

Promoting Your Way to PROFIT\$

By Chuck Simons - SAGE Advice®

Tis' the season to be thinking about giving and receiving! Most of us would like to receive. Perhaps you are thinking along the lines of a great gift basket overflowing with chocolates and baked goods galore and given to you with deepest appreciation from one of your loyal customers (or their pet). Or maybe you would just like some cold hard cash and a big tip or two (or ten).

And yet we are all taught that the holidays are about giving. It is certainly the perfect time of year to show your clients that you appreciate their business and remind them that you are always there in time of grooming need.

Holiday cards and calendars have been a business staple since marketing began. Many classic calendars are collector's items, but with today's minimum orders for custom printing and the rising cost of postage, these promotional materials are sometimes beyond the average advertising budget. Many people get in over their heads during the holiday and end up paying for their purchases throughout the New Year and beyond! You should try to avoid that.

If you are going to go the traditional route with an imprinted calendar, check with many online services that offer incredibly low prices through a method they call "gang running." Your job is put into production along with a dozen other companies and all are printed at the same time before being assembled. The printer then saves on materials and time, and will pass the savings onto you.

But how can you say "Happy Holidays" to your customers without breaking the bank or taking out a second mortgage? Instead of considering imprinted items, visit your local value store and get a selection of the cards that come 100 or more to a box. Even though the designs on these cards may not be as appealing as higher priced models, it is what's inside that really counts.

Let's start with some scratch off lottery tickets. These cost \$1 a piece, so it makes it easy to set a budget based on how many you plan to give away. A handwritten note inside the card that says "Don't gamble with your grooms, but good luck in the New Year," along with a scratch off ticket or two can be a big hit with customers. They may even split their winnings with you!

If you have a computer and printer available, you can create some coupons for your top clients that include things like \$5 off the cost of their next groom, or Free Teeth Brushing with their next groom or perhaps a Free De-Shedding treatment next spring. Measure the free service or discount you are giving to the level of client you are offering it to. You certainly don't want to give too much away, but since it is a free offer, then you are not spending a lot out of pocket.



If you have the time to make some phone calls, you can contact local businesses and see what they have to offer your customers. How about gift certificates for a free cup of coffee and a bagel at your local bakery, or discounts on a movie or show? This kind of cross promotion helps you to not only provide a token of your appreciation to loyal customers, but also help your local area merchants as well. And this kind of marketing goes on long after the holiday season. Many merchant associations have been formed when businesses band together to promote each other. You can use their pre-printed materials to stuff envelopes or make a list of businesses that are participating in your holiday promotion on your printer.

If you are not the coupon kind of salon owner and would prefer to give an actual gift to your customer, consider the wide world of affordable giveaways. You will need items that make a lasting impression on the receiver. Buying in bulk from the many wholesale distributors that are online or sell through catalogs will allow you to get a variety of low cost gifts that make big dollar impressions.

Decide what you want to spend per person before firing up your web browser and looking for bargains. For example, if you set a \$5 limit for your top 100 customers, you know right away that you are going to spend \$500 on product. Are you going to gift wrap items or just attach a bow or a hang tag with your contact info? Try to factor these costs into the total you are willing to spend on each individual.

It is important to remember that the gift you give should be something that will be displayed or used all the time. If you are not going to the expense of having an item personalized with your contact information imprinted on it, then it should be an item that constantly reminds the person of you. According to a recent article on giving gifts it was found that gifts that are used on a regular basis have a high impact on individuals, but gifts that are displayed are rated even higher.

So why not spend some time snapping photos of your customers pets and then having those photos printed for framing? You can buy a bulk order of magnetic acrylic frames to put on the refrigerator or a nice wooden frame for the mantle. These photo gifts serve two purposes. First, you are saying to your customer "you should be proud of your beautiful pet." And second, you are saying "here's how good your pet looks when I groom him." The photo is a visual aid to your pet styling skills and a measuring stick for how good a dog can look after visiting your salon. In six weeks, the customer will see the picture and say "looks like it's time for a trip to the salon."

If you want to skip the frames, look into buying a bulk order of novelty magnets. There are many online wholesalers that will let you buy magnets by the dozen. People often collect magnets in addition to using them to keep their pet's photo in place. Look for dog magnets or dog bones and brushes when shopping and don't forget to check out sites like orientaltrading.com for a huge selection. Put a puppy picture along with a magnet in a nice envelope and you have a winner.



Why not consider buying plain document frames and printing awards certificates on your printer? You can create categories such as Best Behaved when Brushing, Cutest Puppy or maybe Miss Congeniality. You can also make matching awards for the owners such as Most Beloved Master, Customer of the Year or World's Greatest Tipper. Get some gold seals from the office supply store and try to make them look official. Then make a big deal out of giving them the award with some fanfare and style. Have your staff applaud them and their dog before leaving with their coveted award.

When you want to give a gift that is used often, start by checking your supply catalogs for bulk purchases of plush dog toys where you can often buy quality items for as little as \$1 a piece. Hand them to the owner and say "I hope you can get a chance to play with your pet for awhile during this busy time of year."

Plush toys are great, especially with a holiday theme. Or maybe you can make mini-baskets with doggie treats including snacks and chew toys. Toys that talk or squeak are great because your customer has an audible reminder of your appreciation for their business.

Don't forget maintenance tools such as combs and brushes along with info on how to keep their pet looking good between grooms.

You can make it a point of looking for deep discount pet items at trade shows, and many manufacturers provide samples. You may want to stock up on these bargains when the opportunity presents itself to have a variety of low dollar gifts in stock and ready to distribute.

Remember that you can also have treats and snacks on hand during the holidays for both the customers and their pets. Plan a day when you can host an Open House with cheese and crackers, cookies and other low cost treats. Maybe you will serve coffee and tea or soft drinks for the kids while holiday music plays in the background. You may not get every customer on your gift list to come, but invite them in even if they are not getting a groom. They will remember the event and may even come to expect it on an annual basis.

And speaking of holiday treats, you can really save by doing things the old fashioned way. Bake your own cookies and doggie biscuits, and then tie them in colored cellophane and ribbon. If someone as busy as you has the time to bake, you know your customers will appreciate your efforts! Pull out one of your relative's favorite holiday recipes to add some nostalgia.

The best thing to do is to be creative. Stretch your dollar for all it is worth while remembering to give gifts that your customer will use over and over again or display for a lifetime. Let your customers know how much you appreciate their business and the trust they place in you when they leave their pets in your care. A small token of your appreciation can go a long way in endearing your clients to you and your salon.

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