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Establishing the value of promotions.

Dorry Kordahi looks at the role of promotional products in creating a brand platform.

We are all professional marketers... and so spend a lot of time thinking about value. What value do our prospective (and existing) clients perceive within our brands, products and services? Value is the single most important issue in the promotions business.

Typically, people want to buy a product that costs as little as possible, but is perceived to be 'high value' by their clients. 'Value' is talked about in terms of criteria such as weight (heavy things are not made of plastic) or usefulness (will people actually use the object?).

Weight and usefulness are two great reasons why the ubiquitous coffee cup often wins the day. It is made of nice heavy ceramics and is useful around the office.

The value discussion is often, however, only one-dimensional: "How much value will my prospect perceive in this gift?" A more important question is missed.

"How will this product impact on the value of my brand?"

In the value stakes, nothing is more important than the value proposition wrapped up in your brand. Does the product add value to your brand? Does it diminish the value in your brand? Does it change the perceived value of your brand?

What we can't do is lose sight of the real issue. Promotional products are brand platforms first and promotional gifts second. Let me put it a different way.

You are in charge of Happy Meals at McDonald's. Your marketing strategist tells you that you need to lift the number of 11-year-old

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boys into the stores. A promotional company offers you a great deal on two million action figures from the latest computer game – complete with chainsaw and meat axe accessories. Of course you are going to decline the offer. The promotional product would do a tremendous amount of damage to your brand. Many businesses, however, cut corners on their brand every day... albeit on a lesser scale.

Imagine for a moment that you work for a promotional product company. The phone rings. It's a junior marketing assistant. They have some budget left over for a conference and want a price on a giveaway. The event is in two weeks.

Their intention is to get three quotes and to then go with the cheapest. Question: in six months, what is the only physical object your delegates will have to remind them of your conference? The answer is the giveaway.

Do you want the only lasting memory of your event to be the cheapest t-shirt or coffee cup that money can buy?

By thinking differently about promotional products and approaching them as a strategic buy, you can come up with an item that is unique, that perfectly encapsulates your brand or your event, and is of real appeal and value to your target audience.

What you are buying is a platform for your brand, a brand platform. It is true that to some extent the promotional products industry has in the past helped perpetuate the common misperception that it was all about cheap coffee cups, cheap water bottles and cheap t-shirts.

But in a fast-paced digital world, the value of an item that can be held, that can persist over time and can be treasured, is becoming paramount. Promotional products are becoming recognised as a key strategic marketing tool.

Marketers are awake to the potential and so are promotional product agencies. Several are now offering a sophisticated level of service and input. If your preferred agency is still thinking about water bottles, try talking to some others.

Also important are suppliers who are increasingly aware of their role in designing and supplying high-value brand platforms, as opposed to simply shipping container loads of cheap product in from overseas.

I think of the promotional products business as the 'brand platform' business. You can deliver your customers some fantastic item that reflects your brand values perfectly, and that they will keep and treasure, or you could give them a coffee cup and plastic water bottle for the gym. No contest. **M**