

How to Successfully Promote Printed Plastic Bags in a Mail Order Catalog

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Introduction

I'm Zal Puchkoff, the third generation in my family to work in the bag industry – my grandfather started the original company in 1910. I took over from my father and became a promotional product supplier in 1974. There are now over 50 suppliers of bags in our industry, most of whom are retail packaging distributors who offer retail packaging products in their catalog – because that's all they know! I wrote this booklet to give mail order distributors the benefit of my experience.

Retail Packaging vs Promotional Bags

What's the difference? Retail packaging distributors never go above street level to sell. They call on retailers and offer them a wide variety of bags, boxes, and accessories, i.e. ribbons, tissue paper, etc. They quote retailers on a cost plus basis and sell them a 6 months to one year's supply, depending upon the customer's needs. Their prices are lower than promotional product distributor's prices.

Promotional product distributors call on corporate buyers who work in offices reached by elevators and stairs. They send out catalogs to their customers based on suggested selling prices.

As a promotional products distributor, your primary market is to corporate buyers; only a small percentage of your sales will be to retailers. So you'll want to feature appropriate styles and sizes of bags for corporate and business buyers who will use them at trade shows, conventions, and special promotions.

What's your advertising cost to sales ratio?

If you're promoting plastic bags in your catalog, here's a simple way to find out how well they're selling.

1. Add up all the costs associated with producing the catalog; printing, layout design, artwork, photography, and the shipping costs to your fulfillment house (don't include mailing costs) and divide the total cost by the total number of square inches of selling space in the catalog. For example, an 8-1/2 x 11 catalog page has about 60 square inches of selling space per page. A 32-page catalog has 1,830 square inches of selling space, not counting the front cover and only 1/2 of the back page. Say you ran 250,000 catalogs and the total cost of the catalogs came to \$150,000. Use your numbers.
2. You now have the cost per square inch: \$81.96 for including a product in your catalog. Next, measure the square inches devoted to the selling space of all plastic bags; say 1/2 a page: 30 square inches and multiply it by the cost per square inch of catalog space; that's \$2,459. That's your cost to advertise plastic bags.
3. Divide that cost into the gross sales of all plastic bags on that page over the life of that catalog; i.e., a month, a quarter, a year, and you will know what your advertising to sales ratio is for all plastic bags. You can do the same for any product group and make a list of the products that pull the best.

4. To further refine your advertising cost ration, for each bag style, measure the space allocated to each and every bag style, and break out the sales for each bag style and you'll know whether they are pulling their own weight in relation to any other product group and product style. You can probably drop 20% of the bags you're featuring now, or for that matter, other products as well.

MY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Offer custom printed bags as well as imprinted bags

Offer your customers custom printed bags in 3,000 quantities and over in the same bag style as imprinted bags. They are more economical. By offering a choice of imprinted and custom printed bags your customers will see the difference in price and delivery and make their own choice. The sale is yours except for the quantity!

The Plastic Man offers a 3,000 minimum for a custom bag with 15-day production, and no rush charges. The bags are printed on both sides at the same price -- in up to 2 ink colors. The dollar value of the order is much higher. Even though the plate charge is higher than imprinted bags, it's a one-time charge to the customer and it's just as easy to sell. If your customer wants a custom printed bag, he has to pay for the plates no matter which company he buys them from. Once paid for, the customer will reorder from you. Why would he want to buy from another company and pay for plates again?

2. Don't sell less than 500 bags.

It costs as much to process a small order as a large one, so you might as well go for the bigger orders. Don't feel that you have to offer 250 minimums because your competition does. Give your customers good value and service and they'll keep coming back to you.

3. Offer appropriate colors

Be careful about promoting colors that are not appropriate to your customers – corporate buyers – like pastel or frosted bags because someone tells you they're 'hot'. Tradeshow exhibitors and corporate buyers want bag colors and ink colors that match their corporate colors. The most popular bag colors are the ones that work year round: white, black, yellow, blue, black, maroon, red, and beige.

4. Size and shape counts.

Bags that are wider than they are long are a throwback to the days of retail packing when all soft goods were boxed and put into plastic snap-handle bags and shopping bags that were made wider, in the shape of a women's pocketbook, for women to carry; 80% of all en's garments are purchased by women! Corporate and tradeshow buyers need bags hat are deep with bottom gussets to hold samples and catalogs.

Promote bags that are 16" or deeper with sturdy handles. Smaller bags will only be put into another exhibitor's larger bag. The larger the bag the better value to the exhibitor, and our patch handle bags are the best value for the money in the sizes recommended. The 6-mil clear patch that is heat sealed at the top at each side of the opening insures that the bag will hold up to anything put inside it.

Our hot stamped plastic shopping bags, H-16, 13 x 16 x 6, are geared to the small exhibitor. It's the trade show industry standard size, not 16 x 12 x 6 'Vogue' pocketbook size, nor the 16 x 18 x 6 'jumbo' size, for retailers.

5. Under/overruns

Selling a custom printed bag is the same as selling any other promotional product, with one exception: bags are not taken off the shelf and imprinted. They are printed from large rolls of poly, then put on machines where they are folded, cut, sealed, handles applied, and then packed in cartons. With so many steps, there is a fairly high waste allowance so under and over-runs are common to all plastic bag manufacturers. Though there are no under or over-runs with imprinted bags, The Plastic Man limits your under or over-runs to 20%, the lowest in the industry. This fact has to be told to your customers.

6. Tips on hot stamped bags

The foil to hot stamp bags is available in a wide variety of colors, including gold and silver. We recommend using a light color foil on a dark colored bag for the most dramatic effect, and vice versa. How do we know? We were the first bag company to foil stamp on poly bags, and invented the process in 1968.

7. Offer a choice of litter bags

Because litterbags are so inexpensive, every company can use them as a promotional handout and give-away. If you already offer pre-printed stock designs in small quantities, consider adding custom printed litter bags as well. The Plastic Man offers them in lots of 5,000 and up at very low prices with 15-day production. Give your customers a choice and go for the larger orders.

8. A word about plate charges

Every supplier lists plate charges based on square inches of copy for each ink color. The Plastic Man lists the actual plate charges for each bag size in the catalog. The larger the bag, the higher the plate charges because the copy is larger. For custom printed bags, list the plate charges for each bag size with a note: one-time charge only. Don't list one plate charge for all size bags and don't offer stock type unless it's on a small stock-design litter bag.

Corporate and business bag buyers want their logo and design big and bold on their bags and know that plate charges apply. Stock designs take up the whole bag with 3-4 lines of

customer copy at the bottom. They'll save on plate charges but pay dearly on the price of the bag and get very little image advertising. What's your advertising cost to sales ratio on these types of bags?

What the Plastic Man offers

The Plastic Man has been selling promotional bags to mail order companies since 1974 and we've learned a thing or two about taking care of your customers, and you. To help you increase your sales, here's what we offer:

- No rush charges
- No PMS color match charges on custom printed bags
- 15 day production/3,000 minimums on printed bags
- 5-day production/500 minimums on hot stamped bags
- Lowest over/under run on custom printed bags
- No over/under run on hot stamped bags
- EQP on all hot stamped bags
- Competitive prices

BAG STYLES TO PROMOTE

Custom printed patch handle bags

Sizes: 12 x 15, 15 x 18 x 4, 18 x 18 x 4, 20 x 20 x 5

Quantities: 3,000, 5,000, 10,000

Hot stamped patch handle bags

Sizes: 12 x 15, 15 x 18 x 4

Quantities: 500, 1,000, 2,000, 3000

Hot stamped snap loop handle bags

Size: 16 x 18 x 4

Quantities: 500, 1,000 2,000, 3,000

Hot stamped shopping bags

Size: 13 x 16 x 6

Quantities: 500, 1,000, 2,000, 3000

I hope this information will help you increase your bag business. Call us now and let us help you choose the bag styles and sizes for your next catalog that best fit your customer's needs.