

Prime location, views and dining add up to a hip destination

Promo POWER

How memorable,
practical products keep
the buzz alive {32}



BY KEITH LORIA





HERE'S PLENTY OF BUZZ SURROUNDING NEW JERSEY'S MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES EACH DAY, BUT ONCE THE MEETINGS AND EVENTS ARE OVER AND PEOPLE GO HOME, HOW DO YOU CONTINUE THAT BUZZ? THE ANSWER IS SOMETHING THAT MEETING PLANNERS HAVE KNOWN FOR YEARS—BY PROVIDING TANGIBLE PROMOTIONAL ITEMS AND GIFTS THAT WILL REMIND THE RECIPIENT OF AN EVENT (AND A COMPANY!) DAYS, WEEKS AND EVEN MONTHS AFTER IT ENDS.

Margo Smith, marketing copywriter with Promotions Now in Moorestown, notes there really is no substitute for how a tangible gift can affect an engagement with either a customer, an employee or a business associate.

"Businesses and event planners use a number of methods for promoting their endeavors, but they continue to include promotional products as a part of their typically multifaceted strategies because they understand this," she says. "Not only does a promotional gift serve as a permanent reminder of a particular event or brand, but it creates a positive experience associated with that brand and encourages a favorable image of it. For the cost of a promotional giveaway, that's a pretty great ROI."

Melissa Vigue is the senior director and driver of Peppercomm's experiential service offering. She has planned countless events incorporating promotional products in not only New Jersey, but also across the globe.

"Marketers, communicators and employers are looking to add value to meetings and events, and for ways to

extend the experience," she says. "Having something useful that attendees can take away and use ongoing reminds them of the experience, what they may have learned and the brands and people who were a part of the day."

Dan Stenchever, president of Proforma Garden State Graphics in Wanaque, has more than 30 years of promotional item experience, specializing in letting a company's imprinted logo make a lasting impression on promotional products such as tote bags, water bottles, magnets and key chains.

"Promotional products are still relevant because it can list the company's name, include important notes and future dates of events and can even show the advertisers and sponsors for an event," he says. "It's a trusted and somewhat expected way to get your name out there at an event."

Kerry Bannigan, event planner at Nolcha, who often holds events in Montclair, notes promotional items can be a cost-effective method to increase brand

recognition amongst your guests.

“This is especially true if you connect with your attendees and provide promotional items that they will use on-site and even more importantly, on-site post event,” she says. “Promotional items are a must for any meeting planner, and we make it a point to select items that people will want and use, such as branded pens and notepads, which increase brand recognition in the hands of attendees.”

Rochelle Moneta, president of LeRoe Promotional Marketing in Whitehouse Station, says there are some meeting organizers who don’t think much about the products and want to “cheap out” and just get something for a few dollars, but those that think like that are the ones who get a booth at a trade show and don’t have a plan in place.

“You have to think of a trade show as the pre-, day of and post-show,” she says. “Identify the target office and think of a creative way to get their attention. They need to give something that says who they are and that represents the brand.”

She also recommends having a large bag with your logo on it to give to people so everyone else at the trade show is walking around with your company’s bag and stuffing everything else inside.

RECENT TRENDS

Promotional product trends often mirror the current trends in retail. Right now, more and more people are interested in nontoxic, eco-friendly products that help them stay healthy on the go. To that effect, some of the most popular trends right now include reusable, recycled and BPA-free travel tumblers and water bottles with water filters, fruit infusers or blender balls for making healthy shakes.

“We’re also seeing a lot of stylized kitchen and bar products made from natural woods and metals—think copper Moscow mule mugs and bamboo or walnut wood cheese boards—as people move towards a preference for home-style, all-natural food and beverages,” Smith says. “This is especially true for food industry businesses who are seeing a boom in popularity with farm-to-table or locally sourced restaurants, artisan brands and family-owned craft breweries.”

Julie Levi, founder and CEO of Progressive Promotions, a 30-year-old promotional company from Englewood, is responsible for providing corporate gifts, premiums and awards to the corporate market and at trade shows. “Items range from Bluetooth speakers to snowboards, custom-made promotional products,

vending machines, juggling balls, plantable notebooks, almost anything” she says.

One unique item that millennials seem to love is 3-D virtual imaging, where a logo appears on a T-shirt and if you swipe your device to it, it appears 3-D. “Wearable technology is very hot right now,” Levi says. “Practical merchandise is also very important. We want things that are sustainable and useful and interactive in the workplace. Things that go on your desktop and things that are interactive with your computer.”

Kelly Shearer, CEO and chief marketing strategist for Corporate Pajamas Marketing Solutions, LLC

“WE’RE ALSO SEEING A LOT OF STYLIZED KITCHEN AND BAR PRODUCTS MADE FROM NATURAL WOODS AND METALS—THINK COPPER MOSCOW MULE MUGS AND BAMBOO OR WALNUT WOOD CHEESE BOARDS—AS PEOPLE MOVE TOWARDS A PREFERENCE FOR HOME-STYLE, ALL-NATURAL FOOD AND BEVERAGES.”

in Tabernacle, notes that in today’s competitive environment, visibility is key to customer retention, so the company works to come up with branding ideas, products and strategies to help a client get its name out there at meetings.

While padfolios used to be a staple at meetings, she finds that more companies are getting simpler notebooks and using the funds to spend on technology pieces now.

“Mostly the trend is to go with a technology gift—a power bank or a USB,” she says. “One of the hottest items at the last show we attended was a USB light, so you can work on a laptop and not disturb anyone else.”

Shearer shares that pens without a stylus are no longer in style and calculators have gone by the wayside.

It’s no surprise that tech products are hot right now, and Stenchever says that anything cell phone related is





THE PRODUCTS SHOULD BE USED FOR CREATING DIMENSIONAL MARKETING PIECES FOR A WARM CALL PROCESS, AS OPPOSED TO A COLD CALL.”

in vogue at meetings and conferences today. He lists items such as cell phone wallets, kickstands, stylus pens and lint cloths as being the most popular promotional giveaways in 2016. “When you’re talking about millennials, this is even more true,” he says. “Headphones are also popular with this group.”

Moneta agrees that tech accessories are effective. “Something like a screen cleaner is inexpensive, but everyone wants one because they never have one when needed,” she says. “It’s something that can drive a message because someone won’t get rid of it.”

One item that is losing steam lately is selfie sticks, which are losing favor because many places are forbidding them. Stenchever notes that a year ago, more than 30 percent of clients were interested in them, but today it’s dropped to miniscule numbers.

When it comes to popular items in 2016, Vigue has seen a shift from disposable and pedestrian (pens, pads and luggage tags) to reusable, sustainable and items that enhance the experience or are tied to wellness.

“Everyone is looking for a place to charge, especially at meetings and events. To that end, power

(battery) packs for smart devices are very popular; they are useful, reusable and offer ample space for branding or messaging,” she says. “Stainless water bottles continue to be a hot item and more recently branded healthy snacks. Apparel, as long as it is well made and not overtly branded, is also still a draw.”

Since Bannigan produces a lot of business-focused events, she still encourages clients to have branded pens and notepads, as these are used as a main part at some point in the events.

“If you do not supply them branded, the guest will use their own,” she says. “Stationery tends to be a staple promotional item for my events; however, you need to change with the trends. Although my events are business-focused, they are within the fashion, beauty and lifestyle sectors, and therefore are interacting with an on-trend demographic.”

That’s why with the boom of the digital interactive age, the company’s promotional items have grown with this.

“A few years ago it was sufficient and popular to receive a branded USB stick, but now clients receive

more return on their investment with phone covers,” Bannigan says. “Also with the growth and ease of business travel and/or people working remotely, travel-focused promotional items are well received: branded or cobranded with personalization option travel tags, iPad covers, etc.”

Smith says that most of her company’s customers have entirely different preferences when it comes to choosing a custom meeting or event gift, and it’s developed a vast and varied product selection in order to cater to each and every one of them.

“Some of our most commonly purchased business items include custom debossed padfolios, laser engraved gift pens, custom imprinted briefs and messenger bags, and various pieces from our wide selection of ceramic and travel mugs,” she says. “While these particular gifts have proven to be quite popular, it’s not uncommon for customers to opt for a tech product, such as a Bluetooth speaker or power bank, or a high-end desk accessory (i.e. a designer desk clock or crystal paper weight).”

For large-scale events where budgets often must be stretched, Promotions Now has accommodated orders for full-color mouse pads, customized USB drives, debossed journal/notebooks and even edible items, like custom printed chocolates and snack bags.

“The sky is the limit,” Smith says. “As far as product selection goes, if a customer can think it up, we can generally provide it.”

DECIDING WHAT’S RIGHT

With so many products to choose from, understating your clients’ needs and the audience it’s reaching out to is vital to a successful meeting planner. After all, you don’t want to offer products that are simply going to be thrown in the garbage or given away to the kids.

“You need to consider the audience and the function of the meeting,” Vigue says. “For example, at a recent company off-site where we focused on the importance of listening, we distributed branded headphones.”

Bannigan says the takeaway needs to be relevant and dependent on the attendees, and every meeting or conference is different.

“For example, a branded stress ball could be used for a business meeting or a branded mirror for a beauty show,” she says. “This is an effective alternative to a business card and something that will be used by the attendees post-event.”

At a recent body product preview event in New Jersey, where guests included beauty editors,

Bannigan decided to make the promotional items very industry-specific to the attendees.

“The goal was to connect with the editor beyond the event ... and in their homes, when they are doing their beauty/relaxing routines,” she says. “So we gave branded slippers, branded sleeping eye masks and mirrors. Branded robes were also on the list originally, but due to the time of year, we did not move forward with this as it was so hot out, but would have been an excellent addition at another seasonal event.”

APPEALING TO PLANNERS

While many promotional companies are extremely proud of their product selection and continue to expand upon it, there are usually other promotional product companies that can offer many of the same items, so the competition in getting meeting planners interested is fierce.

“We get planners interested on our particular products by making our company stand out, rather than the products themselves,” Smith says. “We do that by holding ourselves to the highest standard in customer service and by making good on our promise of excellence.”

Moneta says when considering what promotional products to offer at a particular event, it’s vital to remember what people are coming to the show for.

“It’s either to educate or generate leads and the promotional product has so much power to it when done correctly,” she says. “The products should be used for creating dimensional marketing pieces for a warm call process, as opposed to a cold call.”

FINAL THOUGHTS

Although they are unlikely to be taken home, don’t forget about branded napkins, cups and banners.

“These are a cost-effective ways to brand the room with useful items that each guest will use,” Bannigan says. “They will also appear in a lot of photos taken by guests as they interact with refreshments, so they will have staying power.”

Moneta says that if you’re going to give out a promotional item, a company should set up a plan and track it, so they know that it’s working. This is done easily today through apps.

“Promotional items work to build brand visibility and enhance marketing initiatives, you just have to be smart about what you offer and those you are offering to,” she says. “A promotional item says that you are appreciated, and people love to feel appreciated.”

CEI CONNECTED

**CORPORATE
PAJAMAS MARKETING
SOLUTIONS, LLC**
corporatepajamas.com
609.388.4817

**LEROE PROMOTIONAL
MARKETING**
leroe.com
908.236.0408

PEPPERCOMM
peppercomm.com
212.931.6100

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STATE GRAPHICS**
proformanij.com
862.200.5858

**PROGRESSIVE
PROMOTIONS**
progressivepromotions.com
201.945.0500

PROMOTIONS NOW
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856.727.5200