

BACK TO



GR8 4PROFIT!

While traditional sectors 'do their thing' there are also opportunities for the less glamorous and the in focus.

BY JANE SMITH

As spring gives way to summer it won't be long before the kids are off school for another long summer break and the new school year begins in September. For the writing instruments sector we are just starting to see the launch of promotions, incentives and new products set to boost sales through the summer during the 'back to school' season.

Sanford, Pentel, Pilot, Staedtler and Uni-Ball, in fact all the major pen manufacturers are actively promoting now and competition is fierce.

Clare Wilcox at Uni-Ball told us about their GR8 Value promotion. 15 special offer uni-ball pen packs all heavily promoted at money-saving prices, plus a further incentive for consumer purchase – the chance to win top 10 CDs in an easy-to-enter website competition. There will also be the opportunity to sample brand new products including Jetstream, the world's smoothest pen.

Sanford have got a lot going on too with a wide selection of back to school products and money saving promotions on their Paper Mate,

Berol and Rotring brands not to mention Parker and in particular the launch of the new Jotter Jubilee to mark the 50th birthday of the Jotter.

Staedtler are concentrating on confidence in the quality aspect and what they believe is an unbeatable mix of key products (25 to be precise) and 15 added value 'test the best' cards, all in eye-catching packaging and offering exceptional value for money.

For retailers in particular this is a great time to use these aggressive consumer promotions to get more traffic through the door and provide an opportunity to sell other stationery related lines. You could even create your own promotions to increase the average number of lines purchased. For example, for every £5 you spend on pens we'll give you an extra 20% off our range of pads, glue sticks and scissors!

If it does happen to be pen that you're selling, then pads are the obvious add on sale. Alistair Kirkpatrick, sales manager at William Sinclair told us that 'although the back to school period in terms of promoting pads and other associated paper products is still



by and large dominated by the CTN wholesaler, which includes buying groups such as Club, Premier, Impact and Forward, the commercial sector still has the opportunity to get in on the act.

He went on 'Products such as refill pads, shorthand notebooks, student notebooks, twin wire notebooks and duplicate books spring readily to mind and we have promotions in place to boost sales. From my perspective there is plenty of Silvine branded product available, it's a question of who will grasp the opportunity.'

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT!

An opportunity to target education buyers!

Whilst we tend to focus our attention on pupils and students in this back to school season, we should not forget the education buyers themselves. Budgets are set and equipment needs to be sourced for the new term starting in September. We spoke to Steljes, a leading value-added distributor of a range of display technologies. Their distribution sales director, Paul O'Reilly gave us some really interesting information about the market for projectors and interactive whiteboards in education and the potential opportunity for office products dealers to get involved.

2003 saw a 37% increase (source Decision Tree Consulting) in overall projector sales, with growth in all market areas but especially within education. Margins

are gradually reducing but are still relatively high in comparison to standard stationery items. The most popular product being sold through office products dealers is the entry-level projector.

O'Reilly explained the two main things that are driving sales. Firstly: 'The recent interactive whiteboards catalogue/guide from BECTA (British Education Communications and Technology Agency) sets out the

requirements for projectors for schools ie XGA projectors with 1000-1500 lumens and secondly a greater demand from education buyers for the best value 'bundle' of a projector with an interactive whiteboard. The focus is on price rather than brand and the choice for the projector brand will often be determined simply by what comes with the desired interactive whiteboard.

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He went on to add that whilst adding interactive whiteboards to an office products dealers' portfolio may initially require a higher level learning curve to develop sales the financial rewards are there and so is the support. Steljes are one of a number of distributors in this area that can offer dealers a range of added value services including training, demos, exhibition support, literature and technical support.

So whatever channel you happen to be selling in, there is opportunity for everyone. It's about being imaginative and energetic to pull in those punters! ■

