owner of The Floor Guy, a floor installation company in Tulsa. Genay had recently installed floors for Mickey Porter, vice president of Advertising Anything (asi/109959). So, when Genay needed promotional products for the Tulsa Remodel and Landscape Show this February, he made a beeline for Porter's shop. For the booth Genay purchased for the three-day event, he bought

and handed out business card holders and imprinted bags. And, to get the most marketing mileage for his money, Genay convinced 20 of his colleagues to help pay for the products. In return, he included their cards in the business card holders he handed out to attendees who stopped by his booth. How much each business owner paid (contributions ranged from \$50 to \$100) was up to them, with Genay footing the majority of the \$1,700 tab, which covered 250 business card holders. Says Genay, "It was my own little stimulus package."

OREGON

Engineers tend to be pretty smart people. However, many were a little taken aback when they entered the Chart House to find the lights dimmed and, well, everything else was lit up. Each place setting had a menu lit up with a custom laser pointer with a magnetic base and clip. Light boxes spotlighted featured guests. Even the centerpieces on the table were fiber optic. This was the scene for ESI's "Light Up With Innovation" dinner, which honored engineers for their latest patents, many of which revolved around the innovative use of lasers.



RHODE ISLAND

For those visiting Narragansett, it is quite a sight. Ship owners pull alongside the shore so a local priest or bishop can bless their vessel. The "Blessing of the Fleet" takes place the last full weekend of each July. Each year up to 30,000 people come to this waterfront New England town to eat, participate in a marathon and, of course, get their ships blessed. Awards are given out for best looking boat, best lobster boat and so on. For the more than 3,300 participants of the road race, who run, walk or roll in a wheelchair, the Narragansett Accessories Co. (*asi/279857*) created commemorative shirts and hats. President Gene Willis, who creates the shirts on behalf of the local Lions Club, says all proceeds from the event are given to charity.



SOUTH CAROLINA



The Buddy Walk was created in 1995 to promote acceptance and inclusion of people with Down Syndrome. For this year's event, which is put on by the National Down Syndrome Society, a little more than 1,000 people turned out to walk at Roberto Hernandez Stadium. They were presented with shirts, hats, stickers, magnets and pens commemorating the day and their effort. Jim Hanna Sports (*asi/219555*) provided all of the premium items free of charge. Owner Jim Hanna says it's not only a good thing to donate "anything they needed to promote the cause," but it's also good for business. "They get to maximize their fund-raising dollars. And, our products are passed onto other people. We've gotten business because of it."



SOUTH DAKOTA

During the first week of every month, a modest awards ceremony takes place among the sanitation workers in South Dakota. Those who avoided an accident for the month receive an award honoring their cautiousness. Indeed, Ad-Star Sales (*asi/108397*) can honestly say it has helped make the state of South Dakota a little bit safer. Ad-Star created this safety program, which dangles monthly and yearly awards for avoiding any and all accidents. Drivers are gathered around at their respective depots and presented the award, which has ranged from small coolers to drinkware to a laser engraved crystal piece. The award ceremonies are working. "They've noticed they've had fewer accidents," says Craig Ullom, president of Ad-Star. The only problem: "We've done this 17 times. We're running out of things to give them."



TENNESSEE

For its prior annual holiday party, health care provider HCA had opted to give donations to charity on their employees' behalf. However, last year, it felt a need to return to basics and give them something they could touch and feel that would serve as a thank-you for their hard work. Yet, they still wanted to do something good. The solution: handing out 2,000 eco-friendly bags. Inside was a thank-you message from the CEO written on a seed bag. Each employee was handed the gift in their lobby by Bravo Marketing Group (*asi/145277*). "We presented ourselves as elves doing Santa's work," says proprietor Barbara Rhodes. "It was a thrill to see not only the production, but the fulfillment. The response was overwhelming."



UTAH

Utah Valley University recently had two things to celebrate. First off, it had officially transitioned to university status. Secondly, it was opening its "green" library. The \$8 million five-story building was the first in Utah to meet the state's new energy efficiency and design standards. The V.I.P.s among the 1,000 on hand to celebrate its opening received a green-themed gift bag including a writing journal produced from recycled materials. However, Signature Promotions Inc. (*asi/326614*) really shined when the organizers realized that everyone was going to be staring straight into the sun during the ceremony. At the last minute Signature Promotions created 1,000 visors. "They called in a panic," says president Sue Robinson. "We went with visors because they were cheap and we did them fast!"



VERMONT

The organizer for this year's Gift-of-Life Marathon in Rutland, issued a challenge to its citizens: "Beat Boston." And they did. Residents donated 773 pints of blood during the holiday blood drive. One of the organizers, electric company Central Vermont Public Service, donated signs and banners spurring participants on during the event. They were created by Winning Image Graphix (*asi/361981*). Winning Image's Kim Keith says her company did the project free of charge because the electric company "is a really good customer of ours." Apparently, she wasn't alone as the blood drive broke the prior New England record by one pint.



VIRGINIA

Living 90 years is an accomplishment in and of itself. That's why when Pat reached this milestone this year, her family decided to have a massive birthday bash. Four generations of her family and close friends got together to celebrate, including her niece who had been struggling with cancer. Pat's niece hadn't left the house for weeks because of health issues but insisted upon being at her aunt's party. Because Pat loves gardening, everyone who attended received a "Johnny Jump Up Mini Planter." Nearly five dozen people received the plants "which they could grow so they'd always be reminded of her," says Andrea Savitch, owner of Unique Events (*asi/348430*). Savitch says a business associate tapped her for the party because "he had no clue how to do it and said 'Would you please help?'" She did, and Pat had a birthday that she, and her guests, would never forget, thanks in part to her party favor.



WASHINGTON

Those non-dog sledding fans of the world, may not know about the Iditarod. The race runs 1,150 miles from Anchorage to Nome, AK. The terrain is some of the toughest that mother nature can dish out. Held in March, temperatures are well below zero. Seems like as good a time as any for a nip of bourbon at bars and Iditarod-themed events from Washington to Alaska. That's why Jack Daniel's is among many of the event's sponsors. Those among the up to 100 teams competing as well as the many spectators received branded Jack Daniel's shirts, hats, jackets and shot glasses. "We did several events the weekend of the race including a pub crawl," says Joan M. Huisinga, president of Heart Advertising Corp. (*asi/222460*), who attended the race herself in 2006. "It's a heavy duty, once-in-a-lifetime experience." Although fur coats were just as much in vogue as the Jack Daniel's shirts, "up there, fur is a necessary thing, not a fashion thing."

WISCONSIN

The first month of the Major League Baseball season will be a boon for fans of the Milwaukee Brewers. The Brewers will be giving away a variety of items throughout April and the beginning of May this year. The gifts start on Opening Day, with a magnetic schedule handed out to all fans in attendance. That's followed up with a very timely giveaway for kids on Easter Sunday: an easter bunny webkinz. The team will also be handing out player trading cards, a pin for a charity drive, cooler bags, and a Ryan Braun bobblehead – yes, they do need to promote their star players, after all.

WEST VIRGINIA

Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College wanted to recognize Black History Month. So it created "Harmony Week." Located in a rural, coal-mining region, the school wants to ensure it delivers a message of diversity among all of its existing students, as well as recruits. Earlier this year, Rev. Samuel "Billy" Kyles, who is the only living person to have spent the last hour with Dr. Martin Luther King, was the guest speaker. Attendees received commemorative T-shirts from Chapman Printing Inc. (*asi/160686*). "The students love them," says product manager Lisa Ward. "The school also uses them year-round for recruiting." This even includes targeting very young future collegians, as the school gives out branded Harmony Week coloring books and crayons as well.



WYOMING

In early April, the home of cardboard box racing could be found in Alta. The 9th Annual Spring Cardboard Box Derby was held at the Grand Targhee Resort on April 11, and sponsors in attendance were happy to take attention away from the cardboard box racers – at least for a little while – with some giveaways. While T-shirts, scarves, and hoodies were in abundance at the event, sponsors also got creative with items. A GPS system was being handed out by one sponsor and a foldable resort map was given to all attendees so they could find their way around the grounds during the event. Of course, the most creative logos were those that could be found on the man-made cardboard boxes racing down the ski hills.



Corbin Sapp, Ivars Sportswear Inc.
All-time high sales volume:
\$1.4 million



Libby DuBay, Jack Nadel Int'l.
All-time high sales volume:
\$1.35 million



Cindy Jorgenson, Brown & Bigelow
All-time high sales volume:
\$1.65 million



Kevin J. Scharnek, 14 West LLC
All-time high sales volume:
over \$5 million



Tony Pupo, Logogram Inc.
All-time high sales volume:
\$1.7 million



TIPS FROM SALES SUPERSTARS

Whether you're looking to hone your selling skills or just remind yourself of opportunities you may not have considered lately, check out these sales pointers from some of the best in the industry.

BY JEN ZORGER

How do you turn a request for 500 stick pens into a \$50,000 order? ▲ "Ask questions," says million-dollar-plus seller Cindy Jorgenson, interaction specialist for Brown & Bigelow (*asi/148500*). "Your clients don't know everything you can do for them, so unless you probe and get more detail, neither of you will know just how much potential business you can do together." ▲ Yes, Jorgenson really did transform a simple pen order into a huge program by probing and listening to her client. "Why? How? Where? What? Asking these questions taught me the pens were supplies for a 12-city training session with customers," she says. "By the time we were done, I had a \$50,000 order of custom three-ring binders, speakers' gifts, meeting signage, name badges, attendees' gifts, follow-up survey gifts, and, of course, the 500 stick pens."

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While she and other top sellers we interviewed cautioned that no single tip can launch you to the top of the sales charts ("I am a firm believer in the basics – offering spec samples, asking for referrals, and penetrating the account from the mail room to president's office," Jorgenson says), they share some of their best tricks of the trade here.

The Few vs. Many

"I think the key thing to anybody's success is really aligning yourself and becoming true to a group of suppliers in all categories," says Corbin Sapp, CEO of Ivars Sportswear Inc. (*asi/232263*), which did almost \$2 million in sales last year. "If you haven't aligned yourself with suppliers, then you're never going to reach the potential you could, because there are going to be situations where you need help – you need something rushed, you need a spec sample, you need a price – because you know you're competing."

Sapp says that too many salespeople fall into a habit of using whatever supplier has a special offer going on in any given week. That may help you get your client a good price that time, but it can come back to haunt you when you need a favor and you haven't established relationships with any of your suppliers. Ivars Sportswear, on the other hand, does most of their business with a very select group. "We



"If you haven't aligned yourself with suppliers, then you're never going to reach the potential you could."

– Corbin Sapp,
Ivars Sportswear Inc.
(*asi/232263*)

**ALL-TIME HIGH SALES VOLUME:
\$1.4 MILLION**

"The art of the personal relationship is still the superglue that keeps you from losing the order because they found it for a nickel less online or in an e-mail from someone else."

– Libby DuBay, Jack Nadel Int'l. (*asi/279600*)

ALL-TIME HIGH SALES VOLUME: \$1.35 MILLION

could have ordered from 75 different clothing suppliers last year," Sapp says, "but I can tell you we probably didn't order clothing from more than 15. And of the 15, probably four made up 80% of the business."

This loyalty ensures they have supplier partners who are willing to help when it really counts. "Say we're using a supplier, and we do \$150,000 a year with them," Sapp says. "If I come to them with a 1,500-piece T-shirt order and I say, 'You've got to give me x' – if they know there's history there – that I'm going to order from them during the course of the year, and that I don't beat them up on every price – then guess what they're going to do? They're going to help me with that."

Face Time vs. MySpace Time

Quality vs. quantity was a recurring theme as we talked to million-dollar sellers, whether the topic was taking the time to understand a client's business and industry, following up frequently, or spending face time with them.

While technology like e-mail, cell phones and texting makes frequent contact easy, Libby DuBay, senior account manager at Jack Nadel Int'l. (*asi/279600*), says there's nothing like face-to-face contact to seal relationships. "The art of the personal relationship is still the superglue that keeps you from losing the order because they found it for a nickel less online or in an e-mail from someone else," she says. "Try to deliver the samples yourself, drop off bagels, take them to lunch or attend their event. You are your business's best asset, not just your pricing."

DuBay recommends getting involved with a project long before an order is placed by attending the client's internal brainstorming sessions. "Your resources and creativity far exceed what they can draw on,"

she says. "You can add new product ideas to their sessions that they didn't even realize existed. They actually get excited with fresh ideas, and it spontaneously ignites even bigger ideas from them."

Naturally, they'll then turn to you to make the ideas happen.

DuBay also points out that your role doesn't have to end when you deliver the product. "If they are having an annual event, be there, too," she says. "Let your client know you want to learn about the event, the recipients, even see the results in order to better help them in their planning next year."

You might even volunteer to help at the event, securing yourself as an integral part of it for years to

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E-mail, cell phones and texting makes frequent contact easy, but there's nothing like face-to-face contact to seal relationships.



Recession-Proof Sales

Our million-dollar sellers offered these suggestions to keep your sales steady:

1. WORK HARDER.

"The only way I know to maintain revenue and grow revenue in this economy is work harder," says Kevin J. Scharnek, president of 14 West LLC (*asi/197092*). Fortunately, he feels that we're in an industry where results are directly coordinated to effort. "Companies that grow in this marketplace are not getting lucky; they're working harder than others," he says.

Scharnek has been reminding his team to get in front of clients as much as they can, to be as proactive as possible, and to follow up on everything. "When we're in a strong economy, if you send out 10 quotes, maybe you follow up on four or five," he says. "But now you've got to follow up on 10."

2. HELP CLIENTS CHOOSE THE RIGHT CUTBACKS.

If clients face reduced marketing budgets, help them choose what to cut wisely. "I am advising my clients to pull budget money from employee perks," says Cindy Jorgenson, MAS, interaction specialist at Brown & Bigelow (*asi/148500*). "Honestly, in today's economy, people are lucky to have a job and a regular paycheck – so cut out some of the employee perks and use that money towards growing sales, marketing, client communications, etc."

Is this likely to cause bad feelings among employees? Not in this economic climate, especially if the employer explains the money will be used in ways that help secure jobs. "If you are honest with employees, they understand," Jorgenson says. "They are usually happy to

give up the quarterly lunch to have job stability."

3. FOLLOW UP ON LOST ORDERS.

Corbin Sapp, CEO of Ivars Sportswear Inc. (*asi/232263*), says that even on lost orders, follow-up is essential. Lately, he's seen competitors win orders away from his company by substituting a lower-quality product at a cheaper price, because the client doesn't always realize they're not



"Companies that grow in this marketplace are not getting lucky; they're working harder than others."

– Kevin J Scharnek, 14 West LLC, (*asi/197092*)

comparing apples to apples.

In those situations, he finds out what product the client bought and tells them what quote he would have given them for it. Because Ivars has lots of buying power and solid supplier relationships, they often beat the competitor's price.

"In the most recent case, the gentleman said, 'Well, that's my loss. I should have come back to you, because you could have saved me about \$1,500 on a \$9,000 order,'" Sapp says. That's a lesson that a straying customer isn't likely to forget.

4. BE THERE FOR DOWN-AND-OUT CLIENTS.

Neither success nor failure

is permanent, so it's important to keep in touch with clients who have fallen on hard times. "Take a client whose budget is frozen to lunch, even when they are not buying," says Libby DuBay, senior account manager at Jack Nadel Int'l. (*asi/279600*). "If they get laid off, offer to be a reference when they are job hunting."

When times get better, these clients will remember your kindness.

For those whose promotional budgets have been reduced, DuBay recommends finding closeouts and clearance items. "Do not lower your margin on stock items or you will be stuck with that pricing structure when the economy returns," she adds.

5. THINK POSITIVE.

The sales team at Logogram Inc. (*asi/255247*) has sworn off political talk shows and news commentary programs. "The last thing we need when trying to sell is more negative news," says president/CEO Tony Pupo. "As sales professionals, we already know how tough business is without anyone in the media having to tell us."

The team also emphasizes the positive when talking to clients and prospects. "Rather than focusing on the negative – such as what they are not buying – we instead focus on their plans to stay in front of their clients and attract new prospects," Pupo says. "This refocus inspires our customers to share what they are doing – and many times what their strategic plans are for when the market turns around. You would be surprised how many times we have uncovered otherwise hidden opportunities by having these conversations."



"Most people want to do as little as possible to complete the task. This includes your clients. Do the work and make it easy on them."

– Cindy Jorgenson, Brown & Bigelow (*asi/148500*)

ALL-TIME HIGH SALES VOLUME: \$1.65 MILLION

come. "Being there also gives you an insider opportunity to network with their clients or other event sponsors who see your successful work first-hand – the best type of referral," DuBay adds.

Easy Breezy Does It

When a client ordered 300 convention bags, along with pens, notepads, snack packs, lanyards, badges and fleece jackets for attendee gifts at a conference, the staff at Brown & Bigelow stuffed all of the merchandise into the bags and attached the name badges to the outside.

The team even matched jacket sizes to the correct recipients – and even when you don't have information for individual recipients, Jorgenson recommends organizing wearables as much as you can. "Separate the men's and ladies'; then box them by size for easy distribution," she says. "Your client doesn't want to dig through boxes trying to find the proper size shirt. It's very little extra effort on your end, but a huge time- and headache-saver for your client."

"Let's face it," Jorgenson says, "most people want to do as little as possible to complete the task. This includes your clients. Do the work and make it easy on them. If you do, you'll stand out from your competitors and earn the loyalty of your clients."

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“If you would call any one of my employees right now and ask them what is one thing that I push continuously, it’s getting tasks written in Outlook so we remember to follow up with a client or even a supplier.”

– Kevin J. Scharnek, 14 West LLC (*asi/197092*)

ALL-TIME HIGH SALES VOLUME: OVER \$5 MILLION

Keep Trying

Rejection comes in many forms. Your prospect may say they don’t have time to talk, that they’re happy with their current vendor or simply that they’re not interested. Or you may get no response at all.

“It takes, on average, seven of those before you get a meeting with a potential client,” says Kevin J. Scharnek, president of 14 West LLC (*asi/197092*). “And, on average, 80% of salespeople stop calling after the second ‘no.’”

As an example of how following up until it hurts can pay off, he tells the story of a prospect he was referred to through his accountant. The company was a start-up but had a significant budget tagged for marketing. “I was introduced to the CEO,” he says. “It took probably four or five phone calls before I was able to sit down with her over a cup of coffee. We had a great conversation, and I knew there were going to be opportunities down the road. But – I’m not exaggerating – I made probably five or six or seven more phone calls. She never called me back once.”

His luck finally changed when he happened to call the same morning she was meeting with an agency she’d hired to develop her marketing strategy. “She said to her agency, ‘I know promotional products are going to be a big part of our platform. Can you guys do me a favor? This guy has been all over me. I haven’t ever returned a phone call, but I’d like to give him an opportunity.’ And we won the business,” Scharnek says.

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asi/49675

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“Rather than focusing on the negative – i.e., what they are not buying – we instead focus on their plans to stay in front of their clients and attract new prospects. You would be surprised how many times we have uncovered otherwise hidden opportunities by having these conversations.”

– Tony Pupo, Logogram Inc. (*asi/255247*)

ALL-TIME HIGH SALES VOLUME: \$1.7 MILLION

As far as prompting yourself to stay in touch frequently, there are various customer-relationship management (CRM) programs you can use, but Scharnek swears by Outlook. “If you would call any one of my employees right now and ask them what is one thing that I push continuously, it’s getting tasks written in Outlook so we remember to follow up with a client or even a supplier,” he says.

Walk the Walk

You’ve probably heard the saying, “Never trust a skinny cook.” Well, why would anyone trust an ad specialty pro who doesn’t use the medium extensively in their own marketing?

“Our marketing plans incorporate a healthy mix of self-promo items, so we are leading by example,” says Tony Pupo, president/CEO of Logogram Inc. (*asi/255247*), a company with annual sales exceeding \$5 million.

There are plenty of places where you can find creative examples of self-promos to emulate. Read case histories in *Advantages* and our sister magazines. Check advertising blogs to keep up with the coolest campaigns out there. And look at advertising award winner lists to see which promotions grabbed the most attention.

Most important, look at the glass as half full. “We always recommend to our customers that when the market tightens, they must continue to spend to attract new business and stay closer to their customers,” Pupo says. “So, we practice what we preach. We are continuing with our 2009 marketing plans to further build relationships with our key customer base while also substantially increasing cold calls and meetings with future customers.” ▲

Jen Zorger is senior associate editor of Advantages.



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