

Corporate Bland

CORPORATE GIFTS OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT BRAND VALUES,
SO WHY IS SO LITTLE THOUGHT GIVEN TO THEM? **BY PATRICIA MOORE**

If it's the thought that counts, why is it so little thought seems to go into the choice of corporate gifts, asks Brian Meredith, CEO of The Marketing Bureau. "A gift has to be targeted, it has to be relevant, it's got to add something to the relationship and it needs to communicate that it is absolutely in tune with whatever the brand positioning is. But, it seems to me, less thought goes into corporate gifts than into what people are having for dinner."

Arrow International got it exactly right earlier this year, he says: "They're a project management and construction company, and one of the huge issues coursing through their industry is environmentally sustainable design.

They hosted a special function to celebrate the length of service of one of their senior managers and, at the end of the event, everyone was given a gift to mark the occasion.

"It was a young native tree, beautifully presented in a reusable container and with a very simple message that underlined their commitment to environmentally sustainable design. They stated that by giving 300 saplings, they hoped they could make some small contribution. 'Go and plant it in your garden', they said. I thought that was fabulous."

Corporate gifts need to be treated in the same way as any other piece of marketing communication, says Meredith. And, he says while

there's nothing wrong with that glitzed-up bottle of wine and the card saying 'thank you for your support all year', you can't help but picture 200 similar bottles stacked in a reception area just waiting to be delivered. "Where's the individuality, the attempt to target the gift to the recipient?"

But Cheryl Rae of Presents of Mind says more marketers are putting a real effort into their choice of corporate gifts. "They want a gift that reflects their brand, their culture and their values, but sometimes the urgency of the event catches up on them." She cites an occasion when a prominent Auckland professional firm wanted an item to send out with an



Stationery set.



Millau gift set.



Arcica cheese board set.



UBQ BBQ light.



invitation to an important event. “They said, ‘Our budget’s \$5.’ I said, ‘I think you’re wasting your time.’ Sending something cheap and cheerful is not going to reflect who you are and what you stand for.”

She’d talked herself out of a sale, but says it was more important to her that a valued client maintained the integrity of its brand. And, as Brian Meredith reminds us, every tiny little behaviour you engage in as a company reflects on the brand. He tells the story of a colleague who was vice president, quality systems for Estée Lauder in New York, when it was at the forefront of gift-with-purchase.

“His biggest challenge was getting the marketing people to understand any gift that carried their brand, either explicitly or implicitly, whether it was with a purchase or a corporate gift, must reflect the values of that brand.” Giving a cosmetic bag bearing the Estée Lauder logo, manufactured in China for 75c, was jeopardising the company’s ‘number one’ position in cosmetics, he said.

Drake International has always seen the value in corporate gifts, says national marketing manager Donna Kerrison, with gift giving at several different levels, including candidate, client and colleague, an important part of its marketing. “It’s a tangible reminder that has Drake’s logo on it and we hope evokes a memory of the recipient’s experience with the brand.”

It’s important to Drake that the gifts they give are relevant, says Kerrison. “No one wants to receive a gift that hasn’t been thought through and designed with a specific purpose in mind. It’s about drilling down for each recipient then ensuring the information is kept on our database.”

While branding is important to Drake, it’s

untreated pine boxes and gifts made in New Zealand whenever possible. We try not to create waste or even give the impression of wasting or abusing resources.”

Because there are limitations on advertising to its customers – primarily doctors – raising brand awareness by gift giving is an important part of the marketing mix, he says. However,

A corporate gift presents marketers with a huge opportunity to promote their brand.

also important it’s subtly handled. “No one wants a gift with a 30cm logo on it.” Kerrison prefers embossing on leather products, branding inside, rather than on the outside for bags. “If we put a logo sticker on a glass product, I ensure it can be removed without leaving a sticky mess.” And, she says, Drake gifts come in a recyclable branded bag. “In the hope that the recipient will reuse it, rather than throw it away.”

Environmental concerns are also important at Douglas Pharmaceuticals, says marketing manager Craig Dallas. “We want to promote our company as representing all that is good about New Zealand.” There are high standards within the company regarding corporate responsibility, he says. “Hence, plants in

the industry code of practice limits what can be gifted.

“We try to gift with New Zealand-themed items as we are the only New Zealand-owned pharmaceutical manufacturer, and want to emphasise the New Zealand-made concept.” Dallas says items such as locally made, hand-crafted, wildlife toys – for example, pukeko and kakapo – have proved a big hit. “Last conference we used native trees with our company logo and branded ‘homegrown’ which were hugely popular, and we also use a local carver who supplies us with small Maori items made from either whalebone or greenstone.”

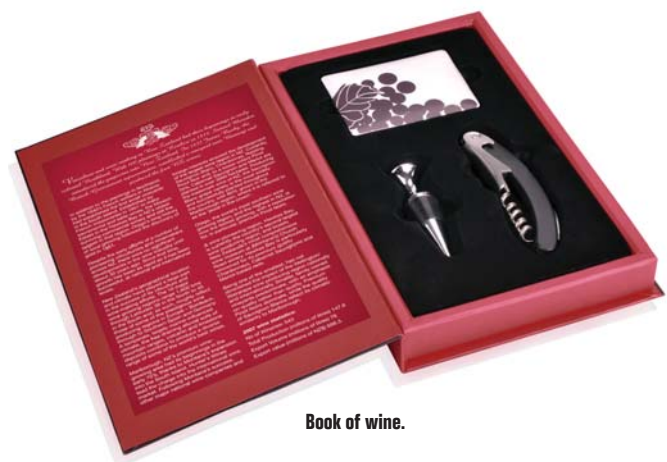
A corporate gift presents marketers with a huge opportunity to promote their brand, but it’s not always the marketing team that’s



Bookstand.



Pepper mill.



Book of wine.

Christmas Trees

Small and large gift box.



Box and seeds.



The desire by companies to be more environmentally responsible has seen an upsurge in the demand for living and eco-friendly gifts, says Ruth Flynn of Trees Please. While Christmas is their busiest season, more marketers are thinking trees – albeit baby ones – when it comes to corporate gifts, product launches, promotions and invitations, she says.

The companies she's worked with cover a wide range of industries, from those with a focus on sustainability, to others directly involved with building and timber. "There is also a growing interest from professional firms who want to give a gift that makes them stand out from their competitors."

And there are no surprises when it comes to the most popular 'living' Christmas gift. "The pohutukawa is always the hot option, but we have been asked to source many different specific varieties by companies which want something that fits with their brand."

Unfortunately 'living' gifts have been known to turn up their toes – as anyone who's ever received a goldfish will testify – but as Flynn points out many corporate gifts are consumed or wear out eventually. "We do as much as we can to ensure our trees are a lasting gift."

making that decision. "Marketers don't see gifts as a vital component in the marketing mix and don't budget for them," says Scott Bedford of TLC Marketing. "They are probably more concerned about building brands and engaging with their consumers than in how a gift can enhance a stakeholder relationship. They need to look at gifts a little more seriously in terms of the impact they can have with key partners."

"We work closely with marketers for promotional product purchases but when it comes to corporate gifts it's often the manager's PA or the HR department," says Rachael Dempsey of Promotion by Design. As long as marketing

has some say where the company's logo is being used, is it important, asks Carmel Gaskin of Zebra Promotional. "It's about the relationship with the client."

However, at Presents of Mind, Cheryl Rae is dealing mainly with marketing people who have a great understanding of the importance of their brand and its values, she says. "But that's only half the picture. It's important to also think about the demographics of the recipients. Younger marketers get hung up about what they would like and don't always think about the needs and wants of the end user."

Regardless of who's making the call, are

companies choosing gifts that are relevant to their business and to the recipient? "Yes and no," says Dempsey. "They always ask for corporate gifts relevant to their business but many gifts are generic and don't relate to specific industries. We find most of the time the corporate gifts chosen are relevant to the client's budget and preferred choice." Branding is important, she says, but it tends to be more subtle on gifts. "Embossing leather products rather than printing them; engraving metal gifts."

"Garish doesn't work for corporates," says Carmel Gaskin.

The 'corporate gift' label applies at a number of levels; as well as clients, staff and project partners may come in for something special, and gift giving can happen at any time of the year. "End-of-exercise and launch gift products are on the increase," says Gaskin, who reports more companies holding stocks of appropriate gifts – particularly those which have been indented 'custom made'.

(Tread warily when choosing staff gifts. An American study, into how staff felt about the gifts they received from their employers within the previous 12 months, came up with some interesting findings: 59 percent admitted they hadn't kept the gift – it was either thrown away or given to someone else; 24 percent rated it cheap; and 32 percent felt it was not useful.)

The season of corporate largesse looms, so what's the next big thing? One cynical insider says "not a lot" – but adds the quality of the traditional favourites does get better every year.

The ubiquitous gift baskets and bottles of wine will still be popular and there's a growing demand for environmentally friendly products, like native trees, and retail brand items – rather than those from a catalogue.

Many of the collections, from promotional products companies that specialise in corporate gifts, feature products that can be enjoyed by a family. And many newer items appear to have the recipient 'with everything' in mind – wine accessories like the XD Wine Box with Vinoglobe, Champagne coolers and gift sets



An Oldie But A Goody

Corporate calendars appear to have become something of an endangered species over the past few years. But they've not disappeared, just moved upmarket, say Nick and Karen Baldwin of independently owned Baldwin Calendars.

"More discerning clients and higher postage rates have created a shift away from the lower quality, high-volume calendars," says Nick Baldwin. "However, the top-end market has remained consistent with marketers evaluating their spending and targeting recipients more carefully.

"A corporate wall calendar gives practical everyday exposure to a brand," he says. And, as the number arriving in the office reduces, the goodwill they generate increases accordingly.

with useful tools and useful information like *The Book of Cheese* and *The Book of Wine*.

So who's getting the glamour gifts – the shopping sprees, the hot air balloon flights

and weekends in Wanaka – surely when it comes to enhancing a company's image and creating goodwill they'd have to be winners?

Or are these reserved for what Brian Meredith calls RAKs? Random Acts of Kindness –

SALES AND MARKETING MANAGERS

Are you comfortable with your answers to these questions?

How would you respond if your competition lowered prices or increased marketing?

What would be the impact on your company if you lost your top five key accounts?

What impact would on-going poor customer service have on your business?

How would you define the sales team's motivation levels and morale?

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Taste Treats

Corporate chocolates have come a long way since marketers first discovered the power of the cocoa bean. And the 'Made in New Zealand' label is a plus, says Stephanie Everitt of Devonport Chocolates, whose company is able to accommodate special requirements such as no alcohol or nuts – and brand to order – when required.


Chocolate gifts are a year-round thing for corporates, she says, popular as conference and speakers' gifts, dinner table and staff gifts. And she reports an increase in the number of companies avoiding gift giving at the end of the year, in order 'to stay out of the clutter'. "Often staff who may be distributing gifts are under less pressure at other times of the year too."

And it seems chocolate can make quite a substantial corporate gift. "We're able to offer gifts from \$11.50 to \$165 depending on the client's requirements. Sometimes the large selection boxes are shared by a whole team of people."

Book of cheese.



home – loot bags for adults. "These include an official souvenir programme, a *Phantom* pen, a chocolate *Phantom* mask and aromatic candle, in a souvenir *Phantom* gift bag." Inclusions may be tailored to suit, she says. "The opportunities are endless."

Corporate gifts – like those at a personal level – show someone you care. So is it important for marketers to be involved, to ensure the gifts of choice are appropriate and consistent with a company's brand values? Mike Williamson of TLC Marketing says, "A gift, by its nature, tends to be quite personal so it's important that whoever organises the items has a reasonable idea of what will work for the recipient. A gift that appears to be personalised – even if it is just a perception – will always be appreciated more than a generic, branded company item." 

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Wine box.

corporate gifts to staff members that can do more to ensure retention than any salary raise ever could.

Rachel Gardiner, marketing manager of ticketing and packages provider Showbiz NZ, says Showbiz Corporate Services was created to meet the demands of companies wanting to show just how much their top clients and top people mean to them. Special packages offer premium seating at a show such as *Phantom of the Opera*, plus a selection of VIP extras including access to VIP lounges, Champagne and canapés and gift packs to take



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