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Creative, Inexpensive, and BIG Value Marketing Gift Ideas

By Catherine Franz

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"Tis the season to be jolly!" A great attitude is easy to have when you design your gifts with a lot of thought and don't allow the experience take you to the cleaners.

One of the traditions I like at this time of year is remembering all the people that were there for me this past year. Especially those that didn't receive anything in return for it -- in the smallest or largest way.

Meaningful gift giving does not have to be expensive. In fact, some of the most precious gifts are the ones that cost very little, but mean a great deal because of the time and effort it took to select, or create, and mail.

Here are eight ideas I have used over the last few years. You can use these as Christmas gifts; add them to your "leave-behind" marketing package, a referral thank you, or "thanks for helping me" gift.

It does make a difference if your logo or advertising information is on the gift. It does affect the perceived value on their part and can make a difference in your relationship. Make the choice to add your information or leave it off with their perception in mind. Remember, marketing is all perception and not product or service.

1. Purchase discontinued note card sets from Hallmark and other card shops during the year. If you call and ask your nearest store as to the time of year when they discount

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"previous season" items, they will gladly tell you. You can save from 50% to 75% on these items.

2. Create a logo candy jar. You can purchase candy jars with different seasonal markings. Then create a stencil with your company logo or web site address (I prefer the web site address). You can buy the stencil supplies and the empty candy jars at your local craft store like MJ Design, Michaels, or online. They sometimes have the mailing boxes to match. Add a bow with your business card. Keep the jar nice so they want to keep it out in the open for that season. Jars for the Easter season are great with the

miniature eggs in them and are not likely to get completing jars from other suppliers. After dinner mints are great for the contents. If you return frequently, bring a refill with you.

3. Give a business journal. Borders and Barnes and Noble have all sorts of sizes and designs. For business journals or marketing journals, I usually buy the 8 ½ x 11 size (usually under \$10) at Borders and then I write three or four marketing ideas in the journal that specifically apply to them.

4. Give a gift they can take home to their child(ren). Most business or marketing gifts are for everyone at the company or for them. Sometimes giving without a "marketing angle" attached increases the impact. Especially if you remember their child's birthday.

5. Create a family cookbook with 10 or so of your favorite (or personal family) recipes. Add your contact information on the back. Use the software, Clickbook (www.clickbook.com) to transfer it from your word processing software into a real nice booklet fast and easy.

6. Give them a subscription to one of the favorite magazines. I love writer's magazines and writing, so receiving something I am so passionate about along with the gift of learning is perfect for me. If you get two, call the company and turn it into a two-year subscription. You can add to your card this idea if they already have a subscription. Do they have a hobby? Do they have a goal or working on a particular project? There are tons of

magazines out there. You can also add to the card a list of web sites they can find more information on the topic. You can send a card with the subscription information in it separately so they know to expect it and to contact you if they don't receive it.

7. If you have great penmanship or creative on the computer, buy blank note cards and add their name on the front of the each card, like "From the desk of..." "A personal note from..." The fact that you took the time always makes an impact. Want to add a little more? Place a stamp on each envelope for them.

8. If they have a home office and you are into crafts, cross-stitch a wall calendar holder. It has a hook, nice border that shows past the large calendar size and business card sewn in with a place for them to hang their favorite

wall calendar or you can send them a calendar with it the first year.

It is normal to value the gift to the value of the client/customer. You can just send everyone the same gift or you can match the gift value to the value you received from him or her.

Don't forget your bartering exchanges or the people that just "opened your doors."

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Inexpensive Wedding Gifts For Anyone

By Sarah Williams

A wedding gift does not have to be expensive to be well received and appreciated by the couple. While the extravagance of some weddings may compel their guests to purchase pricey gifts, it is not necessary to do so. Many people are invited to a number of weddings each year and it's not feasible to purchase an expensive gift for every wedding you attend. While you may want to splurge on an extravagant gift for a close friend or relative, you are not required to invest a great deal of money in a gift for a casual acquaintance. Even if you are very close with the couple you may be able to create a very inexpensive gift for their wedding. The following are just a few ideas for inexpensive wedding gifts that are sure to delight the couple without breaking your budget.

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One inexpensive gift idea is to fill a mixing bowl with a variety of kitchen utensils. This is both an inexpensive and an extremely useful gift. Many couples are starting their life together and will need a few basic utensils and kitchen gadgets to get them started. This gift is thoughtful and useful without being detrimental to your budget.

Another inexpensive gift idea is to create a basket containing elements for a romantic dinner. You could put this basket together by yourself and include items such as dry pasta and sauce as well as a bottle of wine and two wine glasses. You might also want to include a non-perishable dessert such as biscotti to complete your meal. You could even include a recipe card with one of your own personally tested recipes. This inexpensive gift idea will be greatly valued by the couple because it essentially giving them the gift of a romantic night alone.

Picture frames can also be an inexpensive wedding gift idea. The couple will likely have a wide variety of photos that they will want to display in their home and providing them with a few simple frames is an inexpensive way to give them a truly useful gift. While many picture frames can be expensive, you could find simple wooden frames in a craft store and paint or decorate to suit the couple's taste. You could also shop at closeout stores for these items and may find quite a few bargains available. Picture frames are an inexpensive and useful wedding gift idea that is likely to be cherished by the couple.

The couple's registry could also be another source of inexpensive wedding gift ideas. Many couples will register for an assortment of items that span a large price spectrum. You may find that the couple has included many inexpensive items in their registry that may fall within your budget constraints. Choosing an inexpensive item from the couple's registry ensures that you are giving them a gift that they will truly like and appreciate because they picked out the item themselves.

If you are a close friend or relative of the couple you may be able to make a very inexpensive wedding gift that will also be unique and greatly cherished by the couple. If you have many pictures of the couple, you might consider arranging these pictures in a unique way in a photo album to give to the couple as a gift. You could also use the photos to create a scrapbook or even a video presentation set to music that features the couple. These gifts will be greatly appreciated by the couple and can be created for a relatively small cost.

Candles are another inexpensive wedding gift. Newlyweds often incorporate candles in their decorating and also use candles to create ambiance during dinner or on other occasions. Just after they are married is the time when couples are most likely to enjoy candlelight dinners frequently and for no

specific occasion so a wedding gift of candles is bound to be used often. Candles come in a great variety of colors, sizes and scents so it should be easy to find an assortment of candles that will be appreciated by the couple.

A wedding gift does not have to be expensive to be useful and appreciated by the couple. Many wedding guests spend a great deal of money on fancy china or glassware that is only used on special occasions while inexpensive gifts such as candles and kitchen utensils are used by the couple on a daily basis.

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