

ME PRODUCTIONS
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SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS

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WHAT'S ON THE *Pillow?*
Merchandise is an effective way to enhance your next meeting or incentive program

By Jeanie Casison

It happens all the time; Attendee gets gift. Attendee opens gift. Attendee trashes gift. Sometimes attendee re-gifts. While it's the thought that counts, there is an unspoken, universal truth: No one ever wants to receive a lousy present – ever. And no planner wants to be associated with terrible taste – ever. The good news is that when a gift goes over well, it can motivate meeting participants, create brand awareness, and strengthen relationships. And guess who comes out looking like a hero?

So what item makes a smart selection? We talked to industry insiders to get the scoop on mastering the art of giving.

Products with a Purpose

Why waste time, money, and valuable resources by delivering disappointment? The first step in maximizing merchandise in meetings and incentives is to understand the special considerations and the various opportunities that exist to make a strong connection with a target audience.

"The biggest challenge is that the options are endless. Imagine trying to find an item that matches a meeting's specs, theme, and budget, and then convincing multiple decision-makers," says Debbie Etkin, director of premiums and specialties for ME Productions, a destination management company in Pembroke, FL

Special Delivery

Recipients aren't the only ones who benefit from gift giving. Promotional products also offer sponsoring companies immense branding opportunities. According to Etkin, merchandise in meetings and incentives creates buzz through branding. "Anytime you put a premium into a meeting, you are branding your association or corporate event," she says. "It's the ability to remind attendees about the products they represent. All this is positive feedback on a basic, can build momentum. I focus on the quality of the gift with a gift that ties in with the company's mission."

During a meeting for an entertainment company, instead of a traditional food basket for a Generation X group, attendees received energy drinks, PowerBars, and aspirin. "This was a great group. Since the meeting was an information session, we were there for a long time. We wanted to adjust our gifts to reflect the meeting's theme."

Another way to add a twist to tradition is to use a theme. Quatrini, a general manager for ME Productions, used a theme for a Lincare Pharmaceutical sales meeting. Attendees received Gun mugs with the Lincare logo. At a major meeting, attendees were given an Indiana Jones-style hat with the Lincare logo and an engraved message: "Don't lose your focus."

"Giveaways are important for meetings," Quatrini says. "Use items they received from a meeting, even if it's just a pen or a notepad."

