The Power of the Pen

By Michael T. Ferris

What you give away speaks volumes about your agency. The reason for giveaways is to keep your name in front of the referral sources so that they will call when they have a need. Longevity, utility and uniqueness are attributes to strive for in selecting items.

Many referral sources think home care is home care. Don't perpetuate this feeling by giving out the same items. Always think creatively, stay on top of the new promotional items available, and be a leader not a follower. You must also keep up with what all of the other sales people calling on your accounts are distributing. Usually, drug representatives are the ones that are handing out the most giveaways; therefore you should know what they have and maintain your uniqueness.

Pens are an example; you should save your money if your pens will be boring. Think about which pens you like to use and why. Ask your intended customers what kind of pens they like. Let your best customers try samples when you are considering new pens. And make sure that they are going to be prized and not thrown in a bucket with all of the other humdrum pens. This is not to say that they have to be expensive, but better to spend a little more on better quantity pens. ***Tip: Find a Pen that is Comfortable to Use!***

Try to always tie your giveaway items into a campaign. If it is flu season, get an antimicrobial product and tie it to the importance of flu prevention in the elderly. Flu prevention items are especially well received in facilities. Make your campaign timely and consistent with your agency's identity. Any campaign, theme or message can be tied into a giveaway item.

When you print single page sell sheets, make them into useful reference tools. If you include a pharmacy list or other useful item on the back of your sheet, then you have increased the probability that it will be used and kept around. Look for ways to add value to the user, not just sell them something! When you are printing sell sheets, make sure to use an easy to understand graphical representation of your service area. Visuals, such as maps, are much easier for the user to understand, use and remember.

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Once you have found the items you plan to use, calculate the quantity you will need for the expected customer distribution. You should purchase at least a three month supply at one time. Usually I would suggest taking the number you estimate and adding 20 percent to make sure you have enough. This would not apply if you have a specific list and an exact number for the total promotion.

Work to make the giveaways personal. There are many items that can be produced now with specific names and messages at a reasonable cost. When you give someone an item that is of use to them and personalized– you will make an impact.

Here are key pointers:

1. Look at the budget and then find the BEST items (don't order first and think later!)
2. ASK your customers what they would find useful.
3. Make your giveaways MEMORABLE – be creative.
4. Find something that is FUN (when I asked some physicians what they liked one said, "Something that is fun and that I can take home to my kids to play with").
5. Tie the giveaway item into a campaign, theme or celebration.
6. Don't do what the competition is doing or what you have always done in the past.
7. Instruct the sales team on how to use the giveaway item(s) so that they are conveying the message and creating the desired result.

Good Luck and Happy Selling!

Sales Manager's Corner:

This month's issue is a question I receive frequently:

"What should I be focusing on, when I ride along with my sales people?"

There are several different reasons to ride along with a sales person; coaching, evaluation and corrective/disciplinary action. For the purpose of this answer, we are going to limit the discussion to coaching. When coaching a sales person in the field, the sales manager should be looking for their ability to manage their accounts and territory, engage in pre-call planning and post-call documentation, ask good questions and discuss services appropriately. They should have their account information organized to make sure that they follow a proper sequence to their sales calls. They should be able to talk about the agency and using competitive knowledge, explain the benefits to the referral source.

The sales person should be asking good questions to determine the account's needs. The first step is to have a plan for each account before making the call. When riding along with them, force them to stop before walking into each call and think about the goal for the call. This way the questions asked will be right on target. The sales representative should be documenting the results of the call immediately after leaving the account and the follow up steps. This is when the sales manager should discuss how the call went. Ask the sales person how they think it went and what worked best and worst.

At the end of the day, the sales manager should review the day and give the sales person an evaluation of their skills. This evaluation should use a standardized format so that they can see their progress over time. The sales manager should ride with each sales person at least once a month.

Each month, I will address one issue or answer one question dealing with sales management issues. Feel free to submit questions to cat@nahc.org.

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