



By G.A. "Andy" Marken

**About the Author**

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# Specialty Advertising

## The Medium Carries the Message

*Pens and poly bags are popular items, but other specialty items are capturing customers' attention.*

Specialty advertising has long been on the low end of the marketing totem pole. In many instances, it has been used for only two purposes: handouts for trade shows and handouts for salespeople. Therefore, it is no surprise that the "hottest" selling specialty items are poly bags and pens. In recent years, however, more sophisticated marketers have used specialty items as an integral part of their marketing and communications efforts.

### A Success

Remember Apple Computer's famed 1984 ad? While the ad ran only once during the Super Bowl game, viewers across the country and around the world saw Apple's colorful logo throughout the game. Apple had purchased stadium cushions, which were placed on the bleachers. Viewers were not only barraged with the Apple logo, but the cushions became prized collector's items.

No, this was not "lucky" specialty advertising campaigns. It was part of a carefully planned, overall program.

### Establish Objectives

Before you open your first specialty catalog or order your first pen, do as you would with any part of your marketing and communications program. Determine the purpose of the campaign and exactly what results you want to achieve. Be more specific than simply saying that you want to get your name in front of people or that you want to increase sales.

Sales promotion objectives should be designed to motivate your salespeople, distributors and dealers as well as to aid in merchandising and increase sales. The following list will help you develop specific specialty objectives for your company and your products.

- Introduce new products.
- Increase the number of sales calls.
- Generate more excitement.
- Keep the company foremost in the

minds of reps so that they make more calls for you.

- Capture distributor interest and enthusiasm and help them sell.
- Place deals with retailers.
- Introduce new marketing concepts to the trade.
- Stimulate large-quantity buying.
- Generate new retail accounts and larger sales.
- Promote in-store displays.
- Boost sales during slow selling periods.
- Increase dollar sales.
- Accomplish broad-line selling.
- Stimulate multiple sales.
- Build name recognition.
- Build brand franchise.

Once you have established your objectives, you are ready to look at creative specialty advertising alternatives that will support and help you achieve those objectives.

### Enhancing Other Marketing Efforts

An increasing number of companies are using specialty advertising items in conjunction with other marketing/communications efforts.

For example, one firm used specialty items in conjunction with a sales contest. The company conducted two "racing to victory" sales contests last year, with prizes ranging from plaques to television sets to golf club sets to trips to Hawaii. Since the company was asking for a strong push and commitment from the sales force, they developed a low-cost monthly newsletter that was sent to the homes of their salespeople. Included with the newsletter were inexpensive specialty items such as a running shoe key ring, running shoe money/key holder, specially imprinted towel, car compass key ring and similar items. The idea was to continually remind the salesperson's family what the individual was pushing so hard for and to enlist the complete household's cooperation and support.

In the second instance, the software firm had to stimulate the distributor's

sales force and dealers to more aggressively promote the company's products. Since the program was somewhat controlled (a target audience of 1,500 individuals/organizations) and was to run for six months, it used slightly more expensive specialty items.

- A letter announcing a better deal from XYZ, accompanied by a deck of cards promoting the company and individual products.
- A letter announcing better discount and commission programs, which the recipient could easily determine by using the enclosed credit card-sized solar calculator.
- A letter announcing a more organized way to help them sell more software, which also included a personal organizer.
- A letter announcing a program that put money in their pockets, along with quantities of pens filled with shredded money. The pens could be used to write orders and to give to others who signed up for the company's program.

Similar items were used throughout the year to keep the company and its products in front of key people in the firm's distribution network. The result was an increase in sales outlets and increased sales.

For a number of years at Boole & Babbage's user group meetings, attendees received Laser Craft gift items. Each year, an attendee would receive a different item with the user group logo and date etched in dark oak. These items included desk calendar holders, paper clip holders, pen sets, rulers, coaster sets and so on. Over a period of years, a user group attendee (and customer) could collect a complete, matching set.

### Taking a Creative Approach

According to Mike Glantz, of Midland Advertising in San Jose, Calif., firms

in the industry have become more creative in the types of specialty items they use in their programs and the number of programs they will carry out during a year.

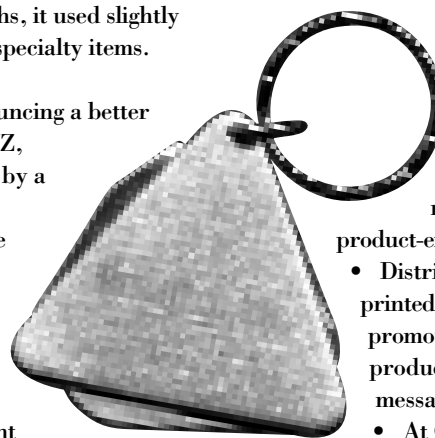
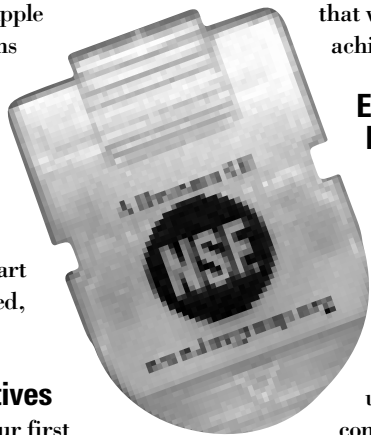
Take an aggressive software publishing firm, for example.

- At its user group meeting it passed out product-embazoned sweatshirts.
- Distributors received custom-printed Post-It note pads to promote the company, specific products and product messages.
- At COMDEX, they rationed out T-shirts with a new product's graphics and name printed on them. Every hour a predetermined number of T-shirts were given out. The company had lines of people waiting for their chance to get a T-shirt.
- At another COMDEX show, they rationed out canvas bags. Again, every hour, when the bags were handed out, people were waiting in line to get one.

For years, Tandem Computers has been giving customers and users who attend their training and educational seminars two-handed coffee mugs to promote the company's name and products. While the imprinted design is changed periodically to reflect the latest marketing message, there is continuity in the medium.

According to Glantz, quality coffee cups have grown in popularity in recent years. Many organizations opt for ironstone coffee mugs with custom imprinting in platinum or gold leaf to denote prestige and quality.

At times, the company also will produce imprinted, ceramic coasters, which can be mailed to the cup owners as a means of saying thank you. Quality, leather portfolios and note pad folders have always been highly regarded by



both the organization presenting them as well as the recipients. Corporate executives visiting the company's headquarters, attendees at the sales seminars or individuals attending customer training programs often receive these highly utilitarian gifts. They are items that are not only useful at the time, but will be retained for a long time to come.

While pens of various shapes, sizes and qualities are still widely used by organizations, other "hot" items include pocket flashlights, the credit card-sized solar calculator and prepaid phone credit cards. These units have come down significantly in price, they have an adequate area for a company/product message and are seldom thrown away.

In the performance management software field, one of the most germane items seen in recent years is the stress card. By placing your thumb or finger on the proper area of the card, the color will change, telling you whether you are calm and relaxed or highly stressed. Firms can put their advertising message on the reverse side to tell the user how to reduce their stress with the firm's products.

For the past three to four years, *Computerworld* has been highly successful at trade shows with its button program. People make it a point to stop by the publication's booth to get the latest additions to the *Computerworld* button collection. The program has gained such a following that they now run contests, asking readers to submit their computer industry-oriented phrases for possible use on the "next generation" of buttons. The publisher reports that response to the most recent contest has been outstanding and very creative.

### Planning and Execution

As you can see, specialty advertising programs can go far beyond poly bags and pens. But to be successful, they must be carried out with a sound set of objectives in mind.

Just as a product or an ad has a life cycle, so do specialty advertisement campaigns. Most campaigns have a useful life of about three months, after which they should be retired and the second campaign should be brought in to rejuvenate the program.

Don't be myopic in the type of program you develop. Rather than looking at a specialty advertising item

and saying "this is what I want to have," take a long, hard look at your target audience. Profile who they are, their personal and professional interests, their "hot buttons" and the kind of image they will have of you and your products when they receive the specialty advertising item.

Keep in mind that the medium is the message. A poorly chosen medium can

send a message that you either do not care about the people you are giving the item to or that your company and your products are of poor quality. To

you, it may be simply a key ring, poly bag, pen or note pad folder, but to the recipient, it is a representation of your organization's image. **WQP**

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