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## Planning for a Powerful Thank You Gift

**B**efore the holidays you might have been thinking about this topic. Things got busy, you ran out of time and maybe you got a card out. You decided that “next year” I’ll get organized sooner! It really isn’t too early to make some plans for showing your clients some love.

What can saying thank you to your customers give you in return? A lot! Competitive advantage. Loyalty. Brand equity. Referrals. A “Thank You” can take the form of an event, meal, or production piece, or a combination of all of those. Customizing your thank you is a creative, exciting project that can motivate you and your staff, as well as remind your customers how much you appreciate their business. What makes an appropriate gift for your business? Here are some things to consider when planning your powerful thank you gift:

### Brand

Just sending a card sometimes seems like a lot of effort when it can get lost in the holiday shuffle. Your thank you design can break through the clutter. The key to any thank you gift is to be sure it represents your brand. Although this project will be an expression of gratitude to your customers for the work they do with your company, it should be as unique as your company culture and your relationship with each client.

### Saying thank you

The project should be well thought out. Although your “package” may be more complex, there is an art to saying thank you. Key components of the communication portion of the project should include:

- A formal greeting
- Expression of your gratitude
- Discussion their use of the thank you gift if it takes explanation or has instructions
- Mention the past relationship, invite a future relationship
- Gracefully thank them again for their business

- Submit your regards from the company or you personally

### Timing

- It is a good idea to thank your customers any time of the year.
- The holiday space may be too crowded for your liking. You can differentiate yourselves by picking a holiday outside November, December and January or another day of recognition that makes more sense for your business. For example, if you own a dating service, Valentine’s Day might work better for you. Or, if your industry is “green” related, perhaps Earth Day will be most appropriate.
- If your particular business does not have a relationship to a yearly holiday or significant annual event, perhaps a charity that you support might have one that you can “borrow” and make a connection between your company and that chosen organization.

### Consider your clients

- You should maintain a sense of appropriateness. Sending Christmas presents to clients of a different faith – or who have no religious or spiritual connection – may not be a good strategy. No single holiday represents the same thing to all of your clients. Respect their feelings and make the gift and timing broad enough not to offend.
- Are your clients competitors? The use of one client’s products in the thank you will cause friction with the other clients. Pick a thank you project and elements that do not show favoritism in any way.
- Keep it legal. Is your industry regulated in terms of gift giving and dollar limits? Know your legal obligations and plan accordingly.
- Define the mailing list and determine if you will also offer the thank you to prospects, vendors, or business partners. This may tweak your copy a little bit but may pay off in the end by influencing all the means by which you get and keep business over time.



## Utility

A thank you that can be used daily or prominently displayed in an office or home will have a lasting impression. It also keeps your business top of mind with the customer. Anything that your customers can engage with- sight, sound, touch - is a plus.

## Emotional component

All business relationships have some type of personal or emotional content. People will typically do business with you if they like you. Your thank you can express or possess an emotional component that can evoke a response from them and inspire them to remember you in many ways, including fondly, fun, or funky.

## Budget

- Think about this project paying off long term
- You will incur a cost up front for development, but look at it as an investment
- Have a vision for how much the project will cost
- Give yourself a range in between which you will be comfortable
- Work an element of timelessness into the program, or the ability to refresh the base thank you every year – to save time, energy and dollars in subsequent years. This approach will also keep your clients intrigued, engaged, and guessing as to what you'll come up with next!

## Planning ahead

For a business owner who has not undertaken this type of custom project before, the lead-time may be surprising. It is important to define all the moving parts of this project ahead of time. Depending on the complexity, the project may include a copywriter, specialty products vendor, embroidery, printer, packaging, assembly, post office mail or other methods of distribution including personal delivery. Each one of these steps involved will have their own timelines and parameters. The best approach is to pick a date for deliver and then work backwards. In some cases, this may push you into next year, but a well-planned project with squishy time is better than being late. Take advantage of project management, whether you assign that task to a vendor or internally. This is a critical step. Brainstorm your vision. Layout the project. List the resources needed for each step and the relationships between component production timelines.

## Put Your “Inner Salesman” on Hold

There is one major point to keep in mind: the goal of the thank you should be just that, to say thank you. It is not a forum for introducing your latest product or service. There should not be any sales language or call to action. The package may be interpreted as a promotion so it should not be crafted in a way that is too heavy handed. You can subtly offer a link to an e-newsletter, which would provide information versus a hard sell, or include a free coupon for something of value. Or you may simply have your website printed on the back as a means to reach you.

## Listen

In polite society, you don't say thank you for a thank you. However, your clients may be so thrilled with your thank you package that they may call you with feedback. Reactions can be a marketer's best friend. Listen. Learn. Incorporate what they say into the next thank you reiteration. You can also consider what their words mean, what they like or don't like about it, log that into a customer relations management (CRM) tool, and use their words to improve everything you do for them based on their personal preferences.

## Case Studies

### Wild Woman Design – Silly Putty

Being in the creativity business, I have high pressure to come up with a thank you that represents my values, the quality of my work, and the brand personality of company! I give out tins of Silly Putty. The Silly Putty can be used over and over again. This attribute fits my passion for social responsibility and conservation of the environment. Silly Putty can be reused and repurposed as a stress ball, lint remover, pen grip, and under a wobbly chair for balance. It is a neat thing and my clients say that they “rediscover it” time and time again, and play with it while they are at their desks.



### Client – Food Labeling Company

I have a client that provides food nutrition labels for food company packaging. They had been talking internally for years about creating a holiday gift to give their clients. The challenge was that the obvious thing – food – was not an option as their clients range from mom and pop outfits to Fortune 100 companies and many are competitors. My client chose an item that was food related, but one that would not offend any of her clients or show favoritism. Their final decision took the form of cookie cutters



packaged nicely with a thank you note and recipe. The package has multiple uses. Attendees get a 4-cookie cutter package as a thank you for participating in educational classes. A five box series was pre-planned as a thank you for client testimonials. Each year my client offers a different shape and recipe with new copy that refreshes the idea while getting a good return on the initial creative and development investment. The crinkle paper in which the cookie cutters are wrapped matches the company's brand colors. The owner prides herself in finding recipes and received permission to use them. As a fun spin on their business, they analyzed each



recipe and put the nutrition label in the cookie cutter box. The owner says that everyone loves them. Clients have given good feedback that can be used in future planning including, "Cute presentation," "We will be baking cookies with the kids and grand kids," "It has inspired a family tradition."

Whatever concept you choose, appreciate the fact that by giving a thank you gift, it is a reflection of you and your company. Gratitude is a good thing.

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