

Rama Beerfas, CAS

Creating Hands-On Hits

Rama Beerfas, CAS, helps her clients capitalize on experiential marketing at trade shows and beyond.

by Julie Richie

Rama Beerfas, CAS, chief solutions specialist at San Diego, California-based Lev Promotions (PPAI 218331), is a big fan of experiential learning. After all, that's how she mastered sales and marketing and discovered the promotional products industry—on the job.

Armed with a degree in hospitality management, she spent 10 years in hotel management. “I was in the front office, but because I really loved the properties I worked at, my bosses kept having me do sales and marketing,” she says. “Then I spent three and a half years as the administrator for a nonprofit where I did a lot of the marketing, including developing marketing programs and events.”

When she was pregnant with her first child, she knew she wanted to stay home with her baby. She had a freelance graphic design business as well as a crafting business on the side and decided to keep those pursuits while a stay-at-home mom.

“One of my clients was the nonprofit agency I had previously worked for, and they were having an event and needed six t-shirts. I designed and heatpressed them. Six months later they called back and said, ‘Do you do balloons?’ I said, ‘Sure, I do balloons’ and I looked at my heatpress and thought, it’s probably not a good idea to try to heatpress on a

balloon. So I went online and found Pioneer Balloon and I got myself into this business.”

The promotional products industry turned out to be a perfect fit for her skills and interests. “I still get to do my creative thing and design all sorts of weird things and then I get to do the marketing side of the business because I’ve always had a marketing focus—I’ve never been just a product person. It’s always been ‘How can we achieve your goals using products?’”

Beerfas dabbled in promotional products for three years. “In 2002 I dove in and said, ‘Forget the handcrafted business and forget freelance design, I’m going promotions full time.’ I changed my company name

from Lev Designs (Lev in Hebrew means heart—so her tagline was Designs from the Heart) to Lev Promotions.”

Engagement Is Everything

One of the perspectives Beerfas brought to her new promotional products marketing business from her previous jobs is that hands-on experiences lead to customer engagement. This is even more true today, she says, as people are overloaded with information but seek meaningful connections.

Beerfas points to one of her most successful events in the nonprofit arena as an example. “The days of sending a letter in the mail and saying ‘please donate’ are over. You



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need to keep people hands-on and active—they'll give money if they feel connected to [the organization]."

She created a local event for a client organization based on the TV show *The Amazing Race*, utilizing promotional products. "We set up banners and had QR codes that would give people the clue (and a website they could just type in if they didn't have the app) and at each station that they managed to make it to they would pick up a little gift that was either tied into that particular station or that would help them make it to the next one. And each one was sponsored by a different sponsor of the nonprofit itself," Beerfas says.

Because of the sponsorships, it didn't cost the nonprofit anything to provide the products, but the event—and the products—got people excited about the program. And, equally important, they got the sponsors excited about the program.

Success followed the engagement. "The organization made more money that year than they had in the previous two years when everything they tried was not working for them," she says. "They learned a great lesson about keeping people involved and keeping things fun. They also grew the number of volunteers because people were so excited about what was going to happen the next year and they wanted to be involved behind the scenes, not just show up on the day [of the event]."

Trade-Show Success

Beerfas emphasizes that experiential marketing programs are great to implement at trade

shows because they drive people to your booth and create excitement.

"Suppliers can provide things like spin-the-wheel games ... Something with noise to get people noticing your booth. The goal is to tie into messaging. I have seen amazing things where people are lined up to get whatever prizes they're giving away—and they could be little things or expensive things. But then people walk away and say 'What was that about? I never talked to anyone, I don't know why they were there or what they were doing there.' So the key is to tie the experience into messaging, and whatever your goals are for having that exhibit there."

She adds that it's critical to make sure that the people who are waiting in line—and that's your goal, to have people waiting in line—are being prequalified.

"Prequalification can be as simple as saying, 'If you want to have a chance to do the experience, first you have to sit through the presentation.' People will filter themselves out. Or maybe they have to fill out a form first. It could be as simple as asking for their title. Maybe you want to hit all the CMOs on the floor, for example. A lot of prequalification can be done in pre-show marketing," she says.

Watch a Q&A video as Beerfas discusses how to deal with difficult clients and turn frustrations into sales. [PPB](#)

Find the link with this story at [pubs.ppai.org](#).

Julie Richie is associate editor for PPB.

Rama Beerfas Shares Five Trade-Show Tips For Suppliers

- 1 **Pay attention to people walking by.** Never eat or read in your booth or people will feel ignored.
- 2 **Don't be overly aggressive, but don't be too passive either.** Stand in front of your booth, smile and nod and ask how the show is going, but don't chase after people or offer to scan their badge before they show interest in you.
- 3 **Make sure you have branding at the top back of your booth (about 8-10 feet high).** People scan from the top left in a Z formation; they like a certain amount of anonymity before they make eye contact or look at your name badge.
- 4 **Any graphics you display must be relevant.** Don't just pick a random photo that doesn't relate back to your messaging.
- 5 **Don't be afraid of words.** Yes, fewer words are better, but sometimes you need more words, especially if your message is somewhat fleeting. Give people enough words and graphics, when appropriate, so that you can start a conversation.