

## How To Start An Advertising Specialty Business

Advertising specialties are small items like book matches, pens or key chains that can be imprinted with a company, logo or slogan.

They are deductible advertising and usually given away to promote the business whose name is inscribed on them. There is almost no limit to products that can be used as advertising specialties. They can be anything the client company can afford, your sponsoring company can imprint and the customer will use.

The ideal item is useful, costs comparatively little and keeps your clients' business name in front of the customer as long as possible.

Advertising Specialties is an ideal business to operate from home. You can market them on a route, by mail, through advertisements, by phone appointments or by personal contact. There are two main objectives in establishing yourself in this business.

The first is to let people know who you are, what you handle and where they can get hold of you.

Second, convince them that you can help them promote their business. Your experience and advertising knowledge level will increase constantly. In turn, your expanding capability will equip you to offer even better advice and more timely suggestions.

Your customers are busy business people who want to get the most of their advertising dollar and are not particularly knowledgeable in this area. As soon as your customers realize they can rely on your advice your success will be assured!

Advertising specialties include place mats, school football and baseball schedules, calendars and plastic windshield scrapers, which lend themselves well to thee seasons. These give you a good opportunity to make timely and realistic suggestions to your customers.

Foe example, in August you can suggest an order of imprinted scrapers for winter and in June you can recommend an order of football schedules for fall.

These suggestions are not just a ruse to sell -- they indicate you have given some though to your client's business interests! These and thousands of other specialty items are available with organization or company (logo and message) imprints at relatively low prices.

Advertising specialty costs to the customer are in line with and frequently below other advertising methods. Although a thousand imprinted pens costs more than a single newspaper or radio ad, the message on the pen lasts as long as the pen,,, while the newspaper ad is in the trash the next day and a radio commercial is but a "fleeting word."

Industry specialty suppliers furnish salesmen or independent

dealers with instructions, catalogs, price lists and often, sales kits.

Most advertising specialty salespersons represent several companies to offer a variety of personalized or imprinted products. They show the prospective customer samples, discuss the merits of different products, promotional and advertising objectives. They quote prices, write orders and sometimes deliver and collect for the products when they come in.

In most cases, however, they just take the order and get a "down payment" (the sales commission) from the client. The supplier then ships the order direct to the customer, COD for the freight and balance due.

This system is slightly more costly due to the piecemeal shipping and COD fees, but it may be the best (especially if you have a route). When you can handle these things personally, even if it is only once in a while. You gain more trust when you can deliver and collect in person; it shows a personal interest in your customer.

As a specialty ad sales person, you are the only link between the sponsoring company and your client. Your sponsoring company does not deal directly with the public. If they tried, they would lose their salesmen as well as many of their customers because they could not deal on a person to person basis.

For beginners, it is advisable to start with one product (such as book matches) so you can simplify your learning process and accelerate building your confidence.

Try to form a business foundation without having to learn too many products, prices and methods of presentation. There is no need to go after a large clientele with your first product. Just make enough calls to gain enough experience and self-confidence, then start expanding your line.

The real secret is to knowing your customers, products and prices well. This will enable you to visualize how your products can best benefit your customers.

As the representative of your company you are the authority for that product and company to your customers. If you seem unsure of your products, prices or their application, the customer is not likely to have confidence in you, the products or the company. This means they probably won't deal with you until you can reflect confidence!

Many retailers will try new salesperson or product to check on their quality, service and reliability. If they like what they get, they will probably increase their orders.

With just one product at first, you can learn not only the pricing, but the sales pitches and various company suggested applications faster, and your confidence will build fast. You will learn what kind of questions customers ask and gain valuable experience in handling them professionally.

When you feel you are ready, start adding products to your line. As you become better acquainted with your customers, you will

soon have a good idea of what might sell in your area. Your customers will tell you their needs and preferences and most will be happy to advise you on your products and techniques.

When you add products, concentrate on those that complement what you already offer (you already their application).

For example, if you sell printed book matches, add printed pens and calendars, which involve similar applications. Later on you can add silk screen labels and wallet size calendar or self-stick football schedules for local high schools.

These are examples of items whose applications may be a little more complicated than book matches.. You should be familiar with their potential use before adding them to your line.

It is quite alright to change suppliers from time to time. When you do and the customer asks why, just explain that you found a better deal (that, they will understand).

Good specialty salespeople gradually build a full line of products, learning all about each one in turn. That's how they can intelligently recommend realistic alternatives and suggest different promotional innovative specialty sales person can mentally adapt to his customers. The result can literally be a special plan for each individual client!

Most specialty suppliers provide their representatives with excellent support. They employ staffs of experts who keep coming up with new and better ways to market their products.

When you discover a new technique for one product, it will usually also apply to other products as well! If book matches are good for a graduate, then why not napkins or handkerchiefs? Also be alert for profitable combinations.

For example, you might try to put together a promotion to print bumper stickers supporting the school team. You might get the bank to pay for 500, the supermarket, another 500 and perhaps a few smaller orders to bring the total to 2500 (a price change). Then, you sell the local drive-in the space on the protective covering for free soda coupons (with purchase).

There are endless variations that an innovative salesperson can devise, including combining orders to take advantage of volume prices.

Those 500 bumper stickers cost nearly double per unit at the 500 rate than the 2500 rate. By paying a small copy change fee, you can have 500 stickers with the bank name; 500 more with the supermarket (etc.) as donors and still enjoy the 2500 rate. Since the bank and supermarket both pay at the 500 rate, you can make up to \$200 extra profit.

An excellent advertising specialty business potential is coming events such as business anniversaries, sales promotions, birthdays, trade fairs, holidays, sports events and elections. Keep your eye on the calendar and plan well ahead to take advantage of these promising situations. Get local merchants to finance publication of school sports schedules (with their company name listed prominently).

Talk to the campaign chairman BOTH parties and political candidates as soon as they file for office.. Find out who files and when from the county, state or city clerks office.

Always be ready to help customers with ideas and techniques to help achieve their goals. Sometimes little suggestions like spraying inexpensive cardboard political signs with water repellent will make you look great!

be sure to give yourself (and your customers) enough lead-time to plan and fill orders in time for scheduled events.

Advise your customers how long it takes to get orders to be filled, and suggest allowing a little extra time in case there are any delays. If printed pens usually take three weeks, advise your customer to order about five weeks in advance if they must be available for a particular date.

Consider joining professional organizations that can alert you to additional suppliers, product and IDEAS.

Advertising Specialties Institute (ASI - see BUSINESS SOURCES) offers distributor (salesmen) memberships for a one time fee of \$75. Membership entitles you to a wide range of trade information and initial credit from member suppliers.

Most trade suppliers display their ASI number prominently in their advertisements and catalogs. Membership is limited to manufacturers and suppliers of specialty merchandise and active independent specialty people.

Going into the advertising specialty sales business is very easy. Just decide on a name for your business, get some business cards, a sales kit from a good supplier and start calling on prospective customers.

You also need reliable transportation unless you plan to operate by mail (which is not recommended at this stage). ALWAYS keep a record of where you go and who you talk to. This makes each succeeding visit a continuation of the previous one.

When professional specialty salespeople drive up to a business, they take a moment to refresh their memory from their route book. This is an informal record of names, major discussion topics of last time (if any), what they ordered and anything else of interest.

The idea is to appear interested enough in the customer to remember their name and the last visit! They have a separate loose leaf page for each customer and update it each visit or call. If you do this, you too will "remember" names and details of the last meeting. This is IMPRESSIVE and helps MAKE SALES!

After you have gained enough experience with advertising specialties, you might consider expanding or converting to an advertising agency or service.

Here, you would size up the client's needs and help design and implement promotions and advertisements for them. You would charge a retainer plus a fee for each promotion and still get

your commission on any advertising specialties. Needless to say, some of your specialty sales customers would be excellent prospects for your agency.

Records keeping in this business is very important. In addition to your customer notebook, you should have accurate records of all sales and commissions.

As an independent business person, the government requires you to make your own social security payments and (probably after the first year) pay your taxes quarterly. If you have someone do your taxes, they will let you know how much you need to pay each quarter and provide you with the forms to send in (they are actually short and simple).

The general rule in quarterly payments is to pay one fourth of whatever you owed at the end of last year over what your employers withheld. For business records, keep all your receipts by the month. Consider a single entry ledger, such as that described in Chapter 16 of The ULTIMATE HOME BUSINESS Manual (available for \$25.00).

This type of record will let you know how you are doing, and the receipts envelopes will enable your tax person to prepare your taxes efficiently.

There are two important potential problem area to watch out for is the imprinted specialty sales field. The first is getting the orders wrong.

Sometimes, you must THINK you have accurate copy, only to discover there is a misspelled word, incorrect address or wrong date. One sure error can wipe out profits from several sales if it is your fault.

To avoid this problem, write out the copy clearly, completely and accurately on the ticket. Then ask the customer to review and sign or initial it -- signifying that they have checked and approved it. When you forward the order to the company, always keep a copy of the ticket with the desired copy (never send them your only copy).

This way, if there is a problem you can easily show who was at fault. The other potential headache is getting hooked up with a bad supplier. This could be one that overcharges, doesn't deliver on time or gets your orders mixed up. When this happens, charge suppliers -- fast! Of course, we all make mistakes, so if your supplier makes an occasional error and takes immediate corrective action,,, they are probably worth keeping.

To be successful in the advertising specialty business, you must be knowledgeable and reliable.

This means that you know your customers as well as your products. This is the only way you can know how your customers can use your products to their advantage.

Being reliable is essentially keeping your word, showing up when you are expected and giving your customers honest advice.

When your customers expect you each month or week, you have

passed a major milestone -- because they will hold orders for you! They could not afford to do that if they weren't sure when you might come around again.

Treat your customers right and they will appreciate it enough to be reluctant to deal with your competitors -- which is your objective!

#### BUSINESS SOURCES

ADVERTISING SPECIALTY INSTITUTE (ASI) Bucks County Business center, 1120 Wheeler Way, Langhorn, PA 19004. Organization for specialty advertising manufacturers, distributors and sales.

KLING ADVERTISING SPECIALTIES, P.O. Box 338, Barrington, Il. Sales kits and instructions for ad salesmen.

ALEXANDER, P.O. Box 6, Lexington, KY 61753. High quality imprinted pens, marble coasters, key chains, emblems, etc.

WILKINSON-ACRES, INC., 844 Central Ave., Kansas City, KS 66101. Advertising merchandise.

LINCOLN SPECIALTY JOBBERS, 117 Virginia Ave., Reading, PA 19606. Wholesale specialty advertising products.

NATIONWIDE ADVERTISING SPECIALTIES CO., P.O. Box 928, Arlington, TX 76010, 817/275-2678. Advertising specialties; free sales kit; AAA1 D7B Rating; old company.

NEWTON MANUFACTURING CO., Newton, IA 50208. Ad Specialties; free sales kit; old company.

PARKTONE PRESS, P.O. Box 539, Spring Valley, NY 10977. Wholesale calendars, ethnic selection; free sales kit.

TASCO INDUSTRIES, P.O. Box 29376, Dallas, TX 75229. Wholesale imprinted merchandise, such as baseball caps.

ALLSTATE SPECIALTIES, INC., 2895 Biscayne Blvd., Miami, FL 33137. Wholesale calendars, pens, etc; 40% commission to specialty salesmen.

SPECIALTY ADVERTISING NATIONAL ASSOCIATION (SANA), 1145 19th St., Washington, DC 20036. Association of specialty advertising producers. Free information.

QUILL CORPORATION,, 100 Schelter Rd., Lincolnshire, IL 60917-4700. Office supplies.

WALTER DRAKE, 4119 Drake Bldg., Colorado Springs, CO 80940. Short run business cards, stationery (no choice of format or colors).