



→ MERCHANDISING

Cheap products can damage your brand

This month PM asks, how important is promotional material in building a brand?

CEO of merchandising firm DKM, Dory Kordahi

At DKM, we provide brand platforms. Not just products, but ideas and concepts. We aim to add value, protect, extend and build your brand.

We view promotional objects as brand platforms as they carry your brand out to the market and continue to present your brand to your audience until the object is lost, destroyed or thrown out.

The idea of brand platforms is critical as the brand takes on the attributes of the item it is attached to. This is because brands are all about perception. If your company name is placed onto an object that exudes all the values so carefully invested into that brand, then the object (brand platform) will extend the value of that brand, re-enforcing its perception in the market.

There is a flip side—putting your brand on the cheapest product you can find can do a lot of damage, especially when you consider the promotional product may outlive the product you are actually selling.

Take beverages for example. A cocktail shaker, t-shirt, deck of cards or glass set might significantly outlast a bottle of wine, bourbon or liquor.

Ideally, if it is a true brand platform, the item will continue to re-enforce your brand image and promote future purchases. However, if the item has a low perceived value, or a low perceived fit with your brand, it will only serve to detract from your brand's value.

There are thousands of promotional and merchandise product ideas around the world, but what one idea is the best fit for your brand?

Making the right choice can have a significant impact on the success of your brand building exercise. Choosing a promotional product is not only about finding the right price, it is about finding the right idea.

Virgin marketing manager, Andrew Whittle

If well executed, using promotional materials is an effective marketing tool in building your brand and keeping it top of mind for both retail staff and customers. To ensure its effectiveness, you need to take into consideration the price, quality, useability/wearability and relevance of the item to both

the end user and your brand. Considering our target market it's important for Virgin Mobile to provide relevant and cool promotional materials.

I believe aligning your promotional material with your top line campaign not only improves the cut through of the item but strongly increases the desirability. When we ran our Five Cent campaign in September 04, we produced Five Cent branded t-shirts, trucker caps and dog tags. When the campaign really took off, we were fielding constant requests for more items both from stores and customers, some of whom offered to buy the items. Running out of promotional items ahead of schedule is a fantastic result.

Cheap promotional items are far more acceptable than poor quality promotional items, which can have a much longer impact on your brand and reputation.

Everyone has probably received a cheap promotional pen at some point. The pen writes fine at first then it stops or only works in

sporadic intervals. The issue here is most people won't throw it out straight away. They will keep it, putting it back on their desk to use again later. Each time they use the pen and it doesn't work properly, they curse your brand and your cheap promo pen. However you can find good quality cheap products and this quality issue is key.

T-Shirts have worked really well for Virgin Mobile. When we have integrated them with our last few campaigns we have seen demand outstrip supply every time.

We have also done a number of branded bags in the past and have recently produced one as a gift with purchase. We made this bag different from most other promotional items by only branding it subtly. The branding is so subtle you wouldn't know it was a Virgin Mobile bag unless you were right up close.

Our goal was to produce something people would use and like. Not something that shouted out where they got it from.

When we were focusing on sharing the Virgin to Virgin love we distributed branded heart-shaped chocolates and silk roses. The items were small, inexpensive and brought a smile to everyone's face. And yes I have done the odd promotional pen, I just prefer not to talk about it! **PM**



➤ Good promotional material is an essential tool for brand building.