



Three factors are vital to ensure consumers have positive experiences with your promotions.

by Kim Pettit

# Are Your Promotions a Nuisance or a Service?

**H**ow do you define promotion? Is it the act of telling someone something they do not want to hear about a product that they are not interested in and have no desire to buy? When you think of promotion, do you picture a pile of unsolicited mail, an in-box flooded with spam, a telemarketer's call interrupting a leisurely dinner, or a flurry of annoying inserts in the Sunday paper? Is promotion essentially a nuisance?

Or, do you define promotion as an organized set of activities designed to inform a specific segment of the market about available goods and services? When you think of promotion, do you picture an attractive display at your favorite bookstore, a colorful bookmark included with your purchase, a seminar with an author, or an intelligent review? Do you consider promotion to be a service to the consumer?

All of us have been on the receiving end of someone else's promotional efforts. Why are some promotions more successful than others? What makes the difference?

One critical issue is the *relevance* of the commercial message to me as a potential buyer. I do not have time to waste. I receive at least a dozen commercial e-mail messages each day, and a pile of direct mail solicitations. Radio, television, movies, and the Web contain more ads. Magazines and newsletters are filled with product information. How do I decide which messages are important? Promotional communications need to be targeted to my interests, or they are ignored or go directly into the trash. Therefore, market research is key. Focus your promotions. Target specific audiences, and tailor your message to the persons you want to reach.

A second issue has to do with the *context* of the promotional material. Is it an interruption, a pop-up window blocking my view of a site I am exploring? Is it an insert with an invoice I dread having to pay? Is the promotional communication expected and welcome, like a preview in a movie theater? Is it a flyer enclosed with the book I am looking forward to reading? Is it ugly or attractive? Review the ways you communicate product information to potential buyers. How can the communications be a pleasure rather than an intrusion?

**Consumers quickly judge promotional messages.**

A third factor pertaining to the success or failure of promotions is the *value* that they offer to me as a consumer. I prefer to receive one evangelical publisher's e-mail bulletin, which includes excerpts from forthcoming books, than the communication of their competitor, which only lists titles and prices. I would rather have the chance to hear a favorite author give a presentation than go to an event where all he or she does is sign autographs. Think about how to offer more to potential customers. Is your material merely informative, or does it minister to and inspire readers?

Are your promotions a nuisance, or a service? It will only take me a few seconds to make a decision, one way or the other. Your commercial message has to be about something that matters to me, presented in a pleasant and attractive manner, and worth an investment of my time.

What makes promotions successful? For me, it is relevance, context, and value. ❖