



The winter holiday season has passed (except for Valentine's Day), but holiday sales are far from over. From Black History Month to Oktoberfest, you can help put the "sell" in celebrations and give everyone a reason to party, promote and commemorate ethnic events year-round.

CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS

BY JULIE A. CAJIGAS

Once the New Year's resolutions have been made (and almost immediately broken), many of us mourn the end of the holidays for a moment and prepare ourselves to trudge on with the rest of our yearly routine. Even the promise of Valentine's Day might not cheer us up, and we don't begin to perk up again until a favorable result on Groundhog Day, or the first warm breeze at Easter-time. That is, of course, unless you live in New Orleans.

In New Orleans, the 12th day of Christmas, January 6, marks the opening of the Mardi Gras season. That's when Yvette Hymel and Rachel Zabala, owners of Proforma Key Solutions (*asi/300094*) kick into high gear. They have provided a number of Mardi Gras items since their grand opening in 2005, including promotions for a new client in 2008, a "King Cake" bakery. King Cake is a tradition that originated in France: twisted pastry frosted with Mardi Gras colors is eaten starting on Epiphany Day, the last day

of the 12 days of Christmas (and a partridge in a pear tree) and the official opening of Mardi Gras season. In Christianity, Epiphany is the celebration of the day the wise men found the baby Jesus, and the cake is baked with a tiny plastic baby inside that the revelers are supposed to find. Whoever finds the baby becomes the king or queen for the day, and their royal duty is to buy the next King Cake. Isn't that brilliant marketing?

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Hymel and Zabala have created a successful promotional marketing blitz for their King Cake baking client including Mardi Gras cups, branded pens and the ever-popular bottle opener. “Our client wanted inexpensive giveaways that could be handed out throughout the entire Mardi Gras season, that would be kept after the holiday has ended, as she offers cakes year-round,” says Hymel. “We came up with some fun items that would have a lasting appeal including a keyring bottle opener, which is a great gift to remind tourists and locals of the great time they had at Mardi Gras.”

Mardi Gras is a fun, exciting cultural celebration, but it’s certainly not the only one. Here are some cultural holidays that will extend your winter holiday season through spring, summer and fall (all the way until next Thanksgiving!) along with tips on how to find the markets and products that your clients will love, year after year.

Mardi Gras, Three Kings Day and Carnival - begins January 6th

Those may look like three separate holidays, but they are all closely related. Three Kings Day is a celebration of Epiphany that is a Caribbean holiday and is celebrated throughout Latin America. On the eve of the “dia de los Reyes,” the children in Puerto Rico set out hay for the wise men’s horses (much like cookies for Santa), while in Mexico, they set out their shoes. Regardless of what they set out, the children receive their gifts the next morning in this traditional holiday that pre-dates Santa Claus.

Much like Mardi Gras, Carnival is a continuous holiday season that occurs before Lent in the Christian tradition, with the celebration culminating on Fat Tuesday, or the day before the Christian Ash Wednesday. Carnival is celebrated all around the world, but most notably in Brazil and some island countries. Stephen Garst, owner of Proforma Promotion Consultants (*asi/300094*) was approached by a client looking for a way to stand out during Mardi Gras season.

“My client wanted to do a Carnival promotion to stand out from other beer brands that were promoting Mardi Gras,” he says. “Carnival is a lot like Mardi



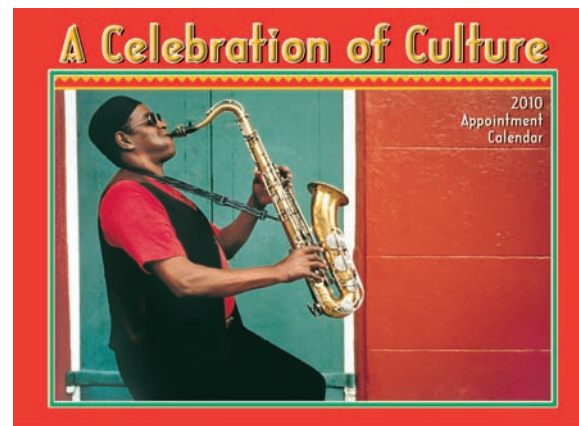
Get ready for a party in the Big Easy with these branded Mardi Gras decorations available from Beistle (*asi/39540*); (717) 532-2131; sales@beistle.com.

Gras, but it has more of an island feel.” His client was thrilled with his custom solution, which included everything from traditional beads and sequined masks to custom-designed feather headpieces and bongo drums, which he sourced from overseas. “The key is finding the perfect item that is new and different,” he explains. Mardi Gras and Carnival are perfect opportunities for you to sell fun promotional items that center around having a good time and give your client a great opportunity to reach out to their customers.

Mardi Gras/Carnival Sales Tip: “A great way to brainstorm ideas for a winning promotion is to get outside the box and search the Web,” says Garst. “The Internet is a great place to see what other brands have done and what promotions have been successful. Then, you can tweak it and give it a new twist for your client.”

National Black History Month - February (USA)

Black History Month is a time to remember the important people and events in the history of African Diaspora. The remembrance originated in 1926,



The perfect calendar to celebrate Black History Month. Available from Hotline Products (*asi/61960*); (800) 225-2114; customerservice@hotlineproducts.com.

when historian Carter G. Woodson, concerned that the many great contributions of Black Americans were being overlooked or misrepresented by historians, lobbied for a commemorative week. Woodson chose the second week of February because it *continued on page 82*

CaseStudy»

Party with Self-Promotions

Want to know how Nicole McNamee, outside sales representative for POP Solutions Group (*asi/359180*), turned \$1,000 into \$30,000? The answer is simple - a self-promotion party! March is a slow time for Nicole, so she put together an exciting St. Patrick’s Day onsite show to showcase all of the new products for the year and get clients thinking about upcoming events and conferences. The onsite show was held at the corporate office for her largest hotel client, the Hilton Family of Hotels, and several of the Hilton Brands were invited.

McNamee took this opportunity to lead by example, showing her clients how to successfully brand and execute a special event with promotional products. The invitations were puzzle magnets that were hung in each invitee’s cubicle with the text, “Do your promotions have

you puzzled? Save the Date!” Her name, phone number and e-mail were emblazoned on a separate magnet that could be easily separated from the puzzle and saved. For the show itself, Nicole created brand-specific gift bags that said “POP Solutions Group, Your Good Luck Charm,” and were filled with holiday branded items including a water bottle, a photo frame and a pen that said “Nicole McNamee and the Hilton Family - a Lucky Pair!” Another nice touch inside the bag was a thank-you note, thanking her clients for attending the event.

She also gave away goodies and shamrock cookies at the event, enticing people to stay and chat. “Over 125 people attended,” she says. She attributed the high attendance to hosting the affair on a holiday that isn’t often celebrated at work. “I made

so many additional contacts with decision makers and had sales happen right onsite,” she says. “People would bring me a shirt and ask if I could order it for them.” Planning ahead, McNamee had invited vendor representatives to join her for the day, and they were able to help her clients complete their orders on the spot. The show was a big success, to the tune of more than \$30,000 in sales, and the cost for the food and thank-you notes was just a little over \$1,000.

“I think any ethnic or cultural holiday would work well for this type of onsite event,” says McNamee. “Everyone was excited to participate. If it had been around the Christmas holiday, it might not have been so successful, because they are used to getting Christmas gifts, but another holiday like Cinco De Mayo or Oktoberfest would have probably been just as effective.”

marked the birthdays of two Americans who greatly influenced the lives and social condition of African Americans: former President Abraham Lincoln and abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Today, Black History Month has become a poignant month-long celebration of key events in Black history and the lives and achievements of African-American icons from Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. to Langston Hughes and Billie Holiday.

Don Michalik of Ad Ventures In Texas, Inc. (*asi/109420*) suggests one special way to add authenticity and heritage to an award for a Black History Month celebration. "An idea we came up with some time ago was to use 'Kente cloth' for the ribbon in the awards," he says. "Because it was a Black Heritage award, we used a traditional material typically found in African garments to add real meaning."

Another ideal product is a calendar, which will stay with the recipient all year round and can contain more information than many branded gifts. "A calendar is a great gift because we can include specific dates on the calendar blocks below that are ethnically related or are simply dates the client would like their recipient to remember," says Sig Birkeland, executive vice president for Hotline Products (*asi/61960*). Hotline's

"Celebration of Culture" calendar uses photos of African American families celebrating their cultural holidays throughout the year. Its family appeal and ability to integrate facts about Black history, special dates and other information makes it an excellent giveaway.

Black History Sales Tip: Instead of purchasing a calendar that starts in January for Black History Month, custom order a calendar that starts in February and contains important Black history milestones in the date blocks each month. "Minimums are declining on custom calendars," says Birkeland, "so it's something a lot of customers are doing now." Not only will your client appreciate the calendar starting during the month of their event/promotion, but their recipients will be looking for the calendar again the next year.

Chinese New Year - February 14th in 2010 (Year of the Tiger)

The year of the Ox based on the Chinese astrological calendar (2009), began on January 26, the day of the Chinese New Year or Spring Festival. The Chinese New Year celebration has a rich mythological history. The Chinese people have a legend about the

beast Nian, or "year" in Chinese, who would come and devour their crops, livestock and even children. According to the legend, a child wearing red scared away the monster, so villagers began to hang red lanterns and set off firecrackers to scare him off. While

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A beautiful red lantern is the perfect way to create ambiance for your Chinese New Year celebration. Available from Beistle (*asi/39540*); (717) 532-2131; sales@beistle.com.

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not an official holiday in the U.S., Chinese New Year is a great opportunity to create a promotion or charity event celebration.

One charity event that can be held on Chinese New Year is a Chinese raffle. Attendees purchase a number of tickets or “chances” and place as many tickets as they would like in a basket in front of the item they would like to win. At the end of the evening, the winning ticket is drawn from the basket in front of each item. If you have a client looking for an exciting, themed fundraiser or charity event, a 2010 “Year of the Tiger” dinner and Chinese raffle could be just the ticket.

Nicole McNamee, outside sales representative for POP Solutions Group, (*asi/359180*) provided her client with a complete package for a Chinese auction. “We provided everything from fortune cookies with custom messages and branded Chinese take-out boxes to chopsticks,” she says.

McNamee recommends the fortune cookies from supplier A La Carte (*asi/30350*) for your Chinese New Year event. The cookies she served up to her client had a custom message imprinted on the paper inside and were a big hit. With lots of fun products available, Chinese New Year is an exciting and un-tapped holiday to celebrate with your clients.

Chinese New Year Sales Tip: “Take a typical product that is readily available and use it creatively for a Chinese New Year promotion,” says McNamee. “A picture frame doesn’t scream ‘Chinese auction,’ but if you create a custom frame with the right decoration to fit the event, it can become a beautiful item that recipients hold on to long after the event.”

St. Patrick’s Day – March 17th

The national holiday of Ireland, St. Patrick’s Day is a celebration of the life of St. Patrick, a Catholic saint who brought Christianity to many of the Celtic Irish. Even though the color most associated with St. Patrick in Ireland was blue, green has become the color worn on this day. This is attributed to the tradition of the wearing of a shamrock on St. Paddy’s day because he used the shamrock to teach and convert the Irish.

St. Patrick’s Day hardly requires any explanation when it comes to promotional items. We’ve all seen the green beads, hats, glasses, shamrock tattoos, T-shirts, beer hats and many other green items sported by plenty of non-Irish folks out celebrating the day with a cold, green brew and some corned beef. From parades to bar hops to parties,



This hat is brimming with fun that will last long after St. Paddy’s day has passed. Available from Beistle (*asi/39540*); (717) 532-2131; sales@beistle.com.

the promotional opportunities are endless.

Once you get past the beer and corned beef at the corner pub, there are some other interesting promotional opportunities out there for St. Patrick’s Day that your competition may not have thought of: party decorations. Party favors are a big part of the promotional items associated with the day, including noisemakers, hats and beads, but what about party decorations like garlands, balloons and dangles? If you have clients or prospects with multiple offices or retail stores, let them know that you can brand a favor and decoration kit for their locations nationwide.

Beistle (*asi/39540*) specializes in creating custom party decorations and favor kits for every industry, from car dealerships to pub chains. “The best way to approach this type of promotion is to find out exactly what the client is looking for,” says Mike Fague, account executive with Beistle. “We can take all the ingredients and put them together in the perfect package to send to each of your client’s locations.”

St. Patrick’s Day Sales Tip: Don’t be afraid to suggest St. Patrick’s Day promotions to clients other than pubs and liquor companies. Banks, retail outlets, grocery stores and even car dealerships can get in on the fun of St. Paddy’s – the options are endless. Send out an e-mail in early February reminding your clients that St. Paddy’s day is coming up and is a great opportunity to touch base with their clients and play with the “luck o’ the Irish” for a promotion or two.

Cinco De Mayo – May 5th

Cinco De Mayo is a regional holiday in Mexico, celebrated in the State of Puebla, but is not a federal holiday in Mexico. In fact, the celebration of Cinco De Mayo, originally commemorating a Mexican victory in the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862, is very much limited to the Puebla region and is not considered a major holiday throughout the rest of Mexico.

In the U.S. however, it’s a pretty big deal and has become a date to celebrate the culture and experiences of Americans of Mexican ancestry. Much like St. Patrick’s Day, it has also become a day for revelry and celebration, regardless of your heritage. It has also become an important holiday in the school systems in which students are educated about Mexican culture.

All types of companies, not just the makers of Tostitos and Jose Cuervo, capitalize on the celebration by using it to promote their products and services.

Cinco De Mayo Sales Tip: While cultural holidays can often be a great way to reach the minority segments in your client’s market, it is important to be sensitive to the fact that not all Hispanics are Mexican, or identify with this particular holiday. When celebrating ethnic holidays, it’s often best to include all ethnicities in the celebration, rather



Celebrate Chinese New Year with a Chinese take-out carton filled with jelly beans.

photo courtesy of Lanco (*asi/66224*)

than singling out some segments or markets based on name or demographics that may or may not be a true indication of their cultural heritage.

National Hispanic Heritage Month – September 15th – October 15th

The observation of Hispanic Heritage Month started in 1968 and was solidified in 1988 by President Ronald Reagan as a 30-day celebration. September 15th was chosen as the starting date because it is the anniversary of independence for five Latin American countries, with two others celebrating their independence day within the next 30 days. Hispanic Heritage Month encompasses people of all Hispanic and Latin American backgrounds from multiple countries.

Vitronic Promotional Group (*asi/93990*) has partnered with



Created by Mexican artisans, this tote, based on traditional designs, is perfect for Hispanic Heritage Month. Available from Vitronic (*asi/93990*); (800) 398-3695; customer care@vitronicpromotional.com.

Rebeca Barrera, the principal of Tres Rebecas, to offer an item designed by Mexican artisans, the Mercado Tote, to the Hispanic market. "Rebeca is working with several different artisans and putting her spin on their designs for traditional fabrics and styles," says JoAnn Riley Beckman, director of marketing and product development for Vitronic. "Because this product is authentic and made in Mexico, it resonates with the Hispanic community." The Mercado Tote is now available to any distributor looking for a promotion that will resonate with a Hispanic audience.

Hispanic Heritage Sales Tip: Authenticity is important when creating promotions for a history or heritage month. "It's helpful to know someone who really understands the ethnic group," says Ben Adler of Top of the Line Promotions, LLC (asi/232119). "It's more sentimental and effective when you have a real connection to the culture."

Oktoberfest - Late September - Early October

Oktoberfest is a 16-day festival held each year in Munich, Bavaria, Germany beginning in late September. It is a large fair-type event that draws over six million people annually, and is replicated by hundreds of smaller events in cities around the world. Most commonly associated with beer and brats (meat, not kids), Oktoberfest doubles in the U.S. as a celebration of German, Polish and Bavarian Americans.

For clients who are putting on an Oktoberfest promotion, the obvious promotional gifts are beer related. From beautiful glass steins to push beer hats, there are many fun ways to symbolize the enjoyment of a good beer. An array of other cultural items can add zest to the day, including authentic German and Austrian feathered caps and if all else fails, you can never go wrong with a branded bottle opener.

Oktoberfest Sales Tip: Have fun with Oktoberfest promotions. Items that make recipients laugh or remind them of the holiday will stick around. ▲

Julie Cajigas is an OH-based freelance writer.



This hat will catch the attention of everyone who sees it at Oktoberfest. Available from Beistle (asi/39540); (717) 532-2131; sales@beistle.com

One clever distributor used these products for a March 17th special onsite event for her client. All the St. Paddy's products in this RCC Koozie Lunch carrier including the carrier itself are available from RCC Koozie/Norwood (asi/80330); (800) 937-0320; rccmail@norwood.com.



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