

Impactful Greeting Card Advertising and Promotion

By laddering up with this category, you can tap into your customers' deepest emotions

By Jim Welch
Hallmark Cards

Greeting cards are a category that can be quite lucrative, but only if the cards are understood properly. For ultimate sell-through and sales, I recommend that retailers of any size or type ladder up — that is, tap into the highest level emotional consumer need. The term also can be defined as getting in touch with what really matters to your customers.

To ladder up with greeting cards, first its primary market must be examined. More than three-fourths of greeting cards are sent by women, more than half of whom have at least some college education.

Next, let's take a look at the unique characteristics of the category. A greeting card:

- Makes the sender feel like a better person
- Builds connections and relationships
- Can "make someone's day"
- Is never sent in anger
- Is sent by caring people
- Is invited in for special moments and milestones

That being said, here are some things that really matter to your customers that only a greeting card can do. It can:

- Turn a bad day into a good one
- Keep the chain (e.g. of friendship, family) alive
- Be a keepsake
- Connect across people, time and distance, creating a memory that can last a lifetime
- Connect and share laughter
- Create a memory that changes someone's life
- Create a special romantic moment
- Reach out and connect with new friends
- Bring families together
- Inspire, encourage and congratulate

Television Spots

At Hallmark, we are well aware of the unique characteristics of greeting cards. We see it as our role to remind consumers of them, and do so in many ways — one of them being TV commercials. These contemporary situations make the category more relevant as they strike an emotional cord.

Illustrating the idea that a greeting card can make a bad day good is a commercial we call "Thank you, Grandma." In it, a little girl has a bad day at school and comes home to find a card waiting from her grandmother, instantly cheering her up and bringing a big smile to her face.

Another, called "Elevator," brings to life the concept of keeping the chain alive. It also underlines a quote from J.C. Hall, the founder of Hallmark: "The No. 1 enemy of our cat-

egory is forgetfulness." In it, strangers are trapped in an apartment elevator, among them a mother and her little girl who have just picked up the day's mail. In it is a card from a long-lost friend from college, one whom the mother feels slightly guilty about falling out of touch with. Not only is she thrilled, everyone in the elevator shares in the experience and underlines in their own words the importance of old friends.

Another spot, "Memories Saved Across the Years," emphasizes the idea that a card is a keepsake. In it, an actual consumer, Fran DePiano from Wynnewood, Pa., tells the touching story — we call it a Card Story — of how she lost her mom at a young age and grew up feeling even closer to her father, who was filling both roles. Every year she sent her father a Mother's Day card. Many years later, when her father died, she found that he had kept all of these cards over the years, and she knew that they were a treasured part of his belongings.

Two other Card Stories illustrate that a card connects across people, time and distance, creating a memory that lasts a lifetime. The "Linda Brown Card Story" recounts how both she and her husband spent time apart early in their marriage — he was serving in the Army in Vietnam. For Valentine's Day, she searched diligently to find a card that expressed exactly how she felt in her heart during their time apart. Finally, she found that special Valentine, a large card, and mailed it. Due to the distance, she didn't receive anything that day, but many days later, what looked like the same envelope was sent back to her. She thought that she had not addressed it properly and



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A scene from the "Elevator" commercial.

Left, "Linda Brown Card Story" and right, "Paula & Tiffany Card Story" commercial scenes.



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it was being returned to her, until she opened it and realized her husband had sent her the exact same Valentine's Day card! Today the couple cherishes both.

The "Paula & Tiffany Card Story" recounts a true story about a mother and her daughter, and a special lifelong memory. Paula was widowed before her daughter Tiffany even had a chance to form memories of her father. He passed away when she was just 25 days old. As a small child, she wanted to send her father a greeting card, so Paula took her daughter to buy the perfect greeting card. They attached it to a helium balloon ... and sent it to her father in heaven.

However, a wide range of emotion resonates with consumers. On a lighter note, "My Beauty" ties into the idea that cards connect and share laughter. A shared joke between women can be a powerful tool. In this ad, two middle-aged and very unglamorous waitresses toil in a busy diner. It's just another thankless day, until one opens a humorous card from the other, and suddenly there are smiles all around.

Another, "Hooper," emphasizes how a card can create a memory that changes someone's life. A woman visits a retiring college professor who inspired her to get into her profession. She reads the card aloud to the professor, as he cannot find his glasses among the packed boxes, and he is deeply touched. After she leaves he opens the card, reads it again and realizes how big a difference he has truly made.

A card can also create a special romantic moment, as a spot called "Eyes" illustrates. In this one, not a single word is exchanged between the couple, only a song is played, underlying the power of music when combined with greeting cards. The couple is eating dinner, and the woman passes her husband a greeting card, several romantic looks are exchanged ... and then they are interrupted by their small children raising a ruckus.

"Neighbor Lady" shows how a card can reach out and connect with new friends — and that unexpected cards have the biggest impact. It tells the story of a young woman who watches an elderly person go out every day, day after day, to check her mail ... and receive nothing. Finally, the young woman brings over a card and introduces herself ... and a lasting friendship is born.

Cards also can bring families together. In "Recital," a young woman is at her parents' home and mentions to her mother how little she feels her dad is involved in her life. Then her mother gives her a card from him, telling the daughter how proud he is of her, and he finishes the verse aloud as he walks

into the room. Not only does this engage men in the category, it makes Dad the hero.

Finally, "The Words" reinforces the role that reading plays in our category. A middle-aged man attends a series of tutoring sessions where he slowly, over time, becomes literate. At his apartment, he's finally able to read a card his daughter sent him. The message? Cards can inspire — and they change lives.

Ladder Up with Greeting Cards

It doesn't require national advertising to ladder up. Through consumer touch points such as those illustrated below, we can all ladder up and have a dramatic impact on our consumers at retail. We can do this with our:

- Product offering
- Product mix
- Signage
- Promotions

We are in the business of creating emotional moments and bringing people together. What we do with product is greater than anything that can be done with individual marketing tools. Greeting cards have a unique ability to build and enhance relationships. Very few product categories can have such a powerful impact on people's lives ... it's about caring. There are so many things that only a card can do. We are in a great industry ... let's LADDER UP AND WIN TOGETHER! ■

The content of the above article was originally presented at the Greeting Card Association's 64th Annual Convention in Southampton, Bermuda, in late 2005. Jim Welch is senior vice president — marketing and a corporate officer for Hallmark Cards Inc. Jim has corporate responsibility for brand management, licensing, advertising, promotion, Hallmark Hall of Fame, market research, consumer relationship management and Hallmark.com. Since joining Hallmark in 1980, he has held positions of increasing responsibility, including director of consumer promotions; general manager — season card and specialty; marketing vice president — Hallmark Mass; and vice president — marketing services. He received his Bachelor of Science in Business Administration degree in 1976 and his M.B.A. in 1977, both from Kansas State University. Jim's marketing teams have consistently received awards and recognition for their marketing efforts including Advertising's Effie and Clio awards. He also received the Consumer Promotion of the Year Pro-Award.