

Increasing accessories sales

By Kathy Witt

As customer dissatisfaction with the airlines grows and accessories to make travelers more comfortable while flying seem to multiply exponentially, how can retailers market and sell these accessories most effectively to the consumer?

Paul Kiewiet, president and CEO of BrandKiwi, LLC, and the immediate past chairman of the Promotional Products Association International (PPAI), offers some insight on maximizing accessory sales for travel goods retailers.

“A lot of promotional products would make good gifts with purchases for the retailer,” says Kiewiet, who is also a master advertising specialist, the advertising industry’s most prestigious designation, achieved by less than 5% of industry professionals.

According to Kiewiet, such a B2C program could work for big box, independents or ecommerce retailers — even manufacturers featuring a consumer promotion and executing it through a retailer. He suggests offering an inflatable pillow or other accessory item with a luggage purchase or offering free accessory items with different purchases or as part of a loyalty program. These items, or premiums, would be co-branded or imprinted with the retailer’s name.

“A retailer might run a promotion such as ‘Free Noise Cancelling Headphones when you spend \$500 in the Featured Department,’” he says. “In the manufacturer scenario, a luggage manufacturer might offer a backpack filled with travel comfort accessories as a gift with purchase at a featured retailer.”

Different dollar plateaus would be geared to different items: the noise-canceling headphones at a higher dollar level; ear plugs, antibiotic wipes and personal hygiene products or a small travel kit with blanket at a lower level.

“The biggest opportunity for retailers is to offer promotional products for free, a gift with purchase or as part of a loyalty program where consumers collect and earn points or reach a plateau of purchases.”

Kiewiet notes that there are retailers who do create special markets departments to sell to corporate opportunities (B2B).

“A points program or plateau program would be an ideal offering for retailers to use to incentivize the corporate market. Retailers do have a large proportion of the incentive,

premium and promotional spend of corporations — some of it by accident, some by design.”

Mark Kotzer, principal and founder of Venture Drive Consulting, whose clients have included Expedia and Weyerhaeuser, specializes in helping companies develop new lines of business. He believes that retailers can most effectively market and sell travel accessories by being innovative in how they reach their ideal customer — the frequent traveler.

“Retailers can achieve much greater efficiency in their sales efforts by focusing on opportunities to reach large groups of travelers rather than the individual traveler which tends to be the norm,” says Kotzer.

“For example, retailers could reach out to travel agencies, trade show and conference organizers, and to corporate travel managers of companies in their local market or market niche. While manufacturers do sell direct to the largest companies, they don’t have the sales force or the knowledge of the local market to make significant inroads. This presents an opportunity for the retailer with strong networking and customer relationship building skills.”

He suggests these strategies:

- Approach corporate travel managers of companies with a large number of employees that travel frequently. Kotzer says these employees will appreciate travel accessories that improve their productivity and comfort during flights.
- Promote travel accessories to national conference organizers and trade show managers. “Event organizers are always looking for novel promotional items to attach their company’s name to and provide to clients and sales prospects,” says Kotzer. “Accessories that improve the travel experience will generate goodwill for the company that provides the product.”
- Offer local travel agencies and hotels the opportunity to provide their customers with travel accessories as a special perk or reward to clients for booking with them. It may even be possible to brand the accessory with the name and logo of the travel supplier or retailer for particularly large orders.

Each of these solutions provides the travel accessory retailer with the opportunity to achieve multiple bulk sales, a cost-efficient approach that can only complement its traditional retail business. ■

