

Tried and True B2B Promotional Strategies - Give It Away

In today's economy, characterized by ultra-tight marketing budgets, the idea of giving something away to your customers or clients probably seems unrealistic -- if not heretical. But frequently, the best way to create broad awareness of a company and its capabilities is to showcase the organization by way of a contest, giveaway, or charitable initiative that promotes the enterprise's products or services, while at the same time positioning it as a business that cares about its customers, stakeholders and the community at large. This, in turn, creates a platform for communicating about your business's good deed to business and relevant trade media, which often results in non-paid media coverage.

Giving away a product or service can be as simple as holding a sweepstakes or as complex as creating a multi-faceted community program. The trick is to select an approach that is relevant to your business and the vertical markets in which it operates. Examples include:

- For a manufacturer that sells diagnostic products to automotive repair technicians, donating or lending equipment or expertise to an technician training school – then seeking coverage of the donation
- For a company that provides products with key safety features that benefit outdoor enthusiasts, developing a speaker's bureau that showcases how to use the products to enhance safety when hunting, camping or hiking. Each time a speaker is scheduled, a press release can be sent to local media.
- For a provider of wireless service plans with unlimited local calling, staging a calling marathon to demonstrate the “endless” feature of the plan – then inviting coverage of the event through local media, including radio remotes broadcast from the event.

Sometimes, the giveback can even be sleeves from the company's vest. For example, for a security services provider which served the education market, M. NICHOLS recommended utilizing a free trial incentive that was already a part of its sales arsenal. Under a program called “Safe Schools,” the company offered to equip a city school in key markets plagued by vandalism with free security service for a school year. In addition, the program included a free information campaign, created by M. NICHOLS, on how schools and parents can work together to maximize school security.

The campaign was introduced with a press conference that included local police, school and other city officials and received wide press coverage. This giveaway also opened the door for discussions on the merits of implementing the client's unique technology throughout the school district. And, the media exposure in one district helped to pave the way for gaining entrée to other school districts.

So is giving something away really that costly? Or can it be a pathway to ongoing free promotion of your business, attracting new customers, and building goodwill with the community?