



GERONIMO
PROMOTIONS & EVENTS, LLC

THE NEW FACE OF PROMOTIONAL MARKETING

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It has been a long time since a lion of the advertising industry roundly damned and dismissed sales promotion by saying that it only served to detract from the critical brand image. Sadly, that perspective of the promotional marketing business still resides in a vast population of “old school” ad guys, as well as many of the younger executives who view it as an outdated practice and focus on the opportunities of new media and technologies.

In fact, the practitioners of promotional marketing have long been used to this mind set, and are doing quite well, nonetheless.... thank you very much. Industry professionals have been adapting to the changing landscape of marketing since Robinson, Frankel and Flair were founded in the early 1950s.

From their beginnings as point of sale, merchandising and premium companies, the forerunners of promotions agencies quickly became experts in sweepstakes, contests, coupons, rebates, sampling and all the other classic tactics. With the proliferation of promotional marketing, legalities got complex and changed state to state, and the promotion agencies learned and became experts at how to handle the morass of details as national programs got implemented with regional “heavy-up” campaigns, retail extensions and coordinated sampling tours.

So, when Direct Marketing became the next-big-thing, promotional marketing agencies were at the forefront. Likewise, as one-to-one marketing became the new buzzword, promotional marketing agencies quickly adapted and became the go-to resource for viral marketing, events, sports marketing, sponsorships, and even branded entertainment. Most have even taken the word “promotions” out of their names, and seem to go to great lengths to describe their core competencies with words like lifestyle marketing, interactive marketing, digital marketing, entertainment marketing, relationship marketing, shopper marketing, mobile marketing, and experiential marketing. It is not that any of these are incorrect in identifying specialties, but in the end they are just fancier words for describing what has always been known as promotional marketing agencies. You can dress them up and describe them differently, but virtually all of them had their antecedents as a sales promotion agency. If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck...

Don't get me wrong. Promotion agencies have adapted and grown astoundingly. This is meant not as a admonishment, rather it is meant as a huge commendation. In fact, I would venture that promotional marketing agencies, or whatever we call them today, won the war.

What war?

Remember the old days of above the line and below the line? Remember how promotions were so widely dismissed as irrelevant by the big ad agencies? Remember how the two worlds, advertising and promotion, fought so ferociously for the clients' marketing dollars often at the expense of the client? Those days. Many of you don't, but it was the reality of advertising and promotion into the 90s.

Then the internet, mobile phones, social media, and interactive platforms came along. Combined with the proliferation of media and cable channels, the splintering of interest groups and the waning influence of print, advertising was the discipline in jeopardy of becoming obsolete and irrelevant. On the other hand, complex messages in new mediums with minutely targeted audiences had long been the bailiwick of promotion agencies. Above the line and below the line were long gone. The only solution was to adapt, absorb or be absorbed.

Which is exactly what happened. Now we have a growing universe of massive conglomerate agencies like OMD, Draft FCB, Leo Burnett ARC and a host of others that bring together all the various disciplines of advertising, PR, promotions and media under one organizational roof.

No longer can enlightened advertising guys or gals look down at "promotions" as irrelevant, because it is an integral part of any conglomerate agency's business. More importantly, corporate spending on promotions is, and in fact always has been, greater than straight advertising and is critical to the overall growth of any company. So, now advertising guys and gals, if you can even say there is such a thing anymore, are working hand in hand with promotions folk, if there is such a thing. Together, they are creating multi-layered marketing programs that utilize all the tools and technology that is becoming available on a daily basis. In fact, any marketer who is doing the job right will go back to the original idea that they teach in graduate business school: a program works better if it includes all the elements of marketing... advertising, public relations and sales promotion. So, most agencies now include a discussion about promotions and PR at the outset of program development rather than as an afterthought.

So, sales promotion hasn't disappeared... it has just evolved as it always has.... and has put on its newest face: every agency in America.