

March 2015

## SWAG BRAG: PROMO ITEMS SHOULD SPEAK FOR YOUR BRAND

Last summer, a business [blog](#) called The Event Manager dared to make a pretty shocking recommendation regarding promotional items for SMBs.

The post's author, Andy Johnston, said that giving a mishmash of promotional items without much thought or just for the sake of handing something out isn't a great move. Regardless of whether you are at a trade show, client visit or some other event, a simple but effective strategy is to match the tastes and preferences of your audience with your "swag bag" section.

"Just giving people . . . office supplies is a wasted opportunity," Johnston wrote. Instead, consider items people like and can use regardless of the industry.

It is also true that look is important. While you and your customers want to make sure your logo and business info is prominently displayed on the pens, mugs, and tech items you give out, remember that tasteful colors are important to catch the professional's eye.

If your specialty advertising items — and the containers or bags that hold them — look boring, or shoddy, your brand may get lost in the shuffle. So too does your opportunity to connect.

Always think about what your swag bag is saying about your brand. Here are a few category suggestions.



### Wearables and Seasonal Items

Since windbreakers and outer jackets are popular in the upcoming spring months, they enable company logos to be seen by many more people than those who wear them. Someone wearing a

## HAVE YOU CHECKED OUT OUR BLOG?



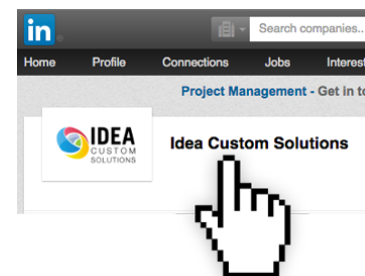
We've been busy creating articles for you on promising market sectors, marketing tactics, relevant industry news and solid advice for growing your business. [Take a look](#) and let us know what you think. And we'd love to hear your ideas for topics! Here are a few that were published in the past weeks.

[Real Estate — Where it's at](#)

[Be Direct — Your Customers Will Appreciate It](#)

[Spring = Warmer Weather. Brighter Opportunities](#)

## LINK UP WITH IDEA CUSTOM SOLUTIONS



Not too long ago LinkedIn was considered to be the uncool version of social media, or as CNBC put it, the "Rodney Dangerfield of social media," getting no respect. But now it's *the* place for business.

Idea Custom Solutions recently launched its own LinkedIn [page](#) and we would like to invite you to follow us!

company logo is essentially a walking billboard, exposing others to your client's brand wherever they go.

Make sure, though, to consider geographic location. While logoed fleece pullovers and seasonal items like auto ice scrapers make sense in the Northeast, these items would obviously miss the mark at trade shows in south Florida. Don't hand a prospective customer a logoed winter hat in Phoenix. They might ask you, "What's this?"

### Sports-Related

Not everyone you encounter in business is a sports fan. But even people who don't keep up on daily scores like sports-related items and desk toys. So much so that even major teams have noticed. According Sports Business to Daily, Major League Baseball clubs gave fans — just during game day in-the-ballpark promotions — nearly [2.6 million](#) bobble-heads in 2013 alone.

Just the same, you need not be the New York Yankees to get in the game, using sports to promote your business. As we mentioned in the Idea Customs Solutions [blog](#) last month, golf items such as balls, tees, carry bags and visors are wildly popular with businesses both big and small, who want to promote their brands with items people love and keep.

### Tech and Fun Stuff

As high technology becomes more and more a part of our everyday, tech-related promotional items have become some of the best and most favored choices for specialty advertising items for anyone interested in really pushing their brand.

According to tech-savvy sources like the *Upstart Business Journal*, accessories like [earbuds](#) have become a leading choice for marketers, while logoed protective iPhone and Android phone covers are coveted among tech-savvy consumers. As for desktop items, trade show goers at the [2015 auto shows](#) miss the mini-car models that were so common in the past and all but gone this year, according to Bloomberg. Consider also that people love to bring fun, kid-friendly items home for little ones.



### Just Everyday Use

Toys, sports and tech things may be the most fun pieces, but don't forget useful everyday classics. Pens and mini-staplers may not be your lead item in grabbing attention but — as something people use daily — they can act as a constant reminder of your company's brand. Still, aim to differentiate with good choice in color and design. A timeless item like coffee mug will be a keeper if it comes in eye-catching color and with quality visuals.

We will share [valuable news](#) about trends in marketing, specialty advertising and promotional products and business insights, while also keeping you up-to-speed on the SMB marketplace.

### NOTABLE QUOTES



"There are no secrets to success. It is the result of [preparation, hard work, and learning from failure.](#)"

— Colin Powell



"It takes as much [energy to wish](#) as it does to plan."

— Eleanor Roosevelt



"Money won't create success, the [freedom to make it will.](#)"

— Nelson Mandela

Ultimately, you should use your own common sense as a consumer. Think about what you pick up, what you would use, and what you would keep.

Idea Custom Solution can partner with you to help match customers' needs with the best in white-label graphic services. Look to us for fast [embroidery digitizing](#), [vector artwork](#), [image editing](#), [virtual samples](#) and [marketing materials](#) to help your customers advance their brands through promotional items. Let our quality speak for you and your customers' brands.

## CUSTOMER SERVICE = SUCCESS IN SERVING SMBs

Most forward-thinking entrepreneurs know that service is not just something important for big mega brands in the consumer market. Sometimes, just being in the everyday thick of running a business, you may forget that even the most loyal and savvy customers need a little handholding here and there.

Thus, it is important to think about how important service is in your business and that often the best customer service is more than just a smile and a firm handshake at the initial close of business.

### Do-It-For-Me Versus DIY

Think about why you use the services you use, both as a business person and a consumer. A lot of what drives business-to-business activity today is the ability of one party to solve another party's problem with the right solutions. Whether you primarily work with service-based SMBs like sales outfits, law firms and the medical field or your focus lies with manufacturing and companies that *make stuff*, you know that the clients you serve are successful because they do one or two things very well.

People at small businesses often don't have time, much less the interest in DIY (or do-it-yourself) for things in which they lack expertise. For example, your local pub may know its crowd well enough to keep them coming back for the best food and local brews, but that doesn't make them good at marketing. When it comes to help with branding through marketing materials or promotional products, companies like yours that serve SMBs can add the most value by offering recommendations and consultation to customers.

Firms of all kinds, from website designers and investment firms to retailers like [Home Depot](#), have thrived in recent decades by serving both consumers and businesses with a do-it-for-me approach and excellent service. Show the SMBs how you add value and they will gladly pay you to "do it for them."

### The Customer is Always Rightly Served

We tend to think of "customer care" or "customer service" as something we get as consumers from our cable TV company or from a hotel concierge. But the truth is that customer service is as important in business-to-business as it is anywhere.

More importantly, customers "live in real-time context and answers to questions about the products or services they use should be timely," said Kirstin Ogilvie of Thunderhead.com in a [Business News Daily article](#) by Nicole Fallon. Whether you serve your SMB



"You can't do it unless you can **imagine it**."

— George Lucas



"If you're a champion, you have to have it **in your heart**."

— Chris Evert

## IDEA CUSTOM SOLUTIONS EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

*In the Employee Spotlight, Idea Custom Solutions features one of the people behind the scenes that make our customer-oriented business work. This month, meet Roben Kunder, Team Leader in the operations side of Idea Custom Solutions.*



Roben has been with Idea Custom Solutions for nine years and feels his greatest achievement so far was helping his operations team win the company's Best Team Award, and winning Best Team Leader himself.

Outside of the office, Roben enjoys the quiet of reading, while also spending the balance of his free time with his wife, daughter Rebecca and his parents. As



customers primarily via technology or by traditional means like phone and in-person, Fallon points out that it is most important to be responsive as well as consistent in your communications and customer service.

Moreover, as Salesforce points out in its business blog, it doesn't matter if you sell burritos [or multi-million dollar enterprise solutions](#), everyone appreciates a response to their service needs. And, good service begets not only happy customers, but also long-lasting repeat business.

By working with [Idea Custom Solutions](#) for your graphic needs, you'll not only be able to confidently quote turn times and deliver quality branding for promotional products or designs for printing, you'll save a ton of time that can be better spent giving customers the benefits of your expertise and advice. That's the equation for success.



### Embroidery Digitizing



### Vector Artwork

someone with a taste for travel, Roben said that taking a trip to Israel with family is a lifelong dream.

Roben also says that one of the reasons that he enjoys working for Affinity Express, and why the company is well known within its industry, is that its products and services are top quality. He and his team work hard to maintain this standard every day.

### TWEET THAT!

Let Idea Custom Solutions help you find content:

Baseball season is almost here. From bobbleheads to wearables, baseball has some of the best [#PromoProducts](#) ever. <http://goo.gl/TDKqtm>

[Tweet That!](#)

Does [#swag](#) work? 3 of 4 professionals have a [#PromoProduct](#) at work. [@FastCompany](#) says in 2010, 31% were wearable. <http://goo.gl/Vab7AI>

[Tweet That!](#)

Branding isn't just for Fortune 500s. 4 [#branding](#) tips for the [#SMB](#) marketing toolbox, from [@Firmology](#). <http://goo.gl/LXmdJO>

[Tweet That!](#)

Plugging [#SocialMedia](#) through printed or [#PromoProducts](#) helps your brand. 8 ways social helps your biz. <http://goo.gl/SZjcTI>

[Tweet That!](#)

Did you know: 25% of U.S. consumers own logoed drink ware? Half use it every week. <http://goo.gl/CGB4Vg>

[Tweet That!](#)



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