

Villa Park firm provides “scratch and win” marketing

Robust Promotions LLC has a message for multi-unit restaurants and other retail businesses seeking not only to survive, but thrive in a down economy.

When there is an itch to grow sales, just scratch it.

The Villa Park-based promotional marketing firm's scratch-to-win expertise has fueled sales for nearly 100 restaurant chains in less than two years. Now the company is applying the same principles to give a boost to companies in other industries, and has added employee incentive promotions to spur sales.

The company offers a turnkey system that encompasses details from conception to execution, including prize selection consulting, legal, graphic design, shipping, high-security printing and collating and market analysis reporting.

Through the first three quarters of 2008, the company has more than quadrupled its combined 2006-2007 sales, said Greg Seei, Robust Promotions' founder.

Seei conceived the customer loyalty program in 2002 as he took a master's business class at the University of Chicago.

With nearly one million restaurants in the United States, and six cents from every dollar of the U.S. economy spent inside them, he viewed it as a huge market opportunity.

Capitalizing on Americans' insatiable appetite for playing games of chance, Robust has helped clients hit the jackpot by enticing repeat visits from its customers. Business also grows through word-of-mouth “buzz,” as people spread the word about promotions.

On average, about 20 percent of patrons have redeemed their cards, or “bounced back” to restaurants that have hired Robust

Promotions.

Seei advises clients to offer prizes that are substantial enough to stir interest, but not so large that they cut into their financial bottom line.

Two examples are Armadillo Willy's in California and Coffee Beanery, each with a variety of locations in the country. Both companies guaranteed at least a free non-alcoholic beverage as a prize.

The Grand Prize for Armadillo Willy's was a catered barbeque for 100 people, while Coffee Beanery's grand prize was a weeklong Jamaican trip for two.

Then comes this crucial step: In order to qualify for a grand prize, patrons must surrender their contact information—typically an elusive, costly proposition for businesses.

Business author and marketing consultant Tom Feltenstein said Seei and his business partner, wife Leslie Allison-Seei, “get the job done.”

“When they make a promise, they deliver on it,” Feltenstein said. “They're capitalizing on the popularity of lotteries and what the Publishers Clearing House did. People love the element of surprise.”

Business people, however, do not appreciate the shockers that have marred the promotions industry reputation—such as the failure to secure grand prizes or bureaucratic errors that result in too many winners.

To head off that concern—and to ensure the games comply with all applicable laws—Robust Promotions has retained Winston & Strawn, one of the oldest and largest law firms in the country which also handles the McDonald's Monopoly game.

Shanga Hankerson, president of Gladys & Ron's Chicken and Waffles in Largo, Md., discovered



Greg Seei, owner of Robust Promotions LLC.

Photo submitted by Matt Baron

Robust Promotions when he went through a drive-thru of one of the firm's first clients, El Pollo Loco.

“I got my prize and immediately thought to myself, ‘Man, this is exactly the kind of thing I need to drum up sales in my slow period,’” Hankerson recalled.

In addition to boosting sales with Robust Promotions' help, Gladys & Ron's has collected hundreds of e-mail addresses that the restaurant will contact to create ongoing, targeted marketing campaigns.

“It's an awesome tool if the rest of your structure is sound,” said Hankerson. “You can't beat it.”

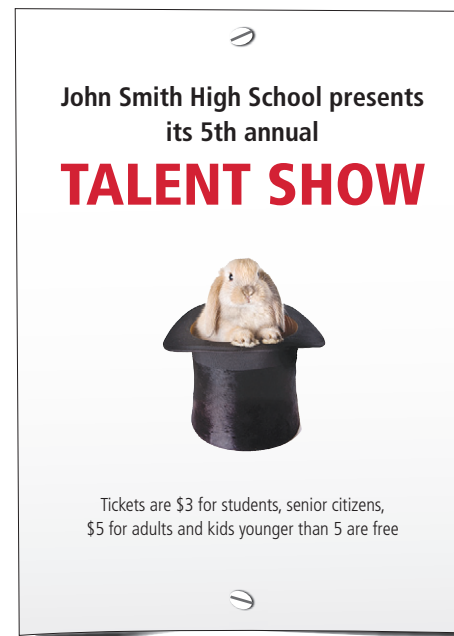
He retained Robust Promotions for the chain's three locations, and will be doing so again when a new location opens in December.

That bounce-back business for the firm bodes extremely well for 2009 and beyond.

Of the firm's nearly 100 clients, all but two have either engaged the firm for another scratch-to-win campaign or expressed plans to do so, Seei said.

— Matt Baron, Inside Edge PR

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