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## This Week in Broker Magazine

This week's featured story from *Broker* magazine, our sister publication:

### Keep Branding

**Yes, times are tough. However, now is not the time to cut back on your marketing efforts.**

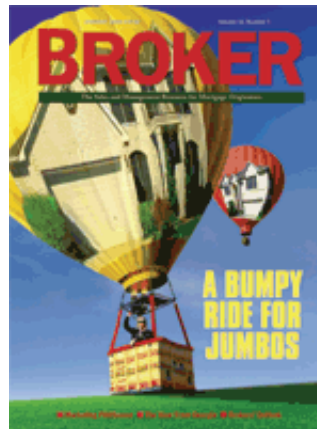
**By Brad Finkelstein**

The downturn in the mortgage industry has made a shambles of many originators' marketing and branding efforts. Many firms, too many, abandon their marketing plans to use the cash on what they believe are more important uses.

Yet there still is a need for getting an originator's name out in front of a desired audience, whether it is a business-to-business relationship or a business-to-consumer relationship.

In these tough times for business, more original means may be needed in order to insure your message gets out to your referral partners, customers (current, past and future) and any one else you want to reach. An example is the small Halloween-themed bottle of bubble soap given out by LibLoans.com, Atlanta, at the Southeast Mortgage Brokers Conference held last October. At the NAMB West meeting held in Las Vegas in November, among the trade show participants was Geoff & Drew's, which makes all natural, gourmet cookies and other baked goods. Unlike some of their competitors in this space, Geoff & Drew's products are not available in

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stores or other retail outlets.

Drew Koven, chief of 100% customer satisfaction at Geoff & Drew's, said, "We feel that our products are a very effective tool for folks in the industry to give as appreciation gifts to the clients and their peers" as thank you gifts or incentives. They are using the Geoff & Drew's products to reach out to potential new business opportunities as well.

The company feels the mortgage market is a good one for it to be involved with. It goes to the national show as well as some of the regional shows like NAMB West. Mr. Koven said it has been targeting mortgage originators for the past two and one half to three years.

The tough times have had some impact on the company. "But in terms of the mainstream marketplace, we're seeing an increase in business. What we're realizing and what the smart companies realize is that now is the time if they invest a little more in the client relationship and building goodwill, they are going to come out the winners. "If everybody is doom and gloom, you can either go downhill with everybody or take a contrarian point of view," adding the smart companies are going to spend on marketing while their competition sits out.

Everything is cyclical and now is the time for a company to say its here, healthy and it is going to provide more service and more appreciation, instead of taking all what it did for the customer away, he said.

The client/consumer is very savvy and they will make a judgment call based on the gift. You have to think through how the client is going to receive it. Are they going to perceive the company that sent it to them went out of its way to send them something special?

That includes sending them a product that is available everywhere, compared with a premium product like Geoff & Drew's, Mr. Koven said.

Any incentive he said should be something that can be branded and is high end. Geoff & Drew's provides a high-end product that unlike other cookie companies is not available in retail. "Differentiation is an important theme with the clients in the industry. They do not want to be seen as just another company and they are looking at us as a product that really stands them out. They don't want to send a low end gift," Mr. Koven said.

Uniqueness is one of the things Silver Hill Financial was looking for in creating something to give to get the notice of potential business sources.

At most trade shows, said Amy Treese, assistant vice president of marketing, the firm had been distributing

bottles of water. It wanted to find something different, as well as being able to tie the product into its theme. She added it tries to tie in its promotions with a theme for the company "because we always believe that that works better."

Tying a giveaway to a theme works best if it does not appear to the recipient to be forced. "Rather than just having a premium that sits on someone's desk that seems gratuitous, if there is [an idea] that is not too forced, I think it does work well," said Ms. Treese.

Its current theme is "Energize your business with commercial."

It drives that point home through its privately labeled energy drink, called "Silver Shot." The product is in a black can, with the company's logo underneath the Silver Shot label.

On the back there is information about the Silver Hill lending program as well as the Energize theme. The product helps to meet the company's goal of reaching out to mortgage brokers who normally do residential loans.

The goal of any incentive like this is to get the recipient to pick up and use the product and that is what has made Silver Shot successful for Silver Hill. "People appreciate it because they are thirsty and it is something different than water," said Ms. Treese. "We see people looking over the can and saying, 'Oh wow Silver Shot,'" and examining the company's logo. People even see the product held by other people at a show and go to find it at its booth. "It gets them to come and visit the booth and talk to us about the program and ask some questions about it," she said.

Another unusual giveaway from Silver Hill was distributed to the media only. It consisted of a plant, whose seed had an imprint of the company's logo. When the plant sprouted and grew, the logo came out on a bean. It, too, was tied into a theme, which was "We continue to grow." Besides the items mentioned above, Silver Hill has given away engraved martini shakers, cookies with the company's logo embossed on top in icing, as well as other forms of food.

Ms. Treese said the company believed this was high impact and something the recipient would open, keep on their desks and even watch it grow.

But what might be the ultimate in terms of what its sales force is giving out to mortgage brokers this year is a Food and Drug Administration-approved doughnut (or bagel) box, in which the salesperson can attach his or her business card to.

The branded box is used instead of the salesperson bringing in a box with the doughnut company's name on it. This has been a big hit with recipients, Ms. Treese said.

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