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Holiday Gift-Giving for the Implant Dentist

By Jacquelyn Lynn

The holiday season is upon us, and it's time to deal with the annual challenge of choosing gifts for your key patients and business associates. How do you choose a gift that is useful (otherwise, what's the point?), ethical, politically correct, reasonably priced (so it won't look like you're trying to "buy" business or referrals), has no potential for liability (a primary reason alcohol has lost popularity as a holiday gift), and won't offend anyone?

First, decide who will be on your gift list. All your patients? Only certain ones? What about other business associates, such as your referral sources and even suppliers?

When giving gifts to business associates, determine the recipients' policies on accepting gifts. Many organizations limit gifts to a certain dollar value; others refuse them outright; still others allow employees to accept just about anything. Check with the company's personnel department or discreetly ask your contact. You'll also want to get a feel for the individual's attitude about gifts beyond the formal policies. When it comes to giving gifts to patients, consider what you've done in the past and what sort of message the gift is likely to send.

Now, set your budget and select the gifts. Gift-giving to business contacts is certainly a part of your marketing plan, but keep the cost in proportion to the benefits received.

Some ideas to consider:

- **Plants.** Plants are a very neutral gift with an environmental flavor; choose one that is known for cleaning indoor air. Be sure to include a tag with care instructions.
- **Memorabilia.** If you have a news clipping featuring your patient or business associate being mentioned in a positive way, or if you have a photograph of your patient at a happy event, have it framed. It will likely hang on their wall and be a reminder of your thoughtfulness for years to come.
- **Books.** Books are always a good choice in business or personal gift-giving. Be sure the bookstore has a liberal return policy, avoid controversial subjects, and don't buy anything dated that may be hard to exchange.

- **Charitable donations.** You can approach this from two directions: Either give specific donations in each particular patient's name to charities you know they personally support, or give a single large donation to a charity of your choice and send out a letter to everyone saying that's what you've done in lieu of individual gifts. If you do the latter, choose a neutral organization that enjoys popular support. In either case, you don't have to indicate the amount you gave.

- **No gift at all.** This is a perfectly acceptable alternative to the gift-giving dilemma, especially in today's economic climate. If you decide not to give gifts, don't make a big deal about it. Unless you have a reputation for splashy presents, chances are no one will notice.

Another holiday gift-giving strategy to consider is to send gifts at a non-holiday time when they are more likely to stand out and be remembered and appreciated. You can link your gifts to a season, such as sending a gift in February to brighten up the dark winter days. Or you can tie your gifts to a different holiday, such as Valentine's Day with a "we love our patients and business partners" message or April Fool's Day with a "this is no joke, we want you to know how much we appreciate you" message.

Whatever you decide to do about giving gifts, always acknowledge the ones you receive. A hand-written thank-you note is your best choice.

Jacquelyn Lynn is a business writer whose dynamic books and insightful articles have been helping business owners and managers work smarter and more profitably for more than two decades. Her work has appeared in more than 100 regional, national and international publications, and she is a regular contributor to Entrepreneur magazine. She is the editor of the Flashpoints newsletter; subscribe free at www.theflashpoints.com.

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