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THE ORIGINAL 'BELOW-THE-LINE' SUCCESS STORY

William Kestin uncovers that some marketing decision should be black and white. As the guests arrived they were given a glass of champagne which contained a glowing cube in their corporate colours. The men wore black tie and the women were in beautiful dresses. There was a feeling of celebration in the air; an expectation a good night was palpable. But the night would end in screaming, illness, vomiting and tears. I wish I was describing a scene from a new horror film, but unfortunately I'm not. It's reality: just another day when a marketing manager could have avoided disaster.

As the guests took their seats, the marketing manager noticed about one in four of the glowing cubes printed with the company logo was already flickering out. She'd bought the cubes from a promotional company she'd found on the web. "No wonder they were so much less than the other quotes," she thought. But she had much more important things to worry about. She spoke softly to her assistant: "This must be a night to remember".

Along with the problems of the lightcubes not working, the promotional company who produced them was not a member of APPA (The Australasian Promotional Products Association) www.appa.com.au. The original patented product would have lasted 30 hours, instead of less than 30 minutes. But even more tragically, the promotional company was not trained to use the vegetable-based ink necessary to avoid food poisoning. The 'night to remember' included almost all of the 5,000 guests vomiting violently before the evening was over.

By the time the marketing manager came to APPA, it was too late. APPA could not intervene on their behalf because the marketing manager had not verified the promotional product provider was APPA member in the beginning.

Safety is just one of the important issues to consider when buying promotional products. Navigating the minefield of buying promotional products can cost companies thousands of dollars and result in product recalls, lawsuits, negative media coverage and also diminish your brand's reputation.

The economic woes of last year are causing a shift in advertising dollars. Marketers historically increase promotional product spending during downturns. In tough economic times, promotional products have consistently shown they are affordable, accountable and measurable advertising.

What should I ask my promotional products company?

- How long have they been in the promotions industry?
- How long have they been APPA Members?
- What is their policy on return of products?
- What is their policy on timely delivery of goods?
- What is their policy on quantity-short product deliveries?
- Have they received any APPA awards for creativity?

However, more inexperienced and unethical players continue to enter our industry. An increase in problems and complaints directly coincides with the growth of the promotional industry; most notably web-based purchasing and the 'claim' of some companies to be a direct source to Chinese factories. Unsuspecting buyers beware; APPA receives weekly complaints about non-APPA members making wild claims about pricing, delivery and sourcing capabilities.

But the invisibility of the web isn't the only problem. APPA members make up 50 per cent of the companies who claim to sell promotional products, still they generate over 85 per cent of the \$2.02 Billion dollar spend in Australia. In direct contrast, 90 per cent of

the complaints received by APPA are against companies who are non-APPA members. Many are repeat offenders, who market themselves extensively and focus on new unsuspecting customers (as repeat business is unlikely). The major reason marketers take the chance is, overwhelming, price.

Promotional products, effectively implemented and manufactured, are the original 'below-the-line' success story. They are not a commodity but an advertising medium, the power of which some marketers are only just beginning to grasp. Research shows that the next generation of consumers are motivated and engaged by tangible forms of advertising. Promotional product campaigns are a part of every savvy marketer's integrated solutions and are used as complex sales triggers and data collection tools. Selection of products are no longer based on ego decisions by marketers "I like that, so everyone will", but strategically chosen by on-line focus groups and forward planning.

The only way to confirm APPA membership is access www.appa.com.au and click on 'Find a promotional company', then search by region or name. You can also always contact APPA for guidance. For more than 24 years APPA has served the marketing community as a resource and consumer advocate.

The science of knowing what questions to ask when producing promotional products and the creativity to integrate concepts linked to products are only a few of the reasons why promotional product professionals are the perfect outsourced extension of most marketing departments. Safety and health requirements, ILS (International Labour Standards) and technical branding application knowledge can make all the difference between a promotional success and a promotional nightmare. ::