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Timing Your School Promotion to Optimize Success

Each year school marketers are challenged with scheduling the timing and frequency of promotions that will increase their chances of reaching educators at just the right time to buy their products. While it is difficult to cut all promotional timing from the same cloth, there are some time-tested strategies that education marketers can employ to optimize success.

School Budget Cycles

First let's talk about the three major time periods in the school market. They are linked to established buying cycles that are usually put into three distinct seasons.

- **Fall (August–November)**—As the new school year begins, teachers often look for materials that will help them support their lesson plans. It is important that education companies are prominent in teachers' minds as they plan out their school year. This is a critical time to boost “on-approval” orders to create a healthy sales pipeline for the school year.
- **Winter (January–March)**—This is a time of year when several key buying trends take place. School budgets are being prepared for school board approval, teachers are planning second-half activities, and leftover money is being reviewed. Clearly, this is an important time to be in front of your customers to take advantage of the upcoming end-of-year spending as well as be included in the following fiscal year's spending plans.
- **Spring (April–June)**—During this period, schools often distribute leftover money for administrators and teachers to spend on supplemental materials and replacement items. In fact, April and May are typically the two busiest months of the year for teachers to submit pur-

chase requests. Because many buying decisions are often made in the spring, this is a great time for marketers to promote year-end specials. Marketers with the right product mix can really benefit from increased marketing output during this all-important spending period.

Timing Your Promotions

Marketers should consider timing direct mail drop dates with actual school start dates. This will prevent promotions from being in the first-day pile if mailed too early, as well as arriving several weeks late and missing important sales opportunities. Marketers also want to be aware of school closing dates to make sure they time spring promotions appropriately and take full advantage of the important spring buying season.

End-of-school-year specials can also be effective since many schools must spend leftover money by the end of their fiscal year.

Synchronizing Your Email Campaigns with Your Direct Mail to Optimize Response Rates

It's been well established that marketers can significantly increase response rates by employing a multi-channel marketing approach. By highlighting special offers, new products, and increasing awareness of your forthcoming catalog in an email message, you can pique the interest of potential customers to be on the lookout for your promotion piece.

This approach can be used to customize incentives to various customer segments. For example, email a coupon for a free gift to your best customers or offer prospects a special discount for first-time orders. You can also follow up with a second email reminder about an offer deadline or promote a last-minute special.

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