

# It pays to advertise – if you do it right

## RSA 'Kooky Award' winners and finalists share tips

By *Connie Evener*

Skating and family entertainment centers face unique challenges in advertising, but several general principals do apply. In any discussion of effective advertising, three terms pop to the surface again and again:

### ➤ Branding

The identity of your business – its “personality” – is based on how customers perceive you. To carve out a positive and well-recognized identity your message needs to be consistent.

### ➤ Benefits, not features

Customers don't really care how wonderful your “features” (equipment, skating floor, staff, etc.) are. What they care about is how it directly affects them. It's called the W.I.F.M. (What's in it for me?) factor. So, rather than saying “Our new rental skates are state of the art and have our logo on them,” advertise “You'll skate faster and smoother and better than ever before on our new rental skates.”

### ➤ Target marketing

Aiming your advertising “arrows” at the people most likely interested in what you have to offer gives the highest response and best value for your advertising dollar.

For the past seven years RSA has challenged its members “to put their best skate forward in advertising,” and recognized the most creative and effective efforts with The Golden Kooky Media awards. In the interest of sharing ideas, The RINKSIDER contacted some of last year's winners and finalists.

## Print media: simple but catchy

Sandra Levin of Orbit Skate Center (*Your Place in the Galaxy*), Palatine, Ill., won last year's “Best Color Flier” award and placed as a finalist for her direct mail and web site entries. “I have a belief in design that you need to take your viewer's eyes on a journey. So many times people don't leave enough space to breathe. You can call it white space, but in this case it's blue space,” Levin said, referring to her winning entry.

Levin's birthday party flier is printed in color on both sides, with a schedule on the back. When she puts them in the rack for customers, she puts out two batches, one with the birthday party promotion facing out, the other with the schedule facing out. Most customers take one of each, and when they pass the extra on to a friend it doubles the distribution.

Jenny Nash of Simply Profitable Marketing (formerly Korte) estimates that she generates more than two million cards for

clients every year. When it comes to design, “Less is more” is her mantra, too. “Another thing that makes a card or flier effective is a call to action,” said Nash, “meaning ‘bring this card in today, this week, this month’ as opposed to something open-ended. Make the offer's perceived value high so that folks are certain to visit your center and redeem the card.” Kids don't get much mail, added Nash, so getting a bright, colorful and easy-to-read card will make a big impression.

Aaron Estrada of Northporte Rollercade (*San Antonio's Finest Skating...*), finalist for his black and white flier, used a Print Shop Deluxe tem-

plate, keyed in the information for his calendar/schedule and added clip art in about 20 minutes. He runs his fliers off on a copy machine and has them in his customers' hands within hours. It's simple, inexpensive and fast.

To see Sandra Levin's designs, go to [www.residentpublishing.com](http://www.residentpublishing.com). For a sampling of Jenny Nash's designs, go to [www.SimplyProfitableMarketing.com](http://www.SimplyProfitableMarketing.com). And for some cross pollination from non-skating related areas, take a look at [www.allgraphicdesign.com](http://www.allgraphicdesign.com), a networking site for graphic designers.

## Go for emotion with radio

According to Radio Ad Lab ([www.RadioAdLab.org](http://www.RadioAdLab.org)), “Audio can generate stronger emotions than visuals,” a concept Grayson White of Looney's Super Skate in Montgomery, Ala., used in his finalist-placing radio spot. “We wanted to go for adult skaters, the people who grew up in that generation when roller skating was enjoying its heights,” explained White.

To do so, White used the high energy music of the period to stir memories. As his deejay did a simple voice over – time, day, price, location – songs like “Rapper's Delight,” “Skate, Bounce and Roll” and “Planet Rock” took listeners on a journey down memory lane: Friday nights at the rink, first couples skate, maybe even first kiss.

He ran the spot on HOT 105 daytime, drive time and “really ramped it up” during the day before the Sunday adult nights.

Because he didn't want to mix his message, White left off his usual tag line, “...where family fun and fitness meet.” The music itself provided a sort of “self branding,” said White. “People heard the music and said, ‘Man! That's roller skating music!’ I think it helped build our base of regulars. It brought back people who had forgotten about skating and helped them rediscover their childhood love.” And some of those people, now with families of their own, are bringing their kids. “Kids I'd not seen before



Regulars at Skating Plus in Ventura, Calif., participate in a TV commercial for the rink.

have become semi-regulars to regulars just because their parents started skating,” said White.

## Cast your customers for TV

The first of the “10 Essentials to an Effective TV Commercial,” according to About.com, is “Put People in Your Commercial.” That's standard practice for Sonny Grenier of Skating Plus in Ventura, Calif. His finalist-placing TV commercial followed a formula that he and other owners and operators use with success.

For two to three weeks before the commercial is to be filmed, said Grenier, “We tell people we're going to be taping a cable

commercial before the Friday night session on a certain date and we want everybody to come in at 3:00.” Grenier gets consent/release forms from everyone who wants to participate as they arrive so he can use their images in footage for commercials and still shots for ads. “Then we have them skate. We do a mock birthday party. It's a lot of fun.”

Skating Plus's slogan gets a workout in those commercials. “We've got kids, sometimes in groups holding each other's shoulders, yelling out ‘The Plus is the place! The Plus is the place!’” said Grenier.

Grenier advertises on TV rather than radio because his facility is in the L.A. area, where Top Forty radio station rates are astronomical, but local cable is affordable.

# Advertiser SPOTLIGHT

## Sure Grip promotion fights breast cancer

Sure-Grip International has begun a new promotion that will benefit the American Breast Cancer Foundation ([www.abcf.org](http://www.abcf.org)). Throughout 2009, Sure Grip will donate all proceeds from the sales of their Rock Skates Flame Line's black boots with pink flames and white boots with pink flames to the Foundation. Jim Ball, Sure Grip vice president, said it was a natural fit.

He pointed out that since the American Breast Cancer Foundation's public awareness tactics are “very discreet,” Sure-Grip is only enhancing the boots' heels with an embroidered pink ribbon. The accompanying ad campaign, which showcases the skates, simply states: “Buy a pair...save a life!”

“One of our next door neighbors had two family members die from breast cancer. It became sort of a personal issue,” explained Steven Ball, Jim's son and head of Sure-Grip's sales and marketing, of the Company's decision to promote breast cancer awareness. “Also, it felt like the right time to start giving back a little bit. Nobody in our industry has really done this. We'll see what we can do, and hopefully we can help somebody.”

“This is a win-win for roller rinks, for us, for the industry,” said Jim Ball, explaining that rinks can bring awareness because everyone already knows what the pink ribbon means and what breast cancer is.

Ball already has plans in the works for 2010, including a pink wheel embossed with a ribbon, called Courage.

Sure-Grip International has been a manufacturer and distributor of roller skating products for 85 years. They manufacture traditional roller skates, inline recreational and hockey skates, skateboards and other sporting goods and equipment. Sure-Grip is located in South Gate, Calif., and can be reached by phone at 800-344-3331 or 562-923-0724 or by internet at [www.suregrip.com](http://www.suregrip.com).