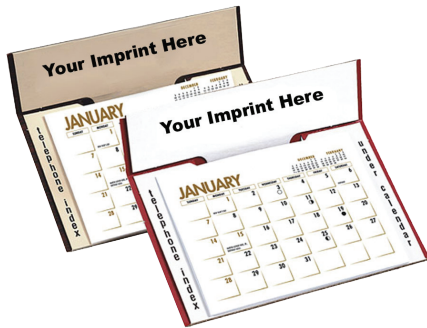


ADVERTISING

Nice for Them, Good for You

Promotional products are a cost-effective strategy for boosting repeat business and shop referrals.



⤵ **CATCHY CALENDARS:** Whether hanging on a refrigerator, stuck on a dashboard, or tucked into a purse, calendars offer a daily reminder of your business. Most calendars cost between \$1 and \$4.



» **HANDY NOTE CUBE:** In an office or kitchen, a note cube makes your name visible to everyone who enters the room. They range from about \$4 to \$6.



« **CONVENIENT CALCULATORS:** Whether used to calculate gas mileage or a household budget, a calculator is the perfect giveaway for the fiscally minded. Most cost about \$1 to \$6.



⤵ **USEFUL KEYCHAINS:** Keychains remind customers of your shop everytime they start their cars. They run about \$.50 to \$3.



⤵ **PRACTICAL PENS:** Keep a stash of pens by your cash register. Customers will take one on the way out the door—and see your name whenever they use it. Customized pens cost as little as \$.33 each.

“We live in a society where people like to get things,” Joe Dargavage philosophizes. And if those things are free, well, that’s even better. “People will drive 10 miles to get something for free. That’s human nature,” laughs the vice president of Wreck-A-Mended Collision Center in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

It turns out that aspect of human nature has been good for Dargavage’s shop. The company’s marketing plan calls for promotional products—like freebie pens and key chains—to be given to every customer. The strategy works wonders, he says, noting that it helps retain current customers while boosting the shop’s referral business. “We have always been a firm believer in promotional products,” he says. “It’s all about driving business to your body shop.”

A DIRECT HIT

A recent study from the Advertising Specialty Institute found that promotional products perform more strongly than TV and radio as a cost-effective advertising medium. That may sound surprising, but Bob Gray, president of Grayt Idea Inc., in El Segundo, Calif., says it’s right on the mark. “Let’s say you spend \$10,000 for a radio campaign, and at any given moment, the radio is turned on or off, or they’re listening to any other of the 5,000 stations but yours,” he says. “It’s not a direct hit. But, let’s say you invest \$10,000 in a promotional product and give one to every customer who walks through your door—it becomes an easy source of referral for business. They’ll carry that pen for the next two or three years.”

And they’ll remember you. “[We] recently released a new study that indicates that over 80 percent of recipients who receive a promotional product remember the brand on the item,” says Timothy Andrews, president and chief executive officer of the Advertising Specialty Institute. “That’s powerful advertising and high recall for your marketing investment.”

Promotional products also work well because they’re a tangible item your customer can see and feel, Gray says. “You’re literally putting it in the hands of your customers. They can feel it and touch it and know where it came from.” He gives an analogy: “I call promotional products ‘desk-front property.’ Take a little note cube, for example. That’s like putting a condo on the

beach. It's right in front of your face. Boom! It's a direct hit."

IDEAS THAT WORK

Having your customer's car in your possession for a few days gives you ample opportunity to take advantage of promotional products. "There's no reason why a guy who drives out of a shop shouldn't get a promotional product," Gray says.

Key chains, Dargavage says, work great as a promo at his shop. "In terms of a customer coming into our shop, we put our key chain on their key chain. It's a nicer key chain so they'll keep it and not throw it away," he says. "Whenever they see our name, it gives them a simple little reminder."

At Wreck-A-Mended, customers also receive a few other promotional products before driving away. "We [leave] them a notepad and pen in their car," Dargavage says. The shop also distributes hats and T-shirts at charity events and local Little League games.

This year, the shop is trying a new promotional product: referral coupons. "If any of our customers or

"You want to be cost effective, and you want to use [promos] that actually work to drive in business."

—JOE DARGAVAGE, VICE PRESIDENT, WRECK-A-MENDED COLLISION CENTER

employees refers a friend or family member, they get a \$100 cash referral bonus," Dargavage says. "We'll give it to anyone in the community just for sending us business, whether the job is \$100 or \$10,000. There is not a better form of new business than referral business." The reminder "Don't forget your family and friend referral fee" is

included on the notepad left in every customer's car.

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—BOB GRAY, PRESIDENT, GRAYT IDEA INC.

DESTINATION: HOUSE

Getting your promotional product inside the customer's home is a goldmine. Why? They'll see it every day.

"If you can make it into the house, that's unbelievable," Gray says. He explains that little things that last—a refrigerator magnet or a potholder with your shop's name on it—work great.

Anything designed for your customer's children is also invaluable in terms of having them remember you. Gray suggests a stuffed animal wearing a T-shirt with your shop's name on it. He also recommends nightlights. "It's an electric sign in their house for the next five years."

Denise Piña, co-owner of Brea Auto Body in Brea, Calif., enjoys giving out promotional products to children. "When you give a fun toy to people with kids they keep it around longer," she says. "It's a nice reminder that we are here for them when they need us."

CONSIDER YOUR INVESTMENT

Incorporating promotional products into your advertising strategy can be done on a budget. It's all about how much you want to invest, Gray says. "What would it take for you to recoup a 50-cent investment? A \$2 investment? Let's say you give a guy a nice big pen for 50 cents, and you get one job out of it that's \$2,200. Wouldn't you spend 50 cents to get that \$2,200?"

Most important, consider the usefulness of the product. "About 81 percent of recipients keep an item because they consider it to be useful," Andrews says.

Piña's shop gives calendars, calculators and local NBA and NFL game schedules with their business name and contact info on it. The usefulness of the promo item is paramount, she says. "Who wants something you're not going to use?" she asks.

Dargavage agrees. "You want to be cost effective, and you want to use things that actually work to drive in business. Otherwise, don't use it. It's not about giving them the pen; it's about them returning to your shop."

CAN'T BEAT OPPORTUNITY

Piña says the value of promotional products is that they stick around. "They keep a presence of mind," she says. Someone who has been in a car accident typically needs to quickly decide where to have their car repaired. You want to be the first place that comes to mind. "When customers are in that situation," Piña says, promotional products are "nice for them and good for you." —Elyse Lucas

TRACKING YOUR INVESTMENT

Keeping tabs on your return on investment from promotional products is easily done, says Timothy Andrews, president and chief executive officer of the Advertising Specialty Institute. "If a shop gives away car air fresheners or interior spray fragrances with a special Web site on it that customers can visit for a monthly prize drawing, you can track how many people visit that unique Web site."

You know the promotional product is driving people to the site because that item is the only marketing vehicle that the Web site has on it, he says. "While they're online, include a link for them to click to send your contest Web site to their friends and expand your referral base."