

Top Ten Online Promotional Pointers



by Bill Carmody

Online promotions were a major topic at this year's Promo Expo, so I thought I would recap some of the most salient points brought forth during the show.

1. Begin with the objective

A consistent theme beginning with a clearly defined objective is perhaps the best thing you can do to control the success of your promotions – online or off. The objective will help you accurately measure your results and identify potential partners with similar objectives. Without one, failures are likely to be repeated and chaos will reign.

2. Integrate

Successful online promotions typically arise from high-quality integration with offline efforts and traditional media support. Without that integration, an online promotion is not likely to get the proper attention it deserves and, subsequently, is unlikely to achieve the desired results.

3. Keep up with technology

Judging by all the Expo exhibitors, it's clear that not only has the Internet penetrated the promotions industry, but it has also affected just about every aspect of how promotions are conducted. From premium suppliers to promotional application service providers, technology is changing the way we do business. So it's important to stay current. As new technology becomes available, so do the applications for promotion.

But remember that technology is just the icing – not the cake itself. Do not fall into the trap of using technology just because it's new and cool. The most effective promotions find effective ways to integrate technology without losing sight of objectives.

4. Listen and learn

Your customers will tell you everything you need to know if you just take the time to listen and learn from what they tell you. E-mail is a great way to get feedback on your promotions, but can often be overwhelming. Make sure you have the people resources in place to answer potentially large volumes of emails and phone calls. The better your customer service, the more likely you will hear your customers.

5. Promote the promotion

Building a cool promotion without the proper advertising support is like opening a lemonade stand and hoping that people will drive by. Successful promotions require ad support to alert your customers about what you're doing and get them to participate. Often, the most successful online promotions have significant traditional media support to drive traffic.

6. Identify reporting needs pre-launch

One of the biggest advantages of online promotions is the reporting capability. Online promotions can track as much information as is asked for, but once the promotion begins, it's extremely difficult (and sometimes dangerous) to change the database structure and information gathering. By taking the time to identify your reporting needs before the launch, you're more likely to get the information that you desire.

7. Let them opt in

Learn from Seth Godin's book, *Permission Marketing*. Permission is an extremely valuable asset and all you need to do is ask for it (and then respect it once it's granted). Do not assume that you have permission for anything other than what was expressly given. Furthermore, you can't use someone else's permission; you must earn it on your own. Once you have permission, you must use it. If you don't follow up, permission will be denied.

8. Begin a relationship

Think of online promotions as a corporate dating service. They help match companies with eligible consumers. But a relationship is not built on a single contact. In order for a relationship to succeed, it must be two-way. By listening to your customers, you can learn what interests them and what they need to keep your company top of mind.

9. Build your database efforts

The old 80-20 rule states that 20 percent of your customers are responsible for 80 percent of your sales. With database marketing, there is no excuse for not marketing smarter to your top-tier customers. With all the tracking capabilities of online promotions, you should clearly see which customers are responding to your various offers and which represent your best bets. Once built, your database efforts will pay for themselves.

10. Ensure legal compliance

Perhaps the most important aspect of online promotions often gets the shaft. The legal aspects are usually the last thing people think about. Online means real-time changes and updates, so often the legal aspects of the promotion are overlooked. Make no mistake, legal matters can make or break the campaign. If the promotion is illegal, it can be shut down (not to mention spark fines and negative publicity). If you don't know the law, make sure your legal counsel or promotions agency does.

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