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Pennies spent, laugh earned

ADVERTISING | OfficeMax campaign shows good cents of humor

July 25, 2008

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OfficeMax Power to the Penny Campaign

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The office supply business isn't an easy business to be in these days. Naperville-based OfficeMax has struggled to improve its bottom line by redesigning outlets to make them more customer-friendly and slashing the ranks of in-store management.

To boost customer traffic during the key back-to-school season now upon us, OfficeMax on Monday will introduce a new pennies-focused ad campaign from the Escape Pod/Chicago. And the campaign is a real hoot. It's hard to say how much the work will improve Office Max's bottom line, however, because the TV commercials and online videos promote loss leaders, as all the items mentioned specifically, like glue, crayons and plastic rulers, sell for exactly 1 cent. By touting the 1 cent items, OfficeMax hopes customers will buy plenty more big-ticket items for school and other purposes.

Whether that is what customers wind up doing, at least the Escape Pod has held up its part by creating a hilarious campaign in which low-key improv comedian Matt McCarthy is seen roaming around New York City trying to make purchases ranging from a few dollars to thousands of dollars and attempting to pay for everything with only pennies. Trust us, folks, when we say this is a campaign that could only work this well because it was shot entirely on location with real New Yorkers in New York City, where characters with attitude can be found in every shop.

We were rolling on the floor laughing as we watched McCarthy try to cut a deal for a used car with an eager young salesman who gives new meaning to "oily." But the payoff -- so to speak -- in this online video execution comes when McCarthy reveals he wishes to buy the car with a collection of pennies that fill a large truck bed. McCarthy's visit to a jewelry shop is just as funny. Here, the saleslady is smooth as butter as she tries to sell McCarthy on a ring. But after her slick and successful sales job, she is more than a little taken aback, shall we say, when McCarthy unzips his suitcase full of pennies. We could go on, too, about the no-can-do women in the convenience store and the agitated deli operator, but watch and enjoy them for yourself.

For the record, only one party -- a carriage driver -- out of 11 people that McCarthy dealt with accepted pennies. Give some credit to OfficeMax too. Each TV commercial and online video ends with the forceful note that OfficeMax will definitely take its customers' pennies. You bet it will.

Lew's view: A-**Comment at suntimes.com.**[Cops called on man paying for gas with pennies](#)

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