

## Marketing Challenge: How to Give Thanks to your Clients

New year and other festivities will be soon upon us. Many businesses like to send their clients appropriate gifts to begin the new year and to thank them for their business. Some send cards and others chocolates.

Here is what a cross section of seven business people has to say about the whole gamut of gift and thanks giving in business. The paper concludes with five business gift-giving guidelines. Work out your own pick.

### 1. Kay, Business Owner

*It's time to start thinking about annual gifts for our clients. This is the first year we will send gifts to our clients. We're trying to figure out if we should give a gift to all paying clients or only to the top ones. Also, we haven't been able to find out what kinds of gifts are memorable and appreciated as opposed to useless and overused (e.g., fruitcakes and calendars with our logo). We want them to come across as genuine, not as sales pieces. What are the gift-giving rules of thumb?*

### 2. Rickey Gold, president and CEO of Rickey Gold & Associates, doesn't have any rules when it comes to gift giving:

*I send gifts to my steady clients and cards to those occasional project customers. I spend according to the amount of business generated from each client. To me, that's reasonable. The biggest problem I've found is finding new gifts for those who've been with me for five or six years. I like to send something different each year. It might be Godiva Chocolates or homemade cookie trays for the larger firms. Last year, I put together big baskets for my best clients. Doing it myself enabled me to pick things I knew they'd like. They did like them, and it was fun to put the basket together.*

### 3. Christine Tursky, marketing manager, takes the logo approach along with something useful. She also gets ideas by looking at similar products when visiting clients:

*I like to see my company's logo on clients' desks when I visit them. We look for practical gifts that people will keep on their desks, such as coffee mugs, and then we customize them to make them interesting or meaningful to clients. For example, we will have a small run of coffee mugs printed up with images (including our logo) related to a particular "cool" project or a highly specialized trade show. Of course, I also check to see what other supplier logos I can spot while I'm there.*

### 4. Agnieszka Gornicka, CEO of Inquiry, wants to be genuine:

*We send a box of "Merci" chocolates and a thank-you note with every invoice exceeding a certain value (approximately \$1,000). For more sophisticated gifts, I don't think there is a rule of thumb, only that you have to know what your clients will appreciate. The gifts should be both personal and related to your business.*

### 5. EC (Lisa) Stewart, creative goddess at ECStewart Designs, Inc., advises personal gifts:

*I prefer to give a gift card from a local bookstore. I refrain from giving something personal, such as a gift certificate to a spa, as it sends the wrong message. A bookstore gift card allows the recipient to accept it without embarrassment.*

**6. Louise Barton, sales/marketing director at Air Compliance Testing, has a large list of people to thank and relies on calendars:**

*As a small company, we maintain about 150 clients and send them all large, colorful wall calendars at the end of each year. We originally started by sending calendars to only the top clients but got such good feedback on such a simple thing that we include everyone now. You may consider calendars "useless and overused" but our clients' feedback indicates that they appreciate and use them.*

**7. Ash Sondhi, director at Definite Brands in Pune, India, reminds us not to overlook one of the most important clients:**

*Look around and you will find your most important client—your employees—surprise them. They are frontline individuals who generate those paying clients. Ask them for suggestions. You may give clients a photo frame (without the logo or name of your company) as each time they see the pictures of their loved ones they will think of your company. Another option is a discount voucher for the products you offer, and this way you shall have an opportunity to meet them again and sell yourself at the same time.*

**8. Five General guidelines for giving gifts.**

- a. Avoid something personal or expensive, as it could be embarrassing.
- b. Consider giving clients who supply most of your business something more expensive than the rest without going overboard.
- c. For potential clients, you might consider sending cards so you're in the forefront of their minds.
- d. Be careful when it comes to using the company logo/imprint, because it could smell more like advertising than a gift.
- e. Why wait until the end of the year to thank your clients (or your employees)? Imagine how surprised they will be when they receive thanks at a slower gift-giving time of the year? Your chances of their remembering/appreciating you are higher.

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(Source: by Meryl K. Evans and Hank Stroll , September 27, 2005)