

DESIGN EXPRESS

The graphic services newsletter for promotional products pros



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PENS STILL PROMINENT EVEN IN A DIGITAL WORLD



No matter whether you're an iPhone user or have an Android, there's one tool that you and everyone you know will use for the rest of your life. It's not the latest tablet, **smart watch** or anything that needs electricity of any kind.

According to an infographic published by the Advertising Specialty Institute in *Counselor* magazine, pens and other writing utensils are dominant products. Better yet, **pens as promotional products are here to stay**.

More than half of Americans — 56 percent to be exact — own some sort of branded writing tool, whether it's a basic vinyl rendition, a mechanical pencil, or a quality refillable metal-bound pen. Apparently, pens are so popular and useful that environmental bloggers praise **their usefulness and easy impact on the office and the environment**. Meanwhile, some comic writers have even devised **smart strategies to keep people from stealing their pens**.

Don't think that branded and logoed pens appeal only to upper echelon service-based businesses such as accountants, law firms, stockbrokers or realtors. In fact, these popular promotional products work just as well for local auto body shops, house painters, caterers, restaurants and repair services. You need only show your small to medium size business (SMB) customers the wide variety of options available.

Luxurious Looks or Nostalgic Charm

QUICK NEWSLETTER SURVEY

Would you recommend this newsletter?

Nope ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☒ 5 For sure

UPCOMING EVENTS

ASI Show!

Orlando, FL
January 19-20
Exhibiting, Booth #1347

PPAI Expo

Las Vegas, NV
January 10-12
Attending

ASI Show!

Dallas, TX
February 2-3
Exhibiting, Booth #1048

PPAI Expo East / ISS

Atlantic City, NJ
March 23-25
Exhibiting

NOTABLE QUOTES



"A people that **values its privileges above its principles** soon loses both."

— Dwight D. Eisenhower

The *South Bend Tribune* wrote earlier this year that **demand for pens has grown worldwide** both from consumers and from businesses. The newspaper mentioned different trends popping up in the U.S. and in emerging markets.

“Demand for basic writing instruments is high in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East due to the increasing population and literacy levels”, the *Tribune* said. Meanwhile, in the United States and the west, the report added that “the demand for luxury pens is higher ... as gift items (that) are nowadays perceived as fashion accessories, similar to high-priced watches.”

As we discussed in Idea Custom Solutions’ weekly blog, **fountain pens have made a comeback**. Along with metal ball point pens, they are an increasingly popular promotional product choice for businesses that want to offer their customers gifts or something for everyday use that has a touch of style and sophistication. Some of the appeal might be the nostalgia trend.

“Part of the resurgence is the infatuation with vintage in pop culture, fashion and design,” *Counselor* writes. For example, “vinyl record sales (rose) 52 percent in 2014 and then rose again by 30 percent last year ... according to Nielsen.” Other vintage items that tap into retro fashions of the 1960s and 70s, including Polaroid cameras and vintage jackets and accessories, are trendy again.

At the same time, style never goes out of style. Major global brands have started to use elegant high-end promotional products to reel in business. For example, The Robb Report announced that **BMW dealers are now offering BMW-styled blue jewel Montblanc pens to new car buyers**.

Basic but Classy

That said your SMB customers don’t have to go high-end to boost their brands. **There are a ton of basic but classy writing instruments available**. SMBs can opt for stylish, shiny metal-finish pens and pencils, or choose more bright and colorful options that allow for the imprinting of logos in an assortment of colors.

Some of the “editor’s picks” from ASI’s in-depth look at style and product last spring revealed that variety of options. **Various items are designed with specific SMB customers in mind**.

- Pens made of recycled bottles or bamboo and perfect for healthy living stores, health and wellness practitioners or even the environment-conscious
- Multi-function stylus-pens appeal to gadget enthusiasts and tech firms
- Pens with a built-in screwdrivers work for handy types and fix-it firms
- Classic ballpoints are a favorite with salespeople, members of academia and others who need pens at their fingertips

Moreover, ASI identified an entire range of **professionals that rely on pens with different requirements** and stories.



“There is no real security except for whatever you **build inside yourself**.”

— Gilda Radner



“Plan your work for today and every day, then **work your plan**.”

— Margaret Thatcher



“I’m different, and my manner invites questions. **I’m never afraid to answer**.”

— Marlee Matlin

When it comes to presenting options to earn new customers, ASI recommends a few preparatory steps. In addition to showing the different products available, ASI says it is best to create packages based on what your customers' needs are and specifically geared to target their audiences.

Something else to cover is **helping customers utilize different promo products to showcase their logos** and include important contact information, website URLs, social media handles, and even names of products and services.

Whatever writing implements your customers choose and the details they decide to feature, reach out to Idea Custom Solutions for **the best in vector artwork** to make their logos shine.

CONQUERING CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS WITH COMMUNICATION

All businesses have them: customers who are just a little more demanding, require a little more attention and can be a little more difficult to deal with than the rest.

For promotional products distributors, it might seem that every customer is absolutely vital and must be cherished. It's commonly thought that tough customers are a reality you have to deal with, no matter the sector in which you operate. Yet, lots of times "the squeaky wheel" might be the customer we need for revenue but also to keep us on our toes.

Relationships, as we have discussed many times before in the Idea Custom Solutions' blog, are the glue that holds you and customers together beyond any sales transactions. Handling those who are more difficult to please requires that you exercise patience, while being eager to learn and help.

Listen and Communicate

Sometimes — perhaps most times — when customers appear challenging, it may be that they have an unexpressed need or business problem you haven't yet understood. *Inc.* magazine highlighted this phenomenon in a post earlier this year called, "**The Right Way to Handle Difficult Customers**". Typically, the post's author writes, opportunities to improve your business and relationships with customers can be buried in complaints or other requests from them for service.

"It's a fallacy to assume that just because someone is behaving wildly," *Inc.* says of the tough customer, "(that) his or her argument has no merit. Complaints, even angry ones, can contain insight; it's your job to seek out the friction."

Keeping an open ear and open mind is also helpful in reassuring your customers and, when they are hostile, disarming them. Nicole Leinbach-Reyhle, a contributor to *Forbes*, advises that being attentive and responding is critical, no matter what the issues are. Specifically, the first step to resolving needs, Leinbach-Reyhle says, is to **let customers communicate how they feel**.



"It is amazing what you can accomplish if you **do not care who gets the credit.**"

— Harry S. Truman



"**Know the business**, learn the business, own something."

— Isaac Hayes



"Leaders lead but in the end **it's the people who deliver.**"

— Tony Blair



"**Don't compromise yourself.** You are all you've got."

— Janis Joplin

CLIENTS ARE RAVING

"Thanks so much for your superior service, Joanna! Your design quality is amazing and we have very few issues when sewing them

“Giving your customers time and space to ‘vent’ is often all they need to help move forward towards resolution,” she writes, and “that by letting the customer do so you automatically support them in their role as a customer.”

Whether your instinct is to apologize for their displeasure, or remedy it with direct action — such as replacing a product, repairing something, or offering a credit or refund — listening goes a long way to building additional trust for your business with customers.

Improve for Ongoing Growth

Part of the success of any SMB comes from the value that you provide customers, both new and long-term ones. Surely, you would not be in the market you are in if you didn’t add something valuable to the people you serve. So don’t be afraid to take inventory once in a while.

Remember that your brand and the reputation of your business **come not only from the products and services you sell initially, but also in follow-up services provided.**

With that in mind, it doesn’t hurt to let customers know what you’re doing to help them when a request for service arises. According to *Entrepreneur*, **one secret to keeping customers is constant open communication.** Always be upfront with customers on how you can help them, as well as what you will do to fix mistakes or remedy problems. Most importantly, let them know what you did once you have resolved their complaints.

In the end, remember also that the difficult or demanding customer isn’t all bad. Peter Scocimara, a support services director for Google, also wrote recently for *Entrepreneur* and argued that **it is the demanding customers who help business owners the most** to develop in the long run.

Scocimara writes that if you utilize clients’ “high expectations as an opportunity to learn, engage and better understand them, you will make better products, inspire your employees and create customer advocates for your business.”

Specifically, customers that request better performance from the businesses that serve them, Scocimara writes, motivate us to lean toward our best business instincts. Ingenuity, problem solving and foresight into preventing and resolving future problems down the road all come from the experiences we have in pleasing customers.

Idea Custom Solutions looks forward to supporting you. Whether you need vector artwork, embroidery digitizing, image editing, marketing materials or any other graphic services, our goal is to make you look good by delivering **reliable, quality and cost-effective designs** you and customers can count on.

HOLIDAYS ARE (ALMOST) HERE — HELP SMBs PLAN

It’s hard to believe that **Thanksgiving is just next week.** In many parts of the country, it’s still warm and the leaves are a rich bright green. But businesses in every sector of the economy are shifting their marketing

out. You are great partners to us and I appreciate you all very much.”

**Major international
retailer/etailer**

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



Abhijeet Garate

Unit Process Specialist, Order Entry

Abhijeet joined Idea Custom Solutions back in 2012 as a junior team associate. Since then, he has performed well and achieved the position of unit process specialist. In his role, he is responsible for training, quality analysis, documenting processes and bridging knowledge gaps. He also provides support on the production floor to all team members and designers.

His promotion to this job is his proudest accomplishment so far. He says, “I am accountable for the performance of entire team, so I learned how to deal with difficult people and situations, while also motivating people.” About the company, he thinks outsiders should know it is a great place to work. “We hire people and develop them into professionals.”

He lives with his parents and sister and enjoys cooking delicacies of his hometown, Ratnagiri.

efforts and promotions toward the winter holidays including Christmas, Hanukkah and New Year's Eve.

Major retail outlets across the nation will announce sales while filling the aisles with candy canes and decorations. Meanwhile, SMBs will tap into holiday marketing not with TV commercials bearing elves and snowflakes, but in the same way they always have, by leveraging relationships with good old-fashioned personal contact. However, they still need help preparing their programs.

As a promotional products distributor, you can definitely help your customers get ready for the upcoming holiday opportunities. *Promo marketing Magazine* served up smart ideas on what SMBs can buy to strengthen their marketing messages and some tips to get the ball rolling.

First off, *promo marketing* contributor Ashley Chiaradio states that ordering early is great advice for your customers hoping to **add some cheer to the fourth quarter**. Specifically, she reminds us that the “holiday season always sneaks up on people,” and your SMB customers — just like everyone else — will be balancing normal business hours with seasonal celebrations and family commitments during the reputed most wonderful time of the year.

“Before you know it, we’ll be wrapping gifts and stringing lights,” she writes, advising the right now is the time to check in with customers about their promotional efforts. Moreover, she writes that it is okay for you and your clients to be inspired by retailers in **making holiday sales efforts a little early**.

But when it comes to promotional products, what works? Does everything have to be red and green? For many SMBs, just doing something connected to the holiday trend may be enough.

Chiaradio also recommends items that play up the celebratory nature of the holiday month, such as **food items** and collectibles like tree ornaments or **fun holiday toys**. Or help your customers **bundle up their best clients** with **warm outerwear** and **fleece hats** emblazoned with companies’ logos. Of course, there are also the quirky “**ugly Christmas sweaters**” and “**ugly Hanukkah sweaters**” that continue to be hits with customers reveling in the jolly side of the season.

Even if your main customers don’t bite on holiday promotions, they will need to plan ahead for 2017 soon enough. And they will appreciate the marketing and promotional expertise you bring them throughout the calendar year.

Regardless of how much you sell at this time, Idea Custom Solutions is ready to provide support for all your vector artwork and embroidery digitizing designs for decorating items. If you plan to provide detailed proposals featuring various products or update your website with new options, we can provide image virtual samples and image editing — all at great prices and in 24-hour turn times! To get a sense of the quality and breadth of our work, check us out on Instagram: [idea_custom!](#)

In his free time, Abhijeet likes to play cricket with friends. But whenever he gets a chance, he tells us, “I escape to places where I can find nature’s beauty and capture pictures of the scenery with my camera. My favorite subjects are sunsets and my dream is to visit Iceland. It’s a heavenly place which has amazing sites for sunset photography.”

Abhijeet would like to be known for his work and artistic abilities. He tells us, “I am a simple, shy and reserved person. I live by my principles and I strongly believe that genuine efforts bring beneficial results.”

TWEET THAT!

Reusable water bottles are popular now and come in durable forms. Hide-away ones a new [#PromoProduct](#) trend. <https://goo.gl/iQ7bvl>

[Tweet That!](#)

Many businesses welcome employees with “swag” or [#PromoProducts](#). Some of the best are from ad agencies. <https://goo.gl/FX3H4r>

[Tweet That!](#)

Kitchen products and housewares are [#PromoProducts](#) people keep. Keep [#SMB](#) brands “in house” at all times. <https://goo.gl/sHdp6u>

[Tweet That!](#)

Licensed sports merchandise makes for amazing [#SMB](#) [#PromoProducts](#). The market is growing. <https://goo.gl/J9z8EU>

[Tweet That!](#)

Matches are a favorite [#PromoProduct](#) of hotels and restaurants. Here are NYC’s best ones: <https://goo.gl/swYrxx>

[Tweet That!](#)

Stylish pens couple SMBs’ [#logos](#) with class, and are handy and useful for

[Tweet That!](#)



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Embroidery Digitizing



Vector Artwork



everyone.
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Top 10 tips for getting business from
[#TradeShows](#).
<https://goo.gl/UB6qs2>

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It's on towels, drinkware and wearables, but the Chicago Cubs' "W" [#logo](#) has been around for ages.
<https://goo.gl/KiOshW>

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What's the key to a world class business [#logo](#)? Here is an [#infographic](#) with 7 great tips.
<https://goo.gl/nXw3Kh>

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Our experts say that there are 7 distinct [#logo](#) types. This [#infographic](#) lays it all out.
<https://goo.gl/ORsHd6>

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Starbucks, MasterCard and other major brands are shedding words in their [#logos](#). Should your business?
<https://goo.gl/41zZdT>

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