

Tradeshow Giveaways: What's on your desk?

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A recent informal survey and lively discussion about tradeshow giveaways made one thing clear: it takes a clever product to make a lasting impression.

According to listserv members for the American Society of Association Executives, tradeshow giveaways should be unusual, useful or amusing to earn a place on someone's desk after a conference.

"The coolest thing I ever came away with was a ball that ASAE gave me as a gift with purchase from their bookstore at a conference," says National Dental EDI Council Executive Director Carol Watkins. "... A ball that not only lit up when bounced, but made a weird noise.....it really served to give me a chuckle when I was stressed out!"

People are giving away pens, flash drives, post-it notes and post-it flags, but the respondents say they often don't pick up generic pens or post-its with cheap glue. Anything plastic or disposable seems to be out of fashion these days, but good-quality chocolate is a perennial favorite. And people still love things make them laugh.

Scott Lester, president of William Kendrick Co./PromoSource.com, says his top-selling items are pens, post-it notes, apparel items computer-related products. Antibacterial gels were big in 2007.

"In 2008 you can expect to see more green products in every brand campaign," Lester says. "Whether the company is becoming more eco-friendly or they want to do a promotion that helps champion environmental awareness, environmentally-friendly products, like pencils made from recycled newspaper and apparel made from bamboo or organic cotton, can help reinforce the brand message."

The managing director of McKinley Marketing in Chicago, Sheri Jacobs, says creating tradeshow buzz is not always about finding a product that will sit on a desk.

"I looked for something that was interesting, inexpensive (less than \$2 per item) and buzz worthy," says Jacobs. Jacobs chose a musical computer mouse when the dotcom craze was at its peak. "There wasn't another giveaway like it on the floor at any tradeshow I visited. As a result, I created the one giveaway that everyone wanted."

Jacobs said she gave the mouse out freely, not only to qualified leads. "I wanted everyone on the floor to want one and have one. The more people talking about it, the more visitors I would get. I overheard people saying 'You've got to visit SurePayroll and get this cool mouse.'"

Another marketing consultant says it's tough to make a good impression. Lindy Dreyer, vice president of client services for CK Marketing Solutions, worked as an exhibit hall manager and saw every giveaway in the book. "They really do break the ice and attract people to the show floor and to the booth," Dreyer says. "I personally have visited booths to get a giveaway and walked away with a potential business partner who I wouldn't have otherwise met."

▶ **What do you give away? (Bold items "disappeared like hotcakes")**

Office Supplies/Desk Accessories Pens (14 mentions): quality pens, "Transformer" pen – push a button and the pen opens up, fancy wood pens, "green pens and pencils," pens with logos/websites, highlighters, unusual pens
Flash drives (5 mentions)
Post-it notes (2 mentions)
Post-it flags (2 mentions)
Variable annuity fact books
Laptop bags
Computer mice
Paperweights
Briefcases
Pocket notepad/business card holder
10-year calendar (the size of a credit card double sided, made of 6 pieces connected in one corner)
Mini office kit (everything you'd need in a pinch)
Mouse pads with inserts for personal photos
Computer related items (Mouse pads and monitor calendars)
Cell phone holders (2 mentions)
Rolodex punch (also a take away)
Business card (Size and shape) CD with information that the client association may have as resource
Calculators

Household/Personal Items Coffee/thermal mugs (4 mentions)
Key chain lights/flashlights (2 mentions)
Tape Measures (2 mentions)
Hand Sanitizer (2 mentions)
Light bulbs
Mini mag lights in a nice box
Small screwdrivers
Ice scrapers
Shoe shine kits
Sewing kits
Battery-operated handheld fan
Sun shades
Emery boards w/logo & website (glow in the dark)

Baseball caps
 Blankets
 Cups
 Ties
 Prize drawing entries for cash prizes
 Ceramic coaster
 Binoculars
 Set of 4 pint glasses
 Window clings
 Water bottles

Conference Items	Conference t-shirt/apparel/other t-shirts (5 mentions) Lapel pins (2 mentions) Lanyards/name badge holders (2 mentions) Pocket maps of the show city Bookmarks with company info/key sections of the convention
Travel Items	Luggage tags/grips (3 mentions) Totebags/bags/gym bags (3 mentions) Travel alarm clocks Pocket mirror
Toys/Sports	Koozies w/ a bottle of water Matchbox car- Jaguar XK8 Flashing stars Stress balls (shaped like hard hats) Seat cushions (for use at sport events) Toy trucks Baseball tickets Decks of playing cards with logo
Food	Tins of breath mints Candy Grand Candy Bar Chocolate Food (Boston Baked Beans in Boston) Themed candy (lobster shaped suckers)

► **What do you pick up/keep?**

General	Useful products (2 mentions) Items made of natural/recycled materials that perhaps support indigenous/disenfranchised cultures/groups Not much but the stuff they do keep goes in a treasure chest at the visitor center Very little (2 mentions)
Office Supplies/Desk Accessories	Pens, in general and if they are refillable, quality, funny (11 mentions) Mouse pads Highlighters (2 mentions) Post-it notes (4 mentions) Letter openers Flash drives (4 mentions) Notepads, paper cubes or pads, notebooks, journals (4 mentions) Larger magnets that aren't obnoxious 20-year calendar (2 mentions)

	Business card holder Paper clip holder Rolodex punch
Household/Personal Items	Small flash lights Hand lotions Nail files Lotions Really neat foot spa kit Leather coasters Emery boards from political candidates Girlie stuff Cell phone "sticky" for the dash of the car Micro fiber eye glass cloth Umbrellas T-shirts Little portable fan (unique or funny) Back scratcher Thermal mugs Photographs (from photo booth set-ups) Canvas bags Potholders
Travel Items	Travel alarm/light Pocket mirror Luggage tags/laminated business card tags/luggage grips (3 mentions)
Conference Items	Belt clips that name badges attach to Functional lanyards Disney badge lanyards Brochures Business cards (2 mentions)
Food/Toy Items	Starbucks card Good candy Mints or candy Toys, candy, etc. (goes in "prize chest" or "kids closet") Food Good chocolate Funny stress balls

▶ What have you stopped picking up?

- ▶ Cheap pens/pens (6 mentions)
- ▶ Bags/plastic bags (6 mentions)
- ▶ Squeeze/stress items (3 mentions)
- ▶ Anything too bulky to pack (2 mentions)
- ▶ Mints/cheap candy (2 mentions)
- ▶ Plastic-whatevers/disposable anything (2 mentions)
- ▶ Stuffed animals (2 mentions)
- ▶ Coffee mugs (2 mentions)
- ▶ Things without real-world function
- ▶ Everything unless it's eye-catching
- ▶ Paper
- ▶ Catalogues
- ▶ Post-it notes
- ▶ Lamé logo t-shirts
- ▶ Highlighters
- ▶ Rulers
- ▶ Water bottles
- ▶ Plastic promotional pins

▶ What was the coolest thing you ever picked up?

- ▶ Baggage tag holder you can put business tags in
- ▶ 10- or 20-year calendars
- ▶ Letter openers
- ▶ Luggage handle covers
- ▶ Cook books
- ▶ Calendar strip that stuck at the bottom of computer monitor (has since made our own)
- ▶ Pocket mini hand sanitizer
- ▶ Mini tape measure
- ▶ Vintage looking, army green, canvass messenger bag with a red cross on it (their theme)
- ▶ Heavy duty stadium blanket
- ▶ Wonderful jacket
- ▶ USA tote bag with a USA cooler inside
- ▶ Nice thermos(not plastic)
- ▶ Really nice zippered padfolio
- ▶ Retractable badge lanyard
- ▶ Really good wintergreen mints in a tin
- ▶ Nice logo Maglite mini-flashlight
- ▶ Set of small screwdrivers
- ▶ Cover for suitcase handle
- ▶ Ball that lit up when bounced & made a funny noise
- ▶ Industry-related freebies (toy trucks, mini recycling bins)
- ▶ Home-baked cookies
- ▶ Water bottle
- ▶ Usable items for desk or office
- ▶ Photo booth pictures
- ▶ Foot spa kit
- ▶ Bottle of wine
- ▶ Full-size kush ball (entertainment)
- ▶ Slinky
- ▶ Pens on "steroids" ink pen approximately 12" long and 3/4" wide
- ▶ Pins that have 2 or 3 blinking led lights
- ▶ A computer kit that had a USB laser pointer/slide advancer
- ▶ Wireless mouse and USB memory stick in a case

▶ What's on your desk?

- ▶ Coffee cups w/ pens
- ▶ Note pads
- ▶ Index cards
- ▶ Calculator
- ▶ Coin tray
- ▶ Rubix cube
- ▶ Pocket Buddha
- ▶ Padfolio
- ▶ Spiral notebook Pens Triangle-shaped multi-color highlighter
- ▶ Leather Coaster (more than a decade)
- ▶ Portfolio notepads
- ▶ Page pal paper holder
- ▶ Cell phone holder
- ▶ Coaster from Myrtle Beach
- ▶ Magnetic flashlight on fridge
- ▶ Own organization's ceramic coaster
- ▶ Slinky from Xerox but doesn't use their services
- ▶ Squishy logo stress-ball like house
- ▶ Magnets
- ▶ Pens
- ▶ Pads of paper
- ▶ Post it notes
- ▶ Logo highlighter
- ▶ Really nice laser-etched Corian paperweight
- ▶ Turtle (ceramic) from Hilton Turtle Bay(holds pencils and pens or could hold a plant)
- ▶ Large ruler
- ▶ Hand calculator
- ▶ Paperclip holder
- ▶ Ball (lights when bounced)
- ▶ Letter opener w/ various pencils and pens and highlighters
- ▶ More clutter then you can imagine
- ▶ Collection of squeeze toys
- ▶ MNCPA (his org) highlighters
- ▶ MNCPA pens from conferences
- ▶ Foam cow stress ball w/graphics on the outside
- ▶ Stuffed Tivo logo
- ▶ Stress ball shaped like a star
- ▶ Pens
- ▶ Notepad (for to do list)

- ▶ Pictures from a company she remembers
- ▶ Luggage tag
- ▶ Stress head (funny face)
- ▶ Pen holder
- ▶ Loads of pens
- ▶ Little spiral bound "book" of post-it note tags
Each "page" of the book has a different size post-it strip
- ▶ 20-year calendar that has the year on one page and the holidays on the facing page
- ▶ Computer screen cleaning fluid spray thing with a wipe cloth
- ▶ Award paperweights
- ▶ Four-function solar calculator with buttons large enough to use
- ▶ Hand lotion dispenser designed to promote Viagra. A client gave it to me after a strategic planning process -- I had made a point of admiring her Viagra coffee cup. [I thought it interesting that a uniformed female police lieutenant would be carrying a Viagra coffee cup into a police department strategic planning session, so I used it as part of an icebreaker.]
- ▶ Collection of body parts made of stress-relief foam
- ▶ An alligator-clip-on-a-wire photo holder with a plastic base with the logo of the National Institute for Mental Health. It holds the "save the date" postcard for our upcoming annual meeting
- ▶ Mouse pad
- ▶ 3 leather coasters
- ▶ Letter opener
- ▶ Post-it notes
- ▶ Pen holder
- ▶ Nice stapler
- ▶ USB extender mouse pad
- ▶ A "paper ball" calendar--arrived flat, opens to a 6-sided hexagon with monthly calendar alternating with pretty picture
- ▶ Post-its
- ▶ Stress relief squeeze ball in the form of the globe--3 yrs old
- ▶ Slender leather "wallet"--just enough room for a few bills and a credit card
- ▶ Two coasters

▶ About Avenue Z Writing Solutions

Avenue Z Writing Solutions specializes in copywriting solutions for the association industry. With almost 10 years of association experience, Principal Beth Ziesenis understands associations and their communities.

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