



## My Secret for Creating Clever Holiday Promotions on the Cheap

I'm going to reveal a couple of things about myself that you may or may not already know. In business and in life, I'm thrifty and I'm crafty. Or maybe I'm just cheap and creative, but either way, I have been known to throw together some pretty impressive marketing campaigns on a (broken!) shoestring budget. Herein, I will share one of my most recent (quite successful) marketing projects that cost me well under twenty bucks.

As a thrifty, crafty marketeer, I have a few habits that facilitate my ability to whip up über-economical promotional campaigns all year long. One of these habits is scouring the post-holiday clearance sales for all manner of treasures that can be incorporated into upcoming promotions. One of my never-miss post-Christmas rituals, for example, involves visiting my local World Market store to capitalize on the 75% discounts they offer on their Christmas merchandise. (For those of you unfamiliar with World Market, they carry, among other things, a cool collection of imported gourmet foods, gifts, jewelry, décor, etc.)

So, as usual, during the week after Christmas, I headed there in search of any Christmas items that could be "reinterpreted" as Valentine's Day items. Jackpot! Among the pink peppermint pigs and gourmet candy canes, I found five boxes of hollow Italian chocolate champagne bottles, wrapped individually in pretty foil wrappers with little champagne labels printed on them. Each bottle was about four inches tall or so. Each box contained 16 bottles and was regularly priced at 13.99. But at 75% off, each box was now only 3.50. I bought all five for a grand total of 17.50.

Next, I dug into my stash and found five rolls of red, white, burgundy, and gold curling ribbon that I had purchased the day after Christmas at CVS Pharmacy for five cents per roll (they weren't wasting any time and had already marked their Christmas stuff down by 90%!). For those bean counters among you, that brings my project total to 17.75.

Next, I grabbed four packages of Valentine cards that I had picked up after last Valentine's Day which had been in Target's "Dollar Spot," but which had been marked down to 25 cents per pack. I also collected a pack of Valentine's Day stickers that had also come from the "Dollar Spot" and had also been marked down to 25 cents. That's 19 bucks we're up to now.

I used a paper cutter to slice & dice the red & heart-patterned Valentine cards into rectangular tags, and I used a hole punch to punch a hole into the corner of each one.

Then I pulled out five sheets of printable mailing labels, and printed one of the two following messages on each one (along with our business name, website, and phone number) via my desktop printer:

"This Valentine's Day, may all your aches be cupcAKES and all your pain be champAGNE. ...But if they're not, come see us for a massage!"

“Tired of hearing your Valentine ‘wine’ about that aching back? A Valentine’s Day Massage Gift Certificate will get your Sweetie feeling ‘bubbly’ again!”

Then, one evening as I sat watching our most recently delivered NetFlix movie, I stuck one of the labels to each tag, tied a tag to each bottle, and curled the ribbon to make each one extra “purdy.” Then, for the “pièce de résistance,” I stuck a few cute Valentine’s Day stickers to each tag.

Voilà! For less than twenty bucks (and a couple of hours’ worth of assembly), I had a basket full of “take away” gifts to give to each client who came in for a massage during the two weeks leading up to Valentine’s Day.



I also sent a bagful of these little goodies home with a client who is a teller at a bank just down the street from our clinic so that she could distribute them to her co-workers. And I took some across the street to another bank that just recently opened – who could argue that \*chocolate\* isn’t the ideal way to introduce yourself to new neighbors?! (And yeah, we’ve got a lotta banks in our ‘hood.)

And don’t worry; the boxes in which the chocolate bottles came said, “Best by: June 2012.” I certainly wouldn’t have done myself any favors by handing out old, stale chocolate. And, needless to say, of course, I made sure that I tested one (or, ok, two) out before distributing them to our clients.

So, while I wouldn’t expect it to be possible for anyone to replicate this exact promotional campaign, the moral of the story is this: Always be on the lookout for elements for your next marketing campaign, and make the most of what you find. This often involves working “backward,” meaning you have to build your campaign around what you find rather than creating a campaign and then going out to collect the elements you need to put it together. This is one of those rare times when it makes sense to put the cart before the horse.

And when it comes to holiday promotions, I suggest not only perusing the post-Christmas sales, but also the sales that immediately follow all of the holidays (Valentine’s Day, Easter, etc.). And when doing so, try to look at the merchandise you find in a different light. In the example I discussed herein, I was able

to look at the chocolate champagne bottles (that had originally been intended as Christmas items) and recognize that champagne bottles have every bit as much to do with Valentine's Day as they do with Christmas. And certainly, there is a myriad of merchandise that is cast off by retailers in the days after Christmas simply because it's red (which is, of course, conveniently enough, the official color of Valentine's Day!).

I've also picked up deeply-discounted bat-themed items after Halloween that I've then incorporated into a promotion that coincided with Austin's Bat Festival later in the year. At Christmas time, you'll find plenty of dove and / or peace-themed items that could later be incorporated into a World Peace Day campaign the following November. If someone (other than me) had had the forethought to buy up some rabbit items during last year's post-Easter sales, they could have been conducting a super cost-conscious "Year of the Rabbit" Chinese New Year promotion right now.

Granted, in order to take advantage of post holiday sales and "flip" merchandise into a promotion for another holiday, you must have the space in which to store the stuff, along with the organizational skills to be able to find the stuff when you need it (both of which can be tough). But organizing and labeling things by color or by the graphic that appears on them (versus by holiday or season) can be helpful. So for example, instead of labeling a box "Christmas," organize and label the boxes as "Red," "Doves & Peace Signs," "Rabbits," etc.

But, if you're like me, and can easily find any excuse to create a promotional campaign, then you'll likely find all of this fun. And for those of us who often find ourselves with more time than money in our marketing budget, conducting what appear to be expensive promotional campaigns requires some creativity, thrift, organization, and time investment. But you're up for the challenge, right?

For now, I need to go and see one of the four new clients who have called me from the banks I mentioned. And in closing, remember that when it comes to creating memorable, effective marketing campaigns, it's all in the execution, not necessarily the expense!

