



Don't Buy Products – Buy RESULTS!

Your Setup: Management decided your agency will host a booth at the annual conference of your niche in the nonprofit public service sector. About 2,000 people are expected to attend. You have been given two things: a budget of \$3,500 and responsibility for purchasing the right give-away item imprinted with the organization's logo. No other information or instructions were forthcoming. Now what?

OOPS! First, a nonprofit can't ethically give away \$3,500 of imprinted goodies for no reason. Second, management (probably accidentally) just asked you to walk the plank.

Your Next Step: Tell management you can carry out the assignment after it clarifies the results it wants to achieve with those giveaways – results that can be measured.

Enter Dick Taft: Mr. Taft was the Prescient Guru from the publishing world who introduced a foreign concept to the nonprofit sector – a concept that was initially resisted. He explained that the process of constituent relations is best served by a fundamental corporate discipline that was unknown to nonprofits. It's called marketing.

Taft's Dictum: Prepare to buy products for your conference by following the advice in Taft's ground-breaking essay: "Don't just do something. Sit there and think. Marketing...is a disciplined approach to problem solving — a process that requires you to think through a problem logically from point A to point B."¹

Taft would tell you to "Sit there and think..." Define results that justify spending \$3,500 of the agency's money on conference freebies. You have plenty of options:

do you plan to give the item to every person who walks by?...just to those who stop at your booth to ask about your agency?...only to your long-term supporters?... will the give-away help introduce a new service at the conference?...can it add new names to your mailing list?...will it attract people to the booth so you can make a pitch or otherwise engage in personal interaction?...is management trying to get more visibility than a competing agency?...trying to make enough of a splash at the conference so the trade journal will give you feature coverage?...giving people a useful conference memento they'll take home and keep – with your name on it, of course?...giving away a disposable item that ties into the theme of the conference but will be left behind?...trying to build a list of new collaborators from other agencies?...just trying to have a good time with old friends who gather around your booth?

Your Postmortem: Be irresponsible and after the conference you can say with a shrug "We gave away 3,000 chocolate bars with our name on them and they made people happy."

OR...decide you are going to use the candy bars as conversation starters to build your mailing list of industry insiders and to acknowledge old friends. Then, after the conference you can report: "We acquired the business cards of 700 new people in exchange for 700 chocolate bars. Some real heavyweights are in the bunch and Fred is entering these people in our data base this morning. In addition, we gave away a full box of 24 chocolate bars to three folks who sat with us at the booth for a couple hours and got so interested in our work they made appointments to meet with our president. We gave about 400 bars to old friends who stopped by so our organizations could get caught up to date with each other. Admittedly, another two hundred were taken by people who wanted chocolate but didn't give a darn about our organization. But we only wasted a couple hundred."

It's All About Results: We used conferences as the example, but the results issue applies to every use of imprinted products by nonprofits. A good promotional products distributor can help you find plenty of items that fit your price point and achieve results that justify the organization's expense. So follow Dick Taft's marketing advice: Don't just do something. Sit there and think. Define your intended results and how you will measure them. Then get together with your vendor and start your product research with confidence.

¹ You can find Dick's essay – *Six Things Nonprofits Can Learn From Profits* - in our [Nonprofit Toolkit](#).