Looking for ways to spice up your direct mail program?

You can dramatically boost the response rate of your direct mail efforts by adding the pizzazz of promotional products, according to H. Ted Olson, president of the trade group Promotional Products Association International, Irving, Texas.

“Promotional products are useful or decorative merchandise usually imprinted with a company’s name, logo or message and offered to customers and prospects for free,” explains Olson.

Promotional products can help you:

- **Cut through mail clutter**, particularly if your promotions are mailed in a non-standard business envelope or are dimensional-packaged in a box or tube.

- **Involve the recipient**. Some items, such as an imprinted jigsaw puzzle or phone card, let the reader “interact” with the direct mail piece.

- **Create anticipation**. This can occur when the products are used in a delayed fulfillment technique (receiving only one part of an item with the matching piece to follow, such as first mailing a coaster and then later sending a mug).

- **Repeat your message frequently**. By sending a thematic series of mailings with promotional products, your message is reinforced.

Research offers concrete evidence of promotional products’ effectiveness. A Baylor University study showed that a dimensional mailing can increase response rates by as much as 75 percent.

Following are four real-life examples of the successful teaming of direct mail and promotional products:

Anderson Trucking Service created a campaign conducted over several months. Typical of the series was a letter opener with the message, “If transportation problems are closing in on you, let ATS open them up.” The program increased revenues by $1 million.

Color Corporation of America, a commercial photo house, mailed a high-impact yellow box with a graphic of Albert Einstein on the cover. Inside was an Einstein image sporting sunglasses,
an imprinted pair of glasses and the headline, “Positively Brilliant,” which emphasized the company’s services. The mailing generated an 80 percent response rate.

Penton Publishing reported an increase in advertising of more than 6 percent after sending 230 advertisers a unique box labeled, “shake three times, then open.” The unique mailing was designed to interest advertisers in buying space in a special magazine issue on indoor air quality.

Inside the box was a clear, plastic cube depicting a person sitting at a desk. Once shaken, glitter and dust floats in the cube, illustrating a very intangible topic—indoor air quality.

3M Health Care used a four-part direct mail program themed “3M Power Plus” that targeted 800 operating room supervisors and head nurses.

In the first mailing, the nurses received folders imprinted with the 3M monogram and quill pens. In the folders were “Power Plus” kickoff materials, which included a brochure on the product line.
The next mailing coincided with Operating Room Nurses Day. A champagne bottle filled with candy and a day planner were sent to the nurses to mark the special occasion.

To provide nurses with the “full scoop on the full line” of power instruments, each nurse next received a mug, gourmet coffee and a coffee scoop ... along with more product information.

The campaign concluded with a post-it note pad accompanied by a survey titled, “A Short Survey of Powerful Note.”

Sales jumped 20 percent over previous year’s sales. And, the survey revealed a favorable shift in attitudes toward power instruments among the nurses.

Many direct mail promotions are conceived in tandem with promotional product distributors. Because distributors work with thousands of products and suppliers, they can meet almost any objective, deadline and budget required.