

OLD STANDBY NEW TWIST

With a little tweaking, you can turn your favorite old standbys into something completely new.

BY DEBORAH JEANNE SERGEANT

As technology, social trends and personal tastes evolve, even your favorite go-to products might need some updating for certain niches. To the rescue: Suppliers are putting renewed energy and innovation into products that go way back, re-creating them into the wave of the future. Here's a new twist on five old standbys.

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OLD STANDBY:
Mouse Pad

People appreciate and use mouse pads every day at work and home. Mouse pads might work for an internal promotion for a client who is setting up computer systems for a corporate expansion or for a totally new company. Companies that sell new computer systems might use them as an external promotion.



NEW TWIST:
Make It Multi-Function

“Now you can get a mouse pad that’s a puzzle and it’s in full color,” says Deb Heppner, owner of HeppnerFriday (*asi/224461*). “People want things that have more than one use or things with lots of functions.”

Some mouse pads come with a built-in gel wrist rest, a picture frame, calculator or other gadgets. Any of these functions might cajole an end-user into replacing an existing mouse pad.

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IDEAS

* **MousePaper Calendars**, from DigiSpec (*asi/49716*); it’s a mouse pad, notepaper and calendar in one – great for receptionists.

* **4-port USB hub mouse pad with radio and calculator**, from Advantage Industries (*asi/31570*) – perfect for techies.

* **Multi-function mouse pad with calculator**, featuring 16 world time zones, currency converter, 200-year calendar, eight different alarm sounds, pen stand and paperclip holder, from Ballanda Corporation (*asi/38140*) – fun for the financial sector.



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OLD STANDBY:

Standard White Ceramic Coffee Mug

Everyone's cupboard is stuffed with logoed mugs. They're offered at every convention, trade show and vendor visit. "One of our clients wants to do a ceramic coffee mug giveaway as a promotion for their older customers," says Brendan Quinn, owner of Proforma Corporate Concepts (asi/300094), "because it's a one-day event. It works there, because the clientele is 60-plus and typically, they love anything free."



Retirees, in general, might not be as inclined to drink their java on the go, but relaxing at home, where a ceramic mug works just fine. In fact, there are many people and occasions for which the standard white ceramic mug is just right.

NEW TWIST:

Travel-Style and Trendy

However, these days, suppliers offer many varieties of travel mugs, as well as trendy twists on ceramics. Carl Handy, owner of Handy Advertising in Pensacola, FL, notes more people are asking for travel mugs these days. "I've worked with ceramic mugs for a long time, but some clients don't want to spend all that money on shipping."

For those who have the budget though, there are bistro and latte mugs, Irish coffee glasses and more, and you might even think about filling a mug with an apple cider packet or espresso beans or something more unusual to add an innovative and surprising touch.

IDEAS

* **Ironstone ceramic and stainless steel espresso mug**, 10 oz., from RCC Koozie/Norwood (asi/45520) - upsell with espresso beans.

* **The Java tall 16-oz. latte mug**, from Numo (asi/74710) - just right for Yuppies.

* **Fill the Heat Wave Star 16-oz. tumbler** with hot liquid and stars appear, from Gordon Industries Ltd. (asi/57800) - fun for star employees and clients.

* **USB plus stainless-steel travel mug with no-spill lid**, which keeps coffee heated, from All-in-One (asi/34256) - hot product for anyone on the run.

* **Ellipse tumbler** is sleek and stylish, from ETS Express Inc. (asi/51197).



OLD STANDBY:

Keytags

We all use keys and we all need keytags. You've no doubt used keytags as giveaways for vehicle and equipment dealers, gas stations, real estate agents and mortgage companies.



But Joan Landorf, executive vice-president of Axis Promotions (*asi/128263*), discovered a new market for them, while researching a project for a client with young end-users. "Children like items they can collect and hang on their backpack, so we did a keychain for them," she says.

NEW TWIST:

Add Gadgets

"Keytags are useful items, but unless they're a different type, it becomes the same-old, same-old," says Larry Margolis, a rep at Newton Manufacturing (*asi/383300*).

As with mugs and mouse pads, the more functions, the better. With the plethora of keytags out there, let the tag reflect the occasion. To thank a customer for a sizeable purchase, such as a house or new car, consider a keychain bearing a mini-camera or a USB flash drive.

For small fries, gadgets are also hot, but so are mini anything, from their favorite characters cross-branded to tiny functional objects that tie into the promotion. But once a boy is about six years old, avoid cute keychain items such as stuffed animals or anything remotely girly, Landorf learned.

IDEAS

* **SolutionZ keychain with mini-digital camera** from SnugZ/USA Inc. (*asi/88060*) - nice for new homeowners.



* **Tablet Traveler keychain**, from Universal Promotions (*asi/92977*) - just what the doctor ordered.

* **Keychain with a neon color hair brush attached**, from Rockleigh Industries Inc. (*asi/88060*) - cute for girls.



* **The Drinkey combines a real house key with a built-in bottle opener**, from Klinky Manufacturing Co. (*asi/65375*).

* **Keychain with alcohol breath detector**, timer with alarm and flashlight, from Esfef Distributors Inc. (*asi/52710*) - great idea for safe-driving programs and bars.

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OLD STANDBY:

Pens

Despite type-driven technology, pens will always be a staple. Just caution your clients about using cheap pens as giveaways. “I have so many pens, I won’t sit there and shake it if it won’t write,” says Quinn. “I’ll throw it away. If you’re going to be giving stuff out with your logo on it, you get what you pay for.”

NEW TWIST:

Ergonomics and Add-Ons

Of course anybody who writes is your target audience, but with the abundance of pen giveaways, how do you stand out?

“A lot of clients are switching to contoured pens,” says Ron Edwards, president of Focus Advertising Specialties (*asi/195746*). “It’s more ergonomically suitable for writing. They like how it feels.”

Another tactic is to couple the pen with a logical add-on. Quinn often bundles pens with a notepad cube or sticky memo notepad. He also favors smooth, roller-ball styles, foam grips and pens that have a good weight and balance.

Others use “bells and whistles” or “sexy” packaging to enhance the typical pen. Of course, you will have clients requesting eco-friendly pens for certain events, too.

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IDEAS

* **Renewable, biodegradable pen**, from Dard Products Inc. (*asi/48500*). Acid, extracted from corn starch, is made into plastic pellets. The pellets are molded into products which, after use, are composted and biodegrade in the soil. What earth-friendly end-user wouldn’t love that?

* **Ballpoint pen with stylus for PDA**, from All-in-One (*asi/34256*).

* **White barrel stick pen with an acrylic adhesive flag holder on top** (holds 75 flags), from Fields Manufacturing Inc. (*asi/54100*) – neat for college students and other avid readers who want to mark up books.

* **Light-up pen with triangle grip**, from Shepenco/Shelbyville Pencil (*asi/86850*) – a bright idea for electricians and electric companies.



Educate Clients About Updates

A client tapped HeppnerFriday (*asi/224461*) for a foam can cooler, a particularly low-end model. “It was imprinted poorly,” Deb Heppner recalls. “It was bulky to mail. It wouldn’t absorb any moisture and it was only 50 cents. But you can do a lot better.”

The client was stuck on the cheap cooler, but Heppner knew they wouldn’t be happy with it. Her solution was to find a high-quality neoprene can cooler and show them the difference between it and the foam version – and it worked. Letting clients compare quality and come to their own conclusion often changes their minds, because then “they’ve made their own decision and the end product is one they’ll be happy with,” Heppner says.

Brendan Quinn, owner of Proforma Corporate Concepts (*asi/300094*), was asked to supply shirts for a client’s charity fund-

raiser. Considering the participants paid \$150 to participate, Quinn felt the client’s choice was a poor one. They had selected a cheap, boxy, unisex \$10 shirt.

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– Deb Heppner, HeppnerFriday

“I told him he should get a 50/50 T-shirt with collars and cuffs,” Quinn says. “These kinds of guys want Adidas or Nike shirts. Last year, they had given away [cheap T-shirts from another distributor] and they had to admit they never wore them.”

The client was also planning to buy logo-imprinted golf tees and ball markers, but Quinn persuaded them that participants would prefer nicer com-

memorative shirts and that their money would be better spent there. He showed the client shirt samples and in the end, his frankness paid off. The client ordered men’s and women’s shirts made of 60% polyester and 40% Egyptian cotton.



OLD STANDBY:
Totebag

Totebags are not only useful but essential, everywhere from the trade show floor to the supermarket to the beach. Most people own a couple already, but old totes get worn out, and we can all always use another one. This is especially true now that plastic bags are becoming passé, and shoppers are using totes for groceries and other purchases.

The question is how to make sure your client's tote is the one the recipient will keep and want to take everywhere.

NEW TWIST:
Organizational Features

Leed's (asi/66887) always has some of the most fashion-forward and best-designed bags in the industry, so we asked them about two of their hottest new styles: the Stitched Organizer Tote and the Transpire Deluxe Business Tote.

"The goal for each of these designs was to make them more than totes," says Heather Smartt, Leed's product development. "They have accessible organization components. You can easily see and find the items you need to keep at hand."

Not only that, these bags give you, the promo products consultant, a reason to sell additional products to complement them. "They are great for cross-merchandising," Smartt says, "as the pockets and other organization features were designed specifically to hold commonly used items such as pens, jotters and technology items."▲

*Deborah Jeanne Sergeant is a NY-based freelance writer.
Additional research by Jen Zorger and Kathy Huston.*

IDEAS

* **Stitched Organizer Tote**, from Leed's (asi/66887) stitching on the front panel creates specially sized pockets for carrying accessories. A D-ring holds keys and flash drives. The handle adjusts up to a 17" drop height.



* **Transpire Deluxe Business Tote**, from Leed's (asi/66887) features a flash drive clip on the pouch, a main compartment with a Velcro closure and an open front pocket with an organizational panel. Also has a D-ring for a flash drive and keys and an adjustable handle.



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