

# IDEAS

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

## 21ST CENTURY PROMOS

Scenario: You purchase all kinds of radio and newspaper ads for a huge sale, and nobody shows up. Or you increase your advertising budget for the next deep-discount event, and traffic has never been better. Problem is, you just sold a truckload of stuff at near-cost. You have to replenish inventory but spent all remnants of profit on the promotional machinery. Your prices were so tantalizing, you saturated the impulse market and probably won't see those customers return anytime soon to buy product you can make money on.

I'm not sure why we continue to use outdated 20th century advertising strategies when hosting big sales is such a lose-lose proposition. Why waste all these resources generating artificial success to put cash in your register that never really becomes yours? Our goal in the 21st century should be to promote with as little money as possible and generate as much profit as humanly feasible.

Face it: We are a niche market. Even before the Internet, we never fully benefited from conventional media like television,



radio and newspapers. Today, we just can't reach out and touch our customers the same way we used to. Focusing on two key promotional qualities will help you in the New World: think *experiential* and *resonant*.

### EXPERIENTIAL

Who do you draw in when you sell cheap? People who always want to buy cheap, and en masse. This can't sustain your store long-term, and it redefines everything you sell the rest of the year at regular price as overpriced. Besides, with competitive cyber-market and

big-box opportunities, your customers can *always* buy cheaper. You can solve this by basing your event on an experience. It can be as simple as a workshop or clinic, or as complex as a fastest-drummer contest.

We've had great results cross-promoting with other community organizations. We had an instrument petting zoo and partnered with the local Humane Society, their adopt-a-pet bus parked outside our front door. We did a string-changing clinic with the food bank (free can, free strings). This not only broadened our influence outside the familiar music community, it cemented our status as the home team, the local folk.

### RESONANT

I was amazed when I asked a group of dealers at the recent "Ask the Experts" panel discussion during Summer NAMM how many ran "stimulus package" promotions. Not a hand went up, and this is truly a shame. These stimulus checks were top-of-mind for every taxpaying family in the United States. We offered a 10-percent-off gift card (for a return visit) for the month of May while this phenomenon

dominated the news. In essence, the media did partial advertising for us. All we had to do was put four-color, 8- by 10-inch fliers in the store. Cheap, cheap, cheap ...

Are gas prices eating into your business expenses? Same with your customers, and since that's on their minds, it should be easy to offer a sale in conjunction. Stay-cations (i.e. stay-at-home vacations) are in the news. The idea of foregoing the family trip to Disneyland for a brand-new Martin D-15 guitar ought to be an easy sell. How about offering "green" bags? Our local Birkenstock store is selling a logoed, reusable bag that entitles the bearer to a 10-percent discount for a year if he or she brings the bag into the store. I'll bet your sheet music customers would eat this up. Why not combine a buyers-club strategy with the green bag? This resonates with your customers' mind-sets, and it's inexpensive to implement.

You don't have to be spendy and extravagant to promote.

Just clever. **MI**

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