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Tom Teach of Quality Foam Designs models some of the foam hats, claws and fingers his company creates. He was part of last week's trade show produced by the Advertising Specialty Institute, which is based in Trevese.

Your Logo Sells Here

By Stacey Burling
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In the advertising world, where fragmented media and products like TiVo have made it harder to capture an audience, the humble tote bag is rising.

Sales of promotional products — useful, often cheap things that bear a company logo like that mug on your desk — reached an all-time high of more than \$18 billion last year, according to Promotional Products Association International. They were up 4 percent, the association said, while TNS Media Intelligence reported that other forms of advertising spending rose 3 percent.

Promotional products are popular, industry leaders say, because the best of them stick around for months, subtly burning a brand name into a user's

Sure, on a shirt, a mug, a tote bag. But how about burned on toast? Or on rose petals?

brain. (One literally burns a brand name into toast.) Others are more short-lived, but amusing or crass enough to be memorable. And, of course, as some in the industry concede, some of the products are “cheap plastic stuff” that immediately gets lost in the children's toy bin.

Last week, about 2,500 distributors — the people who sell promotional products to the companies that put their logos on them — roamed the aisles of the Convention Center trying to separate the keepers from the future rejects.

At the trade show — produced by Trevese-based Advertising Specialty Institute, a company that brings together suppliers and distributors — 450 suppliers represented by friendly salesmen hawked their wares to dis-



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Among items on display last week that can be imprinted with business logos and other messages are protective covers for iPods or the petals of live roses.



tributors carrying plastic bags or even suitcases for samples.

ASI, which also publishes trade magazines and hosts Web sites, produces four similar shows nationwide. It has about 450 employees and produces more than \$60 million a year in revenue, president Tim Andrews said.

The Promotional Products Association is running a similar trade show expected to draw 4,200 distributors to Atlantic City on Tuesday and next Wednesday.

ASI's two-year-old Philadelphia show, considered a fairly small one in the industry, was a display of sheer capitalistic ingenuity — and proof that you can slap a logo on almost anything.

As one might expect, there were many variations on the perennial favorites: wearables (T-shirts, golf



CHARLES FOX / Inquirer Staff Photographer

The Advertising Specialty Institute, a Trevese company that matches buyers with sellers of promotional products, held its trade show in Philadelphia last week. The exhibits offered proof that you can slap a logo on almost anything, including flower petals and toast.

A place a logo can call home

shirts, caps, jackets, etc.), pens, and brightly colored water bottles and mugs. One salesman proudly pointed out a square mug that fits in a round hole. On top of that, there were flashing badges, iPod covers, flashing plastic ice cubes, rubber duckies, stethoscopes, tattoos, voice-recording refrigerator magnets, big umbrellas for the golfer and small ones for the jar opener.

Dean Hammond, an account manager for Indianapolis-based Norwood Promotional Products, sells one of the old standbys: calendars. Norwood produces the Playboy calendar and the Son of God calendar. What better advertising than something someone looks at every day? Hammond calls it "timed-release marketing."

For trendier buyers, there were real roses with logos imprinted on their petals. The flowers, produced by Speaking Roses International, of Salt

Lake City, come in white, pink, red and yellow for \$69.95 a dozen.

Jay Butera, president of Spring Mill Home Products in Gladwyne, used a microphone to grab attention for his product: a device that pops the seal on jars. It has been available in retail stores for a decade, but entered the promotional-products market three years ago. "It's the world's easiest jar opener," Butera said with a carnival barker's zest. "It's a very effective promotional product . . . because people will keep it for years and see that logo every day when they use it."

One of the latest things is a toaster that imprints a logo on the bread, the sort of thing a hotel might love. "The promotional product is actually the bread," Andrews said.

The competition included flip-flops with parts of the soles cut out so wearers leave branded footprints. And a sock-puppet frog that croaks children's songs. Then there's the logo bean, a bean seed with a logo pressed into both sides. Its leaves emerge with the logo printed on them. We'll have to take Andrews' word on that. The plants didn't make it to this fair.

Sales of promotional products — like mugs — reached an all-time high of more than \$18 billion in 2005.



A Vonco Products dancer was hard at work last week at the promotional-products show at the Convention Center.

Distributors, cell phones to their ears, looked for the best buy on specific items, while keeping an eye out for the latest great idea.

Alan Pestcoe, of Holland, Bucks County, said it was the "standards" such as pens, coffee mugs, and Post-it notes that stayed on people's desks. "I find that the hot item in January is the close-out item in December," he said.

Kate Rodgers and JoDee Russell were there to check out the quality of catalog merchandise and logo imprinting for their employer, Office Depot.

It is fun to see the new stuff, Rodgers said, but most of the show is really about new ways of packaging the old stuff. She was impressed, for example, with ASI's name-tag apparatus. A tube of lip balm, enclosed in a little fabric tube, was hooked to the lanyard.

"Each year, a million people give out lip balm," she said. "You have to find ways to make the lip balm more interesting than it was yesterday."

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