

## [Grading The Current Back-to-School Campaigns & Promotional Strategies](#)



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Entering the back half of July, many retailers have shifted their back-to-school strategies into high gear, hoping to drive young shoppers and their parents into stores. Consumers are expected to spend an **average of \$590** on products during the 2008 back-to-school season, according to a survey conducted by New York-based [Brand Keys](#).

Retailers are getting crafty with their promotions —some are integrating music and pop culture into their marketing messaging, while others are maximizing their already thriving labels. *Retail TouchPoints* polled several industry analysts and asked them to weigh in on which promotional strategies make the grade:

- **Victoria's Secret** is capitalizing on the success of its **Pink Label**, which is nearing the \$1 billion mark, which would account for roughly 17 percent of the retailer's total sales last year, according to Advertising Age. Victoria's Secret is expanding the Pink label to include a **Collegiate Collection** of licensed T-shirts, sweats, totes, and underwear rooting for colleges such as University of Michigan, Texas A&M, Harvard, and 30 others.

"We spent a lot of time interacting with our customers," says Sara Tervo, spokesperson for Victoria's Secret Pink. "We definitely saw an opportunity with the Collegiate Collection."

To pump up publicity, Victoria's Secret introduced the Collegiate Collection **across all channels— online, through its catalog, and in-store**. "All of our marketing vehicles were set to support the launch of this strategy," says Tervo.

The Collegiate Collection is taking it to the streets for promotion with a **campus tour program**, which will stop at 15 of the 33 participating universities during the fall quarter. Tervo says the company intends to make it to every university in time. **Paid brand ambassadors** (female students with a vast network and campus involvement) will drive the company's philanthropic effort, "**Recycle Your Sweats**," during which students will donate gently used fleece items to send to a woman's organization that supports victims of domestic violence. "It's about the community, these college students, and philanthropy," says Tervo. "The tour will reinforce these concepts."

The company threw a back to school event yesterday hoping to attract as many 15,000 people to Pinkapalooza, held at the Santa Monica Pier. The event featured games of ski ball, pop up shot, and a water balloon toss between rivals USC and UCLA. The universities competed for the ultimate tailgate party before the December 6 football game at which the two teams face off at the Rose Bowl. In addition, Fall Out Boy gave a concert performance. "We try to create events that are super exciting, a big draw, and relevant," says Tervo. "There's something really fun about rivalry and school spirit," she says.

"Victoria's Secret paying to prime the pump is very smart," says Bob Phibbs of [The Retail Doctor](#). "Now will we see the same attention in their stores?"

### **Celebrity brands need more than a pretty face**

- **Kohl's** is banking on celebrity endorsement for its "**Inspired by the Artists...worn by you**" campaign. Lenny Kravitz, Avril Lavigne, Hayden Panettiere, Vanessa Carlton, and the band Plain White T's (among others) have their own labels under Kohl's name. Kohl's is emphasizing shopper marketing as well as consumer marketing, as its campaign is geared toward teens and Mothers, who typically take their kids back-to-school shopping.

But celebrity endorsements alone are not enough, one expert notes. "With the explosion of celebrities

licensing their names, it is important to not just have a pretty picture in a magazine, but see the outfit on the backs of employees...people buy more when they see it on," says Phibbs.

Kohl's will run 30- and 60-second television spots on broadcast network television and MTV cable network. "The '**Inspired**' campaign is an idea that taps into the dynamic convergence between fashion, music, and culture," said Julie Gardner, executive vice president and chief marketing officer for Kohl's Department Stores, in a recent press announcement.

In another celebrity-oriented campaign, snowboard and skateboard prodigy Shaun White has partnered with **Target Corp.** The promotion is centered on the introduction of a limited-time-only line of clothes targeted for the summer Olympics and back-to-school seasons. White and his brother Jesse set off "to reflect their love for skateboarding, music, art, and travel," according to a recent press announcement.

**JCPenney** recently announced the launch of six young adult-focused brands, including **Dorm Life**—a home goods range for college students—and **Fabulosity**, a hip-hop inspired girl's line designed by **Baby Phat** director Kimora Lee Simmons. The company is kicking off its back-to-school effort with online games, text messaging components, and TV spots. The initiative will kick off July 18, playing up the retailer's lifestyle brands with a theme similar to the 1980s movie "*The Breakfast Club*."

**Sears** is attempting to reach its teens and tweens where they are most—the online world. The company is teaming with **Facebook, MySpace, Seventeen, CosmoGirl, Nickelodeon, and Disney**, which are creating custom content and sponsorships for the retailer. **Addicting Games, FunBrain, and Neopets** have developed games exclusive to Sears. These efforts are to drive customer to Sears' "**Arrive Lounge**," an integral element of the "**Don't just go back. Arrive**" theme for the back-to-school season.

### Rebranding private label

- Shoppers Drug Mart is hoping to reach teens and pre-teens with school supplies rebranded as private label items, featuring teen-oriented styles and packaging. "Retailers' private labels and licensed lines all need the same thing: a compelling new look," says Mark Lilien, consultant with [The Retail Technology Group](#). "Back-to-school fashion isn't very innovative this year, the economy is lousy, and consumer electronics is a giant competitor. That's where the innovation reigns: new Apple iPhone and giant flat screen TVs."

"Many of the core items such as binders, writing instruments, and backpacks have been designed to evoke a cutting edge feeling," adds Doron Levy, President of [Captus Business Consulting](#). "If executed well at the store level, this back-to-school season should be successful...Even dollar stores are taking things upscale. Name brands and higher quality products with better packaging are now appearing on dollar store shelves."

### Innovate to outshine

While many retailers are using celebrity status to push sales, some experts still say the economic downturn and high gas prices will prevent the back-to-school season from being optimal for retailers. "For the consumer, the traditional **three Rs are now 'retailer,' 'rates,' and 'requirements,'**" notes Robert Passikoff, president of Brand Keys. "Which retailer is going to offer the best prices for things they need most is how consumers are entering the back-to-school marketplace."

Lilien adds that federal intervention may further cut into back back-to-school sales this season. **The Federal College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 9/27/2007**, which limits college loans acquisition, could severely impact students' spending habits. "Sale pricing will be the number-one rule, with very few exceptions," he says.