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Plan on Giving Your Clients a Holiday Gift?

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Each year we're presented with the opportunity to show our clients how much we appreciate their business, their loyalty and their referrals. However, with this opportunity comes many gift-giving-etiquette questions and like most business opportunities, you can easily look foolish if you're not aware of the strategy involved. Read this first if you're planning on giving your clients holiday gifts this year, it might save your business' reputation!

Many questions arise when it comes to business gift giving including, if you can't afford to give gifts to all your clients, how do you decide which clients should receive one? How much should you spend? What type of gift is appropriate and what type is tacky? What if you have several contacts at one client's office? What kind of gift should you give if you not only want to show your appreciation for your client's business, but also want to continue to promote your business as well? Is it OK to give a gift that does both?

Now, if you're limited in funds and need to choose which clients should receive a gift, start by making a list, with the client who has made up the most of your revenue first. Then work your way down to the client who has made up the smallest amount of revenue for the year. Next, create groupings of clients by drawing a line after your top five, then the next five, and so on. By doing this, you can set up different price points for each grouping of clients.

The amount you spend really depends on what you want to spend and what your budget will allow. You may choose to divide your budget for client gifts equally or, you may choose to spend a little more on your top five clients, and then divide what's left among the rest.

Now, you may also want to take the time to find out, subtly of course, whether your client is allowed to receive gifts from vendors, and if there is a maximum price point for which they can receive gifts. Some companies do not allow their employees to receive gifts of any kind from vendors; others will allow it with a price point of less than \$50, for example. Still, other

companies allow employees to receive gifts from vendors and don't have a price limitation. Knowing where your client stands in this scenario will prevent you from buying an expensive gift for a client who is unable to receive it, which could be embarrassing for both parties involved.

Depending on how well you know your clients, gifts pertaining to their personal interests are OK, but I don't recommend giving alcohol or tobacco as a general rule. It's always better to err on the safe side. Also, giving nuts or other items that people may be allergic to is always a little risky. If you have several contacts at one client's office, giving a gift that the office can share is a good idea, such as a gift basket with various food items.

Now, if you want to give something outside the box, giving an experience to those in your client's office may be a fun and different idea. For example, you could offer to take the entire office out for a movie, concert, or other type of entertainment (just make sure whatever you choose takes place outside of office hours).

Giving gifts during the holidays that also promote your business is OK, if the items are high quality. For example, I wouldn't recommend giving a cheap pen that has your logo on it as a gift, but a high-quality pen is OK. If you give something cheap your company will look cheap too. For example, giving a vinyl portfolio may not be received as well as a leather portfolio, and so on.

If you truly want to promote your business so that those other than your clients may inquire about what you have to offer, choose an item that your client will use every day and that will be seen by others. For example, the leather portfolio I mentioned above is something your client may use when attending meetings or networking events. If the portfolio is nice enough, others may ask about it, or about you, if your company logo is on the front of it.

If you have clients you consider "ambassadors" or "champions," in other words, they promote your business to others, you may want to consider putting the word "ambassador" behind or below your company logo to indicate your client is an ambassador of your products and services. By doing this, you invite others who may see your logo with "ambassador" written next to it to ask about your client and your company.

So, beware of holiday gift giving rules and always go with something tasteful. Happy gift giving and enjoy the holidays!

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