

Wide price ranges

Swag comes in all prices. Personalized pencils cost 13 cents each, and reusable bags are 90 cents apiece. For those extra-special bank customers or this month's best salesman, there's a \$69.99 solar-powered PDA charger or a \$200 digital picture frame that can store 4,000 photos.

After scoring last year with half-ounce hand sanitizers, Harry Fotopoulos, national sales manager for Colorado-based Leashables by Oralabs, said the flu-inspired product still does well, especially with advertisers at sporting events and places with families. It's not as strong "now that people have been vaccinated," he said.

Some of the biggest customers of promotional products were among the worst casualties of the economic downturn: financial services companies, car dealers and small businesses. At the same time, pharmaceutical companies and health care providers are under stricter gift rules, both self-imposed and some due to new state laws.

"We used to think we were more reces-

sions and pens have remained top sellers. "It stays around for a long time, and it's an inexpensive cost per exposure," Townes said.

His sales declined more than 20 percent last year. The company invested in new machines that allow more complicated graphics. It expanded its green products, including pencils made from recycled newspapers and a pen that's made of biodegradable plastic.

"We're ready for the business to turn," he said.

Another family-run business, Gill Studios Inc., also started in 1930s with founder Forest Gill's invention of the bumper sticker.

Every two years, it has its own form of government stimulus.

"Nonpresidential years are even bigger for us," said sales manager Michael Malinowski. The company's factory in Lenexa, Kan., also makes yard signs and lapel stickers.

"This year, there are 37 governors up for re-election and 573 statewide and above races," he said, without checking notes. "That's a lot of opportunity."