

SAFETY FIRST:

A Guide to Safety Programs that Work - and Generate Business

A rise in the popularity of safety programs has encouraged many businesses to seek creative ways to encourage employees and potential customers to stay safe - and that has been nothing but good news for the promotional products industry.

BY SHANE DALE

Safety programs aren't only deemed necessary; they are labeled as fun, innovative, and even contemporary. Employees are rewarded for being cautious, and the general public is presented with entertaining information on how to maintain their health.

End-users across America have sought out exciting ideas and informative programs via advertising specialties. Whether these programs consist of outerwear to protect employees or informational material to inform the general public, distributors have convinced clients to relay a message that many, as recently as 10 years ago, thought would never catch on: It's hip to be safe.

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Decrease in Accidents Leads to Increase in Sales

When Rose Shorma, vice president of marketing for American Solutions for Business (*asi/120075*), was asked to provide a safety program for an advertising client that would prevent on-the-job injuries, achieve a 30% reduction in disability claims and a \$300,000 annual reduction in paid-out losses, she didn't sweat for one moment.

Shorma's distributorship has a history of making safety a fun and reward-based opportunity for its clients' employees. "The campaign used the acronym SEED for Safety: Every Employee's Duty, which also tied in to the agricultural nature of the advertiser," she says. "The kickoff event involved numbered buttons which, worn daily, entitled accident-free employees to take part in prize drawings."

American Solutions offered over 20 products, from hard-hat decals and key tags, to quarterly safety recognition awards, such as embroidered stadium blankets and radios, to help let its client's employees know that safety had become a serious issue by, ironically, creating a not-so-serious program.

And it was a phenomenal success.

"One hundred percent of the 600-plus employees participated," Shorma says. "At the end of the first four quarters, a 67% decrease in recordable claims was achieved, which was an all-time record."

Employee incentive programs have always been the cornerstone of any successful safety promotion for American Solutions. A craft-making company solicited Shorma for help when it wanted to promote employee safety to improve bottom-line profitability.

"With nearly 10,000 different craftpersons dispersed across 30 states, the ongoing safety promotion was designed to cover all areas," she says. "The slogan, 'Baker Safety: A Concrete Commitment,' was the basis for The Craftperson Incentive Award Program, consisting of quarterly campaigns featuring

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pre-established safety criteria."

Since many of Baker's employees often travel to out-of-town job sites, winners were awarded a black nylon shaving accessory bag, embroidered with the Baker slogan and a logo-imprinted implement set, along with a campaign sticker to display on their hard-hats. Other awards included sweatshirts and belt buckles with matching hard-hat stickers that a winner could add to his or her collection.

The program was, once again, a huge victory. "During the three-year campaign period, OSHA-recorded accidents dropped from 201 to 47, lost time reports due to accidents went down from 173 to 12, and insurance modifiers dropped from 1.58 to 1.15," Shorma says.

Solutions to Sickening Problems

Though gender equality has made a great deal of progress in America in recent decades, female business owners are still in a minority. For Fran Biderman-Gross, president of Advantages Printing Inc. (*asi/109385*) in Flushing, NY, being part of that minority has recently paid off.

Her distributorship has been certified by the federal government as a woman-owned business, which entitles her to receive government funds to level the male-dominated private playing field. "It's not about being poor; it's about being disadvantaged," she says. "I've definitely suffered from discrimination the last couple years."

However, it was not financial assistance, but the connections that Advantages made through its certification that presented Biderman-Gross with an opportunity late last year to prevent others from suffering - from the flu. "Our owner was at a networking event and she met Morton Everett from an affirmative action group," she says. "He said, 'I'm going to help you. I'm going to refer you to HHC.'"

HHC refers to the Health and Hospitals Corporation, a conglomerate comprised of 39 hospitals in the New York City area. Its task was to create an array of flu awareness materials in a campaign to keep New Yorkers healthy during the winter flu season. "I got to his assistant, who said, 'We ought to give you a break,' so we had to make a bid on 5,000 Frisbees," Biderman-Gross says.

So, just days after Thanksgiving, Advantages won the right to become the exclusive distributor for the project - and not only for Frisbees, but for buttons, bookmarks, flyers, tissue packs and hand sanitizers. "What could have been a logistical nightmare for the HHC became a walk in the park," Biderman-Gross says. "Advantages was able to assist the company in all aspects of managing the initiative, including printing the materials, organizing the packaging of deliverable items and arranging the actual delivery to the various HHC hospitals. The organization was able to achieve its goal of coordinating this campaign for the entire HHC network within five business days."

A bid of 33 cents per Frisbee turned into a \$40,000 project for the 15-year-old company - even as time was strongly against them. "I had six college kids packing for three hours. It was crazy," Biderman-Gross says. "My production manager did a phenomenal job."

In fact, the HHC was so impressed that the items were distributed to 20 of its hospitals - not just five or six, as originally discussed. "We couldn't have done it without a great production staff, but the vision to communicate how important tissues were and how important killing germs were had to come across," she says. "It was important to really satisfy their needs. It's not easy to please them. The more value we added, the more hospitals got on board."

Everybody's Safe, Everybody Wins

"Playing it safe" is generally thought of as a derogatory term in America. It certainly isn't a philosophy that's openly embraced in the business world.

So, Greg Edge, vice president of JEB Designs Inc. (*asi/232386*) in Fayetteville, NC, decided to help a certain client turn that phrase upside-down by helping

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Safety Slogans

The following safety slogans are provided by the Naval Safety Center:



- * A safer you is a safer me.
- * A spill, a slip, a hospital trip.
- * Alert today. Alive tomorrow.
- * An accident can ruin your career.
- * Apply your good intention to accident prevention.
- * As temperatures rise, stay safety wise.
- * Be a leader, follow safe procedures.
- * Be alert! Accidents hurt.
- * Before you do it, take time to think through it.
- * Don't learn safety by accident.
- * Double check to prevent a wreck.
- * Expect the unexpected. Gear up for safety.
- * Eyes are priceless, eye protection is cheap.
- * Get In S.T.E.P. Safety Takes Every Person.
- * Hard hats, they're not just for decoration.
- * Safety glasses: Making foresight 20/20.

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– Greg Edge,
JEB Designs (asi/232386)

to promote safety in the workplace. The North Carolina-based company, which JEB Designs has worked with for over 20 years, wanted a program in which employees were rewarded for being cautious.

“They wanted to institute a tiered reward program,” Edge says. “The awards were tiered so that the employees could accumulate their points toward large items, or they could cash them in along the way.

JEB Designs was able to supply many of the rewards the company sought. “The items ranged from things as simple as a stainless-steel travel mug, up to items provided by others, such as large electronics,” Edge says. “The safety director said the program was a huge success. The program lowered their loss time rate significantly and continues to be used.” In fact, the program is in its eighth year and starts over every two years.

Edge wasn’t comfortable telling *Advantages* what kind of business this client was running, but he says it doesn’t matter, since safety programs are such a necessity in so many areas, from wearing hard hats on a construction site to leaving beverages without lids next to a keyboard.

And they all need the industry’s help. “First of

all, they aren’t promotional people,” he says. “They need the guidance and knowledge of our associates. Promotional products provide a method for achieving a goal. If you achieve your goal, you are rewarded.”

Edge says an important factor for this particular program’s success is the communication, not only with his client’s upper-management team, but other employees down the chain, too. “We worked with the client’s safety committee to obtain their input as to the different reward levels, and not just their director,” he says. “This allowed the employees major input into the types of items to be used and gave them ownership in the program.”

One Good Program Deserves Another

“As the owner of my own distributorship for the last five years, I’m free to make decisions that create action immediately on my client’s behalf,” says Cathy Payson, owner and president of Lasting Impressions (asi/249844). “I have built relationships that help me to be aware of what they need and when.”

Such a relationship is similarly desired by suppliers vis-à-vis distributors. Michael Gisser, vice president of Toronto-based supplier Superex (asi/90231), is fortunate to have that kind of rapport with Lasting Impressions. So, when Lasting Impressions was asked by a large oil refinery to produce two safety-themed products last year – one in the spring of 2006, and one at the very end of the year – Payson called Gisser. “My relationship with Superex is relatively new – a couple of years,” she says. “I sought them out because I need excellent suppliers for my very serious mission of keeping people safe.

The two requested items were over 100 safety-themed 20th anniversary gifts for the company’s security department in the spring of 2006, and over 1,500 Auto Adventure Kits to be distributed to all employees and contractors. “The second was intended for use as a reward in the first week of January to mark one million safe work hours at the refinery,” Gisser says.

Payson says the client initially wanted everything completed before the year’s end, which gave her and Gisser just two weeks. “However, since they were talking about a holiday order that had to go through customs and ground ship across the continent, a reasonable delivery of ASAP, which is normal production time, was accepted. That gave us three weeks from start to finish,” she says.

And Superex came through in a big way with the first project, according to Payson, which led her to



turn back to Gisser and company later in the year. “They had a very informative catalog that gave me confidence to order several samples,” she says. “The security company at the refinery had previously commemorated their 20th anniversary with customized disaster preparedness kits. They were an excellent testimonial referral when it was time to make the decision to choose Automobile Adventure Kits.”

“The kit comes complete with tow rope, boost cables, a shovel and more,” Gisser says. “The item was a huge success, especially because they arrived just prior to a spell of bad weather. There have been two subsequent reorders since because the kits have been so popular. Cathy tells me that her client has told her that it has been their most successful program ever.”

And Payson believes the reason for the program’s success centers around – you guessed it – fun. “I have seen an increase in the demand for safety programs because making safety fun, and marketing safety actually works,” she says. “It is a super-effective tool in the environment where I work. Accidents cost lives and millions of dollars, and a lot of bad publicity. Keeping people safe keeps them alive, saves millions of dollars, and generates good publicity.” ▲

Sbane Dale is an AZ-based freelance writer.

Safety Stats

These are some of the latest workplace safety statistics provided by the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Nonfatal Injuries and Illnesses, Private Industry

- * Total recordable cases: **4,214,200 in 2005**
- * Cases involving days away from work: **1,234,700 in 2005**
- * Cases involving sprains, strains, tears: **503,530 in 2005**
- * Cases involving injuries to the back: **270,890 in 2005**

