



# A Promotion Pilot's Pre-Launch Checklist

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Like all good aviators, when you're planning for a successful promotion to take flight, a safety checklist ensures that all systems and controls are in top operating order and nothing is overlooked. Whether you're planning for a cents-off coupon, contest or digital offer, you are investing significant marketing dollars, so it's important to make sure that you choose a high-quality partner whose capabilities and experience align with the scale of your campaign, and one with the integrity necessary to protect that investment.

As the pilot of your promotional flight plan, you're going to have numerous pieces of information all vying for your attention, and determining which are the most critical can be difficult. With that in mind, I recommend you take a walk around your plan and check for three key things before takeoff.

## **Check No. 1: Expertise**

Ideally, you want to choose a promotional partner who is an expert in their field – one who has the experience, data and unique skills that will deliver a focused attention on your business interests. This gives you peace of mind that each part of the process – from distribution, to audit and settlement, to final analysis – is all in capable hands.

Shoppers turn to coupons across print and digital media when researching products and planning their purchases. To reach these value-seeking consumers, your partners should help you leverage shopper, geographic and retail information to strengthen your media plan and maximize the benefits of your promotional investment. When running a sweepstakes, contest or game, global compliance and execution expertise are musts. For coupon promotions, work with a company that provides transparent coupon audit, settlement and analysis services, allowing you to monitor, control and measure the results of all your paper and paperless coupons.

## **Check No. 2: Value**

A promotional campaign can reach into the millions of dollars invested. And because of the investment you are making, it's important to choose who you work with carefully. As the old saying goes, you often get what you pay for. Don't focus solely on price, but look at the company as a whole and the overall value they bring to your promotional campaigns. Do they take time to understand your goals and needs? What resources are being deployed? Are there gaps in the depth and breadth of expertise?

Often, you will find that spending more upfront nets less risk and better results. Price is certainly a factor, but choosing the wrong promotional company can have negative economic and professional consequences.

### Check No. 3: Control and Oversight

It's imperative that you have the controls necessary to protect your promotion investment. Without them, you could fall victim to bad practices or abuses that waste your budget. Tightly controlled administration of a promotional game or contest with appropriate protocols for random seeding, required winner reporting and prize delivery validation will ensure the integrity of the promotion for all your stakeholders, including governing authorities. In other forms of promotion, such as a coupon campaign, complete transparency is vital to understanding the full picture of what is being redeemed, where and by what retailers. This information should be readily and easily available to you at all times.

When selecting a coupon audit, settlement and analysis provider, you need to make sure that their controls operate as promised. That can be accomplished with an independent auditor's validation report, such as the Statement on Standards for Attestation Engagements No. 16 (SSAE 16). Developed by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA), the SSAE 16 is the authoritative guidance for testing and evaluating the quality of the services and controls that your partner provides. While companies can be selective about what they have audited, undergoing a comprehensive audit on an annual basis gives a complete picture from data collection to final payment. An independent audit and verification like the SSAE 16 is a costly expenditure for service providers, but it underscores the security and financial integrity being delivered to clients. More importantly, it demonstrates the organization is committed to serving your needs and protecting your promotional program.

Selecting the right partners is critical to achieving successful promotional campaigns, and many factors need to be weighed before making a decision that a vendor is truly "flight-worthy." However, a thorough evaluation based on expertise, value and controls should make the decision easier. Bottom line – when it comes to protecting the integrity of your promotions, the success of your campaign lies with the value of your partner as well.

