



STEAL THESE IDEAS!

50 (OR MORE) PERFECT PROMOTIONS

Diamond's Outside Sales Managers have crisscrossed the country, visiting hundreds of comic and game shops across North America. They've seen the best promotions and for the past several years have kept a journal of the best and most unique. Come to this workshop and hear them share the best of your fellow retailers' marketing successes.

Presenters: Diamond Outside Sales Managers Dave Hawksworth, Eric Hitchcock, and Tim Kartman

Monday 2:45 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.

Room 327

Steal These Ideas!

50 (or More) Perfect Promotions

The purpose of this seminar is to share promotions, seen by Diamond's outside sales force during their travels, which have been effective for comic and game retailers as well as other businesses. The ideas we are going to share have been used to attract new customers, increase the sales from existing customers, and encourage customers to shop more frequently at a business.

Every comic and game storeowner would like for their business to have increased traffic, more income, and greater profits. Promotions are fundamental tools that retailers can use to accomplish these goals. Promotions come in all shape and sizes, for anything that makes a consumer more aware of your store is, or more aware of something inside your store, is by definition a promotion.

We hope this seminar helps you become more promotion-minded in marketing your store, gives you ideas to make your business a more exciting and interesting place that people will go out of their way to visit more frequently, and gives you ideas with which to create the kind of retail excitement that makes your store a desired customer destination.

What are the most common Promotions?

There are a variety of promotion types that can be used to create awareness, excitement, and sales. These include In-Store Displays, Sales, Customer Rewards, New Customer Recruitment, Electronic, Big Events, and Contests. When creating your promotion, it is important to remember that some efforts are a long term promotional strategy designed to build public awareness and provide a gradual permanent sales boost over time, while others are more of a short-term investment which can create a more immediate but temporary boost in sales.

So, let's steal some promotions...



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In-Store Displays

#1) Set up an introductory boutique with the first volumes of trade paperback series. For example, *Walking Dead*, *Fables*, *The Last Man*, *Sandman*, *Invincible* and the *Ultimate* series of trades are among the most popular that can be used to create a small boutique which highlights the starting points of these popular titles.

#2) Create a boutique centered around current hot movie properties and/or comics that have been turned into movies. With so many comic properties being turned into movies, a boutique that highlights those titles can interest casual shoppers that may not have realized *Surrogates*, *Whiteout*, or *Scott Pilgrim* was originally a comic.

#3) Use signage to alert shoppers to similar products that they might also enjoy. Make in-store signage reading “If you liked this book (e.g. *Walking Dead*), try these books (e.g. *Wasteland*).

#4) Have a sign on the front door exterior that reads “Welcome,” “Please Come In and Browse,” or “Through these doors pass the nicest people”. Similarly, have a “Thank You” sign on the inside that a customer sees on the way out.

#5) When holding a major sale, try to move any fixtures that are mobile, even if it’s just a table or two, so your frequent customers get the impression that something fresh is happening and are jarred from their normal shopping pattern.

#6) Use odd-shaped signs such as triangles, arrows, circles, or stars to better grab the attention of customers.

#7) Change your window displays to reflect holidays, special events, and other occasions. Change your windows frequently, as people will stop looking in the same old window if it doesn’t change for too long.

#8) Have a daily feature as part of your window display such as a product of the day, joke of the day, or trivia question of the day, to entice passersby to look in your windows and hopefully talk about your display.

#9) Keep your windows clean. Dirty, unwashed windows are a turnoff and bad for your image.

#10) Most customers begin their tour of a store with a right-hand turn from the door. This area should be where your higher-priced, higher-profit, or otherwise important items should be spotlighted.

#11) Place your sale racks in the back of the store so customers must pass regularly priced merchandise first. There is a specific customer type that shops for sale items, so you want make sure those people see your other products as well.

#12) Place a suggestion box in a prominent place within the store. Acknowledge every suggestion and give gifts to those people whose suggestions you implement. Also, if any customers send you letters complimenting you on your products, service or individual employees, display these communications in a heavily traveled section of the store.

#13) Show product demos or related videos on a television on the sales floor during store hours. If you conduct game demos, video tape the demo so it can be shown later.

#14) Create a “New This Week” trade paperback section, similar to a “New This Week” comics section. There are enough trade paperbacks published to warrant a spotlight section to help them stand out from other new product. If possible, leave graphic novel new releases up for 30 days.

#15) Have an art/signature wall for the creators that come through your store. It’s cool and creates excitement. If you have celebrities that are customers, ask them for an autographed picture and permission to display it in the store. Customers can be impressed when they learn they shop at the same store as celebrities do. Maybe even have the celebrity pick a “Product of The Week” or “Month”.



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Sales

The most common promotion is the store sale. Whether it is a temporary price reduction sale, clearance sale, holiday sale, or special event sale, this is your greatest opportunity to reward a customer while generating a short-term boost in sales, increasing the average sale per transaction, and hopefully increasing the number of transactions as well. Sale days can rank among the top traffic-builders in virtually every segment of retail. They bring in customers and move merchandise, although not necessarily at the profit margins most retailers hope to regularly achieve, so plan wisely.

How you promote the sale will depend on your goal. Is the sale intended to create excitement within your current customer base? Is it to attract new customers, or is it to close out seasonal or other stale product? Sales should be promoted through in-store signage, mailings, e-mail, your website, flyers, circulars, and, if appropriate, personal calls by your salespeople.

#16) Have a Deal-a-Day calendar, offering a different special or discount each day for a limited period of time. This can be used in conjunction with an anniversary, as a lead-in to a holiday promotion, or in conjunction with an upcoming store event.

#17) Instead of just offering a flat discount to shoppers on a sale day, make the sale interactive by using a spinning wheel or something similar with different discount offers ranging from 5%- 30% off, for example, and allow the customer to spin the wheel to see what discount they can receive. Obviously, make the higher discounts more rare and harder to obtain!

#18) Have an After Hours sale for subscribers only. Or have an Early Bird special and open the store a few hours earlier for additional advertised savings.

#19) Offer a Happy Hour sale as way to counteract slow periods. Choose one of your slowest days to hold a two hour Happy Hour where specific products, such as back-issues or slower moving trades and merchandise, are on sale. Promote your "Happy Hour" with window and in-store signage.

#20) Have a Surprise Special of The Week. Do not advertise the product or price, but promote the concept, letting it be known there is a weekly surprise special. Use this on your slower days to regularly get customers in to find out the nature of the special.

#21) Include store coupons in weekly e-mail or weekly bag stuffer flyer, good for a discount on ONE item between certain dates (e.g. good Sun - Tues). Some weeks the discount could be 10%, but could perhaps be as high as 40% on occasion. It is always great to increase sales on a slow day, and higher discounts can encourage customers to pick up more expensive items such as statues, omnibuses, and hardcover books.

#22) Limiting items for sale can be a good idea, such as "2 per customer", as it can create an increased demand in the customer's mind.

#23) Sell in multiples, such as "3 for \$12" or "4 for \$15". Drop the unit price per piece slightly as the quantity increases.

#24) Pair up slow moving items with related products and repackage as a special buy.



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Customer Rewards

It has been documented in numerous marketing books that:

- Loyal customers buy more and are less price-sensitive than new customers.
- Loyal customers refer friends to your business.

Customer rewards are an effective way to get present customers to keep coming back and to purchase more product. More common types of this promotion include a reward or savings card program, a frequent buyers program, and bonus bucks. Bonus bucks are perhaps the simplest method of rewarding customers. It is based on giving certificates worth a dollar toward a future purchase for every specified amount \$X spent by the customer. The most important thing about any customer loyalty program is that they tell your customer "Thank you and come again."

#32) Many stores offer a Comics Club punch card program in which a customer receives a stamp or punch on a loyalty card for each purchase. The filled card can then be redeemed for a set amount or a percentage off.

#33) Have a raffle drawing for a product or gift certificate, using entry forms to collect customers' e-mail and/or mailing addresses.

#34) Give a discount off **PREVIEWS** preorders over a set dollar amount.

#35) Extra Bucks program at CVS pharmacies – CVS gives 2% back on all purchases, and additional Bucks back on some featured items. The rewards are given 4 times a year, with a receipt printout generated during a customer's first visit of the quarter, which can then be redeemed on the next visit.

#36) Kohl's Kash at Kohl's department stores - For every \$50 spent, you receive a \$1 cash certificate to spend at a future date. This could be a great promotion for December and the skip week.

#37) Atlantis Fantasyworld offers Atlantis dollars. For each \$10 purchased, the customer receives an Atlantis dollar that can be used in the purchase of specific items marked as "Atlantis Classics" or during other sales events as announced by the retailer.

#38) Give a discount on a customer's birthday.

#39) Collectors Paradise selects upcoming events and offers a free comic to customers who sign up and pre-buy the designated series.

#40) Maintain good communication with your customers. Send birthday or anniversary cards to customers that are enrolled in your subscription service or reward program. Obtain these dates when a customer enrolls in your program or signs up for your e-mail list.

#41) Hold special frequent buyer days or nights, running promotions, sales previews, and other events exclusively for them. These events should occur outside of your normal business hours.



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Promotions to attract new customers

Attracting new customers can be costly in terms of advertising, sales time and administrative costs, but this type of promotion is essential to the health of your business. Luckily, there are some very low cost options that can be just as effective as a big time advertising program.

#47) Ask for referrals. Talk to your customers. Find out if they have friends who like comics, games, movies, and such, but that have not been in your store. Ask your customer to refer your store to these clueless souls.

#48) Offer your customers discounts for each referral they provide or for a new customer brought in that spends at least \$15. Many companies such as Direct TV and cell providers regularly provide incentives for referrals.

#49) Create a survey to find out what you're doing well and what needs improvement. This can help you identify areas in which you can improve and possibly land some new customers. Offer a small gift to all survey participants or a larger prize for a randomly selected participant.

#50) Start a Board Game Rental Program. With some board games retailing for \$40 or \$50, it can sometimes be a challenge to get someone to try a new game. Have a program where interested gamers can rent a game for several days for a low rental fee, perhaps for 10% the game's SRP. Use signage and counter displays to advertise the program. Suggest regular customers use this program for a fun weekend night, and tell all their friends.

#51) Conduct a game demo night in your store. Send press releases to local papers for inclusion in their community events calendar.

#52) Use the back of your business cards to promote regular scheduled events such as tournaments.

#53) Print a small map of your store's location on the back of your business card. Have your store hours there as well.

#54) Put your website, phone number, and other information on the store's vehicle.

#55) Buy inexpensive plush or other gift items as deductible promotional items to give away to young children of existing customers.

#56) Create a civilian-friendly brochure to give out at non-comic events such as book fairs, sporting events, and other community activities.

#57) Produce a brochure to place in hotel "Local Attractions" racks.

#58) Include customer testimonials in your printed literature.

#59) Send postcard flyers with product-specific coupons to a targeted demographic area.

#60) Create a calendar for customers with your shop's name and address on it.

#61) Use brightly colored envelopes and unique stationery when sending direct mail pieces.

#62) Send press releases regularly to local newspapers regarding upcoming events at your store.

#63) Create window displays in locations away from your shop such as hotels, malls, theatres, or large office buildings that may have display areas available for rent.



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- #64) Every city has unique organizations, tourist attractions, venues, or other local entities with special interests and needs. Find a product that connects you to them, and market accordingly. For example, if your town has a seasonal Haunted House, offer to advertise the event in your store if they will allow you to set up a horror-themed gift shop at the end of the attraction.
- #65) Parents can be your friends. Position your store as a tool for parents to use in encouraging their children to read. Be-friend school librarians and go to PTA meetings. Offer a reading program for kids with appropriate incentives and let parents know that you offer appropriate material for every age and interest.
- #66) Sponsor a movie night when comic book movies are released by renting out a showing at a local theater. It not only rewards your customers, but also creates a sense of community among them.
- #67) Set up a display in your local movie theater. If you have a good relationship with the local manager, you may be allowed to sell in the theatre lobby.
- #68) Give away tickets for advance screenings of movies. Sometimes promotional movie tickets come with a free ad in the newspaper and radio play. Instead of simply giving away the ticket, make sure the recipient leaves with a free comic after giving their e-mail address and interests.
- #69) Accept gift cards and certificates from other businesses, specifically big box retail, restaurants, or gas companies. Many people have surplus gift cards in early January, so this can work best as a specific and time-limited promotion. Verify the cards are valid and unused. If they are not useful locally, clearinghouses and other online resources are available for recouping your investment.
- #70) Hand out fliers at conventions with a coupon or sale announcement to attract attendees to your store.
- #71) Set up a computer at conventions to showcase your awesome website.
- #72) Create a press kit and keep the contents current. You never know when a media outlet will come calling. (ASM #583, anyone...?)
- #73) When promoting your store at events, give people something they will keep, such as a well-made bookmark. These types of items are more expensive to produce, but fewer wind up in the trash.
- #74) Create an annual award and publicize it, such as San Francisco's Isotope mini comics award.
- #75) Sponsor an Adopt-A-Highway area in your community to keep roads litter free.
- #76) Purchase specialty products such as pens, mouse pads, or mugs with your store logo on them. Give them away to keep your store on people's minds.
- #77) Carry a supply of FCBD books or Halloween ashcans in your briefcase or car, and make sure they are stamped with your store info. If you're at a restaurant seated next to the bored, noisy child, drop a book on his table.
- #78) Cross-promote fliers with local businesses that have similar demographic interests, such as an independent video store or local pizza delivery joint.
- #79) Swap advertisements with other local businesses. Promote the menu of an ice cream parlor to your customers, and ask that they name a flavor of ice cream after your store. Or designate a local pizza shop as the "official pizza" of your store for game nights and events in exchange for ad space on their boxes.



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#80) Keep your Comic Shop Locator Service profile active and up to date. The Diamond online site makes it very easy to update your profile and notify customers of changes or happenings at your store. It only takes a few moments to look at your profile, make sure it is up to date, and make any changes to announcements and special events. Every retailer should be keeping their profile fresh and interesting. Tell your customers to look for announcements on your CSLS profile. If you are not signed up for the Comic Shop Locator Service, contact your customer service representative.

E-Mail / Websites

E-mail blasts are the fastest and most economical method to get information to your customers about events at your store. Many retailers are already aggressively using e-mails to inform their customers of new comic titles, items shipping this week, or new games that are available. E-mails can be regularly sent to a store's customers informing them of sales, signings and other in-store events. Some comic and game retailers keep track of their customers' interests and send targeted e-mails informing them of products they will be most interested in purchasing.

Similarly, websites are a significant opportunity to communicate with your customers, giving them facts about your store and providing a source for additional promotion. Keep your website fresh and up to date. A clean and exciting website can show off the strengths of your physical location and create excitement for a visit, while a poorly maintained website can convince a prospective customer to not visit your store at all.

#81) Compile an e-mail list, adding each new customer you see. Always get e-mail addresses when possible, particularly when you hold events that attract new and casual customers.

#82) Send an e-mail to infrequent customers when items similar to the product they last bought ships to your store.

#83) If you haven't seen a customer on your e-mail list for some time, send them an e-mail saying you noticed they haven't been in your store and you miss seeing them. This personal attention can make a person feel special, and that their presence (and business) is valued. Tell that infrequent shopper that if they bring in the e-mail, it will act as an X% discount on their next purchase to your store. Give the offer an expiration date so they come in quickly.

#84) Use a weekly e-mail to offer a sale on a particular product each week.

#85) Create a section on your website where customers can review books/comics/games and give feedback on those products. This creates a sense of participation for your customers and generates excitement for people to tell others what they thought about a product.

#86) Create a teacher/librarian section on your website where you can list to the most up-to-date information on books and games that educators and librarians will find of interest. Be sure to note the age-appropriateness of each product.

#87) Establish your store on Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter. Create a Facebook page for your business. Tweet when you're having a special event.

#88) Think about starting a PodCast for your store. Alter Ego Comics in Muncie, Indiana is among the many comic and game retailers now using this tool. See <http://www.fanoff.com/shows/alterego/> for an example.



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Store Event Promotions

The granddaddy of promotions for many retailers is the store event. This type of promotion typically entails significant planning and resources, and is often associated with a long-term promotional strategy to build public awareness for the store.

#89) Free Comic Book Day - With so much written and spoken already about Free Comic Book Day, we are not going to explore this promotion in much detail other than to comment that a significant majority of retailers consider Free Comic Book Day to be their best in-store promotion. Free Comic Book Day is as good as you want to make it. The groundwork is already created for media interest as well as community interest. This is a day to have excitement in your store with national attention. Go send that press release.

#90) Writer/Artist/Creator/Celebrity signings - These events can often require a significant investment to fly in the celebrity, put them in a hotel, and purchase meals and perhaps entertainment. However, the results can be very effective in generating excitement, goodwill, and increased sales. Smaller events, with appearances by local talent, are still effective and less costly, and can be an informative test-run for a larger even. Encourage your local writers and artists to sign at least once a year at your store. Generate excitement by making it a VIP event with sodas, snacks, balloons, and sales.

#91) Art Gallery - More and more retailers are creating an Art Gallery in their store. In just the past year, Collectors Paradise in Winnetka, California and Green Brain Comics in Dearborn, Michigan have added such sections. An art gallery gives the storeowner a chance to gather people together for showings as well as generate interest from the local art community, possibly attracting a different clientele in to the store.

#92) Large annual store sales can combine many of the elements already discussed. For example, Carol and John's in Cleveland, Ohio holds a large sale every year on Black Friday that includes VIP mailings, special store hours, and raffle prizes, all designed to generate excitement, reward customer loyalty, and attract new customers.

#93) Store anniversaries should never be overlooked. Whether it is your first anniversary or your 30th, make it a celebration to reward your loyal customers and document your longevity in the community.

#94) Participate in 24 Hour Comics Day. And if you can't have 24 Hour Comics, hold a 12 Hour Comic Day. You'll be surprised at what can be created in a short amount of time.

NOTES



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Contests and Miscellaneous Promotions

Contests will not only create excitement among existing customers, but can also generate additional store traffic. The three most common types of contests are sweepstakes, games of chance and skills contests. Even people who do not ordinarily enter contests will participate if the prize or prizes are perceived to be valuable or desirable enough. The grand prize for Atlantis Fantasyworld's 30th anniversary was a trip to the Atlantis Resort and Casino in the Bahamas. Games of Chance offer a more immediate reward, and might be a spinning wheel, scratch-off game card, or selection of a capsule from a drum. A skills contest requires a customer to do something to win, such as guessing the numbers of beans in jar, answering a trivia question, or demonstrating a special talent.

#95) Offer a coloring contest for children in your community and display the entries on your wall. Have a local artist create the picture for kids to color. Award prizes for the best coloring based on different age groups.

#96) Participate in a fantasy sports league with your customers.

#97) Hold a contest to guess the outcome of a major comic event. For example, Comic Town in Columbus, Ohio ran a contest for customers to guess the outcome of Infinity Crisis. He conducted this in conjunction with a radio advertisement for Cedar Point Amusement Park. The winner of the contest won free tickets to the amusement park.

#98) Hold a costume contest for Halloween or Free Comic Book Day. Many fans love to dress up as comic and media characters. offer a prize for the best costume.

#99) Offer a weekly comic or game trivia contest. Provide small prizes, such as a pair of dice for game stores or a comic book for comic stores. Gather correct answers and draw a winner for the week. Post the winner's name so other customers are encouraged to participate in the contest.

#100) Have all the businesses in your mall or sales district participate in promotions such as a radio remote broadcasts with giveaways, live music, and sales from all stores.

#101) Have comedians, live music or other entertainers such as magicians, clowns, face painters, caricature artists perform at your store to increase the excitement.

#102) Sponsor competitors in Walk-a-thons or Bike-a-thons, or other charitable events. Have the participants wear your store apparel. You may also sponsor a local little league sports team.

#103) Have a top ten/twenty comics/trades list that employees compile and post in a high trafficked part of the store. Compile a similar list based on customer suggestions.

#104) Bring the real world into comics. Have a sale on Detective Comics back issues and TPs, and offer a presentation by a detective or private investigator. Offer a discount on Caliber's Hercules TPs and have a local expert speak on Greek culture.

#105) Use your DC co-op. It's free money.



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Retail Promotional Calendar

A powerful tool for your business is a retail promotional calendar that allows you to jot down ideas and make promotional plans as far ahead as possible. For a retailer every month can bring different observances, seasonal events, and other happenings that can help you come up with creative ideas to add excitement to your store.

For example, June 8th is National Best Friend's Day for women and August 15th is National Best Friends Day for men. These are two dates in the promotional calendar that offer opportunities for your customers. On Best Friend's Day, offer an additional discount to male customers on August 15th and female customers on June 8th who bring a new face into the store. This can create new customers, increase your store traffic, and make your existing customers feel like part of "the team".

The following is a partial list of holidays, observances and other happenings.

January

New Years Eve
New Year's Resolutions
New Years Day
Martin Luther King Day
Back to School -2nd half

February

Super Bowl
Valentine's Day
Presidents Day
Ground Hog Day
Mardi Gras
Daytona 500
February Television sweeps

March

St. Patrick's Day
March Madness
First Day of Spring
Academy Awards

April

Easter
Good Friday
April Fool's Day
Baseball Opening Day
Tax Day
Earth Day

May

Cinco De Mayo
Mother's Day
Victoria Day (Canada)
Memorial Day
Kentucky Derby
Teacher Appreciation Week
Season Finales For Television

June

Flag Day
Father's Day
Schools' Out/ Graduation
Best Friends Day (women)
First Day of Summer

July

Independence Day
Canada Day
Summer Fun Day

August

Back To School
Tax-Free Sales Event
End of Summer
Best Friends Day (men)

September

Labor Day
NFL Opens
First Day of Fall

October

Columbus Day
World Series
Thanksgiving Day (Canada)
National Boss Day
National Book Month
Halloween

November

Election Day
Veteran's Day
Thanksgiving Day
Black Friday (Shopping Day)
November Sweeps for TV

December

Christmas
First Day of Winter
End of Year

