

# Here's a Revolutionary Idea: Guarantee Your Work!

Prior to founding The School for Promotional Marketing Inc., and our consulting practice, Hults Consultants in the summer of 1995, my partner and I operated a successful and profitable promotional products distributing company for 18 years. We believed our reason to exist was to provide innovative solutions (we won over 40 awards for creativity) to our clients and deliver those solutions, never failing to meet an agreed-upon deadline. We believed we had to deliver services without peer in the industry - and to do so on a routine basis.

To distinguish our company from our competitors, we examined our market, looked for competitive weaknesses and set out to fill the gaps. In return, we expected to charge our clients prices for those products and services that allowed us to prosper personally, to invest in the growth of our firm and provide our employees with training, enabling them to be the best in the business.

When I first began to think about how typical promotional products companies operated, I wondered why we hadn't been able to overcome historical practices in an industry that is over 150 years old. Why, for example, didn't more companies offer to *guarantee* their products.

In most businesses, when a product is purchased the buyer expects the seller to guarantee his product and replace it or refund his money if it's defective in any way. Two examples:

- FedEx guarantees to deliver your package anywhere in North America by 10:00 a.m. the next day or your money is cheerfully refunded. We often say that we'll "FedEx" a package to someone. That changed the way the business of small parcel delivery is operated today.
- When you buy a new automobile, you expect the manufacturer will provide an extensive warranty. Those warranties generally cover repair and replacement of any defective part or system in the vehicle without question. The last car I purchased provided a three-year warranty, covering everything but oil changes.

Unfortunately, with many promotional products companies the maxim still seems to be "*let the buyer beware*". Suppliers sometimes claim products are produced to industry standards, but one wonders who established those "standards". Clients sometimes question that assertion with justification. Another issue: delays. Distributors blame suppliers, the weather and couriers for failing to meet scheduled deliveries. These facts led me to think about how to build a more professional business that delivered value to our clients without considering history at all.

Guess What? You're Responsible!

I considered the relationship between the clients and the various entities involved in the delivery of promotional products to them. I thought about whom clients expect to produce an order (or orders) for and the manner in which they expect those orders to be executed. I asked myself who the client considered to be responsible for quality and delivery of those orders. Finally, I examined who I consider to be responsible.

Typically included in the mix are one or more manufacturers/decorators, one or more graphic persons/companies, one or more courier/freight companies and the distributor organization. The question: Who is responsible for meeting the clients' deadlines for delivery, quality of the products involved and correctness of printing of those products?

The inescapable conclusion was that my company was responsible. Clients really don't care - **nor should they** - about the distributor's business problems. Clients don't really care - **nor should they care** - about the problems involved in meeting delivery dates. Clients don't care about the weather in another part of the country or another part of the world.

**Rightly**, clients' only concern is about whether or not the **distributor** meets their deadlines, delivering whatever it is the distributor agreed to deliver, and that it be of the quality promised. After all, clients make decisions to do business with a distributor based on the distributor's ability to do each of the things mentioned – routinely!

Once we accepted this responsibility, our next step was to deliver a written guarantee to perform.

Here is the one we used. Many of our consulting clients have adapted this wording as their own. Please feel free to use it in any form you feel appropriate to your company.

**(Insert your company name here)**

## **Here's our Total Satisfaction Guarantee.**

Few companies in the promotional marketing industry actually commit in writing to “total satisfaction” for their clients. We do! We know that when promotional products are manufactured, there are things that can and do go wrong. But we carry the burden so that you don't have to, regardless of the position of the manufacturer.

In other words, we deliver on whatever you have ordered, no matter what. Here is our commitment, in writing:

### **UNCONDITIONAL GUARANTEE**

(Insert your company name) unconditionally guarantees all products ordered by its clients to be exactly as presented and ordered without product or printing defects. If for any reason you are not 100% satisfied with a product, we will gladly replace it.

Prepare And Protect

Of course, once you create such a guarantee you must develop the systems to ensure your company delivers. It's necessary to look at deadlines in a different manner. Sometimes it's necessary to turn down business if you know it's physically impossible for your supplier to meet the schedule. Sometimes it's necessary to offer alternatives when the products/services you proposed as solutions to deadlines are impossible to meet. Sometimes it's necessary to have the client sign off, acknowledging that your guarantee isn't in effect if the client insists on products from a supplier with whom you have no relationship or experience.

Your own internal systems must be able to track progress accurately. You need to have "fall-back" positions in the event of an "act of God" that prevents the delivery of the original solution. You should consider creating a "preferred vendor" program based on quality, delivery and superior service. To make this program work, you must focus the majority of your business with those preferred vendors in order to ensure consistent, superior quality of the merchandise solutions offered to your clients.

When all this is done, you then should be able to offer an unconditional guarantee in complete confidence. In fact, you can use it as another tool to differentiate yourself from your competitors. The guarantee is a powerful tool when a prospective new client asks ["What makes you different from the others in your business? Why should we do business with your company?"](#)

This article is excerpted in part, from my lecture titled "Building Blocks for a Successful Promotional Products Business", delivered at various industry forums.

[Insert bio & photo. As in March 2009 issue, pg. 30](#)