

How To Get Customers To Buy More, Faster And More Often

Here Are Some Quick, Hands-On Promotional Strategies That Get Results

BY PHIL SASSO, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Q I attended a general marketing workshop last week. I expected to get a bunch of great ideas to use on my truck and start making more money. Instead, I've got a headache. The speaker talked about branding, merchandising, public relations and more stuff I don't remember, and couldn't figure out how to use in my business. I just want to do something to bump up sales next month. What do you suggest?

A Sounds like the workshop leader talked more about textbook marketing than real-world marketing. And, as you and I both know, mobile tool and equipment distribution is anything but textbook. It is very different from any other business — it's part salesman, part retailer, and part collections agent.

Since you were attending a marketing seminar, I'll assume you were looking for marketing ideas. Sales promotion sounds like it might fit the bill. Sales promotions are quick, short-term marketing programs intended to create an immediate boost in sales. A consumer marketer loves promotions because the results of a promotion are fairly easy to measure. If a program is successful, you can run it again and again (think McDonald's annual Monopoly promotion). If it falls flat, you know right away and can avoid it in the future.



Phil Sasso is president of Sasso Marketing Inc. (www.sassomarketing.com), a technical marketing agency specializing in tools and equipment. Subscribe to his free marketing tips at philsasso.com/blog.

Here are a couple creative promotional strategies I think adapt well for mobile distribution.

'Buy Now!'

A price promotion is a discount with a deadline. It's all about creating a sense of urgency — it's the old "call before midnight tonight" tactic. Nobody likes to miss out on a good deal, so if they really want that bright shiny tool, they'll do all they can to buy it before the offer expires.



Coupons are perhaps the most common consumer price promotion. They are a great way to draw sales from both new and existing customers.

Think of your monthly flyer as one big coupon. The key to success is to get them into the hands of both current customers and prospects. And be sure to remind them again and again that those deals end at the end of the month.

Sale-ing

Another price promotion tactic is holding a sale. We don't use the word "sale" in mobile distribution, instead we say "special." So, imagine you want to move an excess inventory of torque wrenches this month. One way to do it is to put a sign up in your truck that says "Model

XYZ Torque Wrench. Special \$199.99 — while supplies last." The good price and the short supply should serve to move product off the truck and cash into your pocket.

The key to many successful promotions is to make them fun. One fun way I heard of to promote your clearance items is to create a "Garage Sale" or "Yard Sale." It's a fun, easy, ongoing promotion you can run year-round. Simply get a remnant of carpet (preferably green) and line a section

of shelf with it. Put up a "Yard Sale" sign and rotate in your clearance items. You'll be surprised how many guys will rifle through these items looking for deals.

Be aware that price promotion will mean discounting. That money has to come from somewhere. It's fine if you're getting a discount on items from your flag or

WD, or if you need to quickly dump overstock to free up cash. But any other discounting means you're giving away part of your margin — so use it with discretion.

Precious premiums

Remember as a kid begging mom for a box of cereal for the prize inside? Or collecting boxtops for a super-duper-decoder-ring? That's the basic idea behind premiums: people love to get free and/or exclusive stuff.

There are several ways you can use a premium to reward your customers. Maybe you want to sell more creepers and creeper seats. Rather than discount the price, you can throw in a hat, shirt or some other giveaway to stimulate December sales. The shirt with your

SALES Q & A

flag's logo on it may cost you \$9, but to the customer it may seem to be worth much more.

I know what you're thinking: who really wants another t-shirt? Don't underestimate the power of a free t-shirt. A former marketer for a tool manufacturer told me that years ago when they repackaged a boring old product with a t-shirt, their product sales spiked. They sold what they normally sold in two years in about six months!

"THE KEY TO MANY SUCCESSFUL PROMOTIONS IS TO MAKE THEM FUN."

Giving to get

You can also use a premium to stimulate collections. Try a "double your payment" promotion one week. Just pick an inexpensive but interesting giveaway. If your customer doubles his payment that week, they get a prize and you increase your cash in hand. This isn't a contest with only one winner. It's a giveaway where everyone can be a winner.

There are a couple of benefits of using branded promotional items as premiums. First, you can buy them relatively cheap, but they usually don't look cheap. Second, you turn your customers into walking billboards for your brand. You can't beat that.

I've also heard of dealers that pay their flag and/or WD with a rewards credit card. They then cash in their rewards for a great gift — like an iPad, and use the iPad to promote more sales. That's another great way to get giveaways at no out-of-pocket cost to you.

Fun 'freemiums'

Another inexpensive premium is called a self-liquidating premium. You don't give it away. Instead, you sell it at close to your cost. These can be tools or toys you can

buy at wholesale. Tools are a great incentive. But many have told me that toys like beach towels, bag chairs, coolers and radio-controlled helicopters can generate much more interest.

How would you use a "freemium?" the same way you would a premium. Say you want to get more customers to come out to your truck. You give every customer a rubber stamp on a special card when they come out. Once they hit a certain number of stamps (like 10) they get a chance to shop in your "prize closet" where you have a dozen or more items you're selling at a deep discount. The idea of a self-liquidator is that it costs you nothing and customers are more than happy to pay you for it.

Drawing in sales

Sweepstakes and drawings are big attention getters — just ask Publisher's Clearing House. One fun drawing that's big in the mobile dealer circles is a penny raffle. Here's how it works: pick up a roll of two-part tickets. Put the numbers 1 through 500 in a big jar.

When a customer makes his payment he gets to draw a number (or more if he wants). The number he picks is the number of pennies extra he pays on his account that week. So, for example, if he picks 333, he pays an extra \$3.33. He keeps half the ticket and the other half is put in a drawing container.

Once you've given away the last ticket, you draw for your prize(s). I suggest you staple the winning ticket(s) to a wall in your truck so the winner has to come back on your truck to see if he's won. If you use up all the tickets, you've just collected an extra \$1,252.50! It makes it worth getting that LCD TV on sale at Best Buy as a prize.

More than just a quick sale

As you can see, beyond just generating an immediate sale, sales promotions are a great way to get customers to start new habits like paying on time, increasing their payments, or just coming out to your truck to look around. ■

XFORCE
REVOLUTIONARY TOOLS

See us in Vegas at
AAPEX in Booth #4016!

AAPEX
AUTOMOTIVE AFTERMARKET PRODUCTS EXPO

**HOTTEST NEW TOOLS
IN THE AFTERMARKET!**

FLEXFORCE
BRAKE AND FUEL LINE WRENCH



"More Grip...Less Slip"

- Removes worn brake & fuel fittings
- Works where others fail
- Easy access to tight areas
- Amazing grip with 'Spring-Torque'
- Sizes from 3/8" to 9/16"

HEXFORCE
360° WRAP-AROUND WRENCH

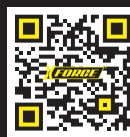


**"Fits like a wrench,
grips like a socket"**

- Pivot/hinge/clamp for 360° contact
- Won't slip off like other wrenches
- Socket-like gripping
- Use with 1/2" or 3/8" ratchet drive
- Sizes from 3/8" to 1-1/4"

xforcetools.com
1-800-253-0403

Scan to see
Xforce tools
in action!



Enter 27 at **See Us At AAPEX Booth #4016**
"e-inquiry" on professional.distributormagazine.com