

# toolbox

## HOLIDAY SURVIVAL

Corporate finances have proven to be tight this year, so what does that mean for the annual holiday event? When it comes to scaling back, there are many options a company can take from holding the event in January instead of December, to having a potluck lunch during the workday instead of a sit-down dinner. While holiday parties tend to enhance employee morale and motivation, planning a low-cost, creative alternative can save your company money and still reward staff for a job well done.



## Surviving the Holiday Season in the Workplace During Tough Economic Times

### Don't Worry, You're Not Alone...

- A survey by the workplace consulting firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas shows one in five companies is scuttling or scaling down its year-end bash.
- The National Association of Catering Executives and the trade magazine *Special Events* have found a majority of event planners are losing at least 10 percent of their corporate holiday business.
- Event planners say some companies are substituting hors d'oeuvres for sit-down dinners, shortening party hours and limiting bar service to beer and wine.
- Twice as many companies as in 2006 are not allowing employees to bring guests to holiday parties; 80 percent more are holding parties at the office; 60 percent more are scheduling them during the workday; and 35 percent more are axing alcohol.
- Instead of a holiday party, some companies have opted to have a potluck lunch, while some executives are inviting employees to their own homes, creating intimacy while cutting costs.
- Some companies are delaying their annual holiday event until January, a less stressful time of year than the more common month of December. Companies can save significantly on the budget, as well as increase employee turnout.

## Boosting Business Relationships With Holiday Cards

The holiday season usually brings good tidings and cheer that businesses like to pass on to their customers and staff, but for some businesses this year, it may bring the realization that finances are tighter than ever. Is this the year to cut back on holiday cards?

Marc Wagenheim, product marketing director, Hallmark Business Expressions, a unit of the greeting card giant, says Hallmark has found that businesses say they use greeting cards as a “kind of investment in their business... investing in customer relationships with the hopes that it will pay back.”

The company has conducted research that found at least half of customers who received holiday cards from businesses say they are more likely to continue doing business with that company versus another one.

Zogby International recently conducted a national survey for Tiny Prints, an online business that offers personalized cards and stationery. Zogby found that the majority of small business owners who typically purchase holiday greeting cards, newsletters and corporate gifts don't plan to reduce their holiday budgets for 2008.

- 88 percent of those surveyed said they typically spend up to \$500 on holiday cards and plan to keep it that way.
- 41 percent said the state of the economy will affect holiday spending.
- Only 5 percent plan to nix greeting cards and gifts completely.
- The remaining 30 percent plan to cut back on the quantity or quality of their holiday greetings.




## Tips for businesses that want to make a lasting impression through cards:

- **Handwrite a message.** It will mean more than if it's just a stamped thing. A card is something you can personalize and the stronger your message the more it will stand out.
- **Spell the recipient's name correctly.** Spelling a customer's name incorrectly on a card is one of the worst mistakes you can make.
- **Send Thanksgiving cards.** It's the nature of the holiday to say “thank you” and the card won't get lost in the droves of Christmas cards.
- **Send cards early.** Oftentimes, whoever receives the card will leave their cards up in the office until the end of the year. So, by sending early, you will have your name or brand in front of the recipient all season.
- **Consider eco-friendly cards.** The single biggest trend in the last year or so is a movement toward greener solutions. Cards with recycled content make a statement.
- **Consider secular designs.** The intent of a greeting card is to strengthen relationships and if you're not clear if a customer practices a particular religion, it's better not to guess wrong even though customers tend to be very forgiving of those kind of mistakes. However, if you know which holiday people celebrate, it's great to be more specific.

Source: Sharon McLoone, [http://voices.washingtonpost.com/small-business/2008/11/boosting\\_business\\_relationship.html](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/small-business/2008/11/boosting_business_relationship.html).

# tool box



## Alternatives to the Ho-Hum Holiday Party

We all get stuck in ruts, and the annual holiday party can be another one. But with some creative thinking, the holidays can be a time to bring everyone together and reward your staff for a job well done. Rather than another party, consider earmarking the holiday party money in more creative ways. For instance, one thing that has caught on recently, instead of the holiday party, is the holiday reward. Rewarding employees this time of year can achieve the same goodwill that a party can, and has the added bonus of motivating employees. There are many different things that a small business owner can do to reward employees within the holiday spirit.

- **Give employees time off.** Give your employees an extra, paid, day or two off. This allows them to go shopping, send off packages and handle all of the other tasks we have this time of year. Because we are all so busy right now, free time around the holidays is especially valuable and appreciated. And even if your business is busy this time of year, juggling schedules and hiring some part time help can create the space to reward your best employees. They will be grateful all year long.
- Similarly, you can give employees who want it a **day off to do charitable work.**

- To get into the spirit of giving, what about taking everyone to a local children's hospital or retirement home where they can **volunteer their time** for half a day?
- **Create a suggestion box.** The employee who makes the best suggestion for improving the business can, for instance, win a nice dinner for two, as well as the opportunity to have their improvement implemented.
- **Hire a massage therapist** to visit your office for an afternoon.
- **Create a package wrapping station** – leave wrapping paper, ribbon, tape, scissors and cards in the break room so that your staff can wrap their presents after doing some lunchtime shopping.
- Consider offering employees a **flex-time holiday plan.** Not everyone celebrates Christmas. Maybe Martin Luther King Day or Memorial Day is more important to some employees. So, at the beginning of the year, post a list of every possible holiday – everything from St. Patrick's Day to Rosh HaShanah. Then, allow your staff to pick any 11 (which is the typical amount of holiday time in most workplaces).

Source: Steve Strauss, [http://www.usatoday.com/money/smallbusiness/columnist/strauss/2003-12-22-strauss\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/smallbusiness/columnist/strauss/2003-12-22-strauss_x.htm).



## Low-Cost Holiday Party Alternative

Times are tough, and so are corporate budgets. But rather than canceling the company holiday party this year, which can have a detrimental effect on employee morale and motivation, try a fun low-cost and creative alternative. Remember: Recognition is free, and can be more valuable and motivating than money. For example, handing out funny awards to employees is a low-cost way to celebrate co-worker success and bring laughter into the workplace.

### Here is a list of the Top 10 Funny Employee Awards Ideas:

1. The **Heinz Ketchup Award** for always making others wait.
2. The **Jeff Gordon Award** for racing away from work the fastest.
3. The **Deer in the Headlights Award** for most confused.
4. The **Loch Ness Award** for least likely to be found.
5. The **American Express Award** for always taking credit.
6. The **Bermuda Triangle Award** for the desk where things go in but never come out.
7. The **Human Vulture Award** for eating anything found lying around.
8. The **Baryshnikov Award** for most skill in dancing around the issues.
9. The **Global Warming Award** for polluting the atmosphere with hot air.
10. The **Casual Monday-Friday Award** for continually pushing the limits of "business attire."

Source: Larry Weaver, <http://vnutravel.typepad.com/dailyperk/2008/11/low-cost-holida.html>.