

BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS TRANSACTIONS

What you need to know about providing corporate gifts to make your holiday season merrier.

By Meghan Boyer

The National Retail Federation found that holiday sales in 2004 rose 5.7 percent over the prior year, with consumers spending a whopping \$222.23 billion throughout the Christmas, Hanukah and Kwanzaa seasons. Looking back at your holiday figures, do you wonder what else you could have done to bring more of that holiday cash flow into your company's pocketbook? One option for the upcoming holiday season is to take advantage of an opportunity that exists for garden centers: building holiday business by servicing corporations' gift-giving needs. The bottom line is corporations need gifts for their best clients, their favored business associates and their employees. Some garden centers have become very

successful at supplying them, so much so that it garners a sizable portion of their holiday income. Charley Hillger, manager of the floral specialties department for Bachman's, Minneapolis, Minn., estimates that corporate gift orders account for about 25 percent of the holiday business in his department.

WHAT TO GIVE, WHAT TO GET

Corporate gifts can be potted plants and fresh floral arrangements or even gift baskets. The types of items offered and their popularity will differ from center to center. Bill Gouldin of Strange's Florists, Greenhouses, and Garden Centers, which has five locations serving the Richmond, Va., area, points out the holiday trend in his company: "Most of the corporate giving would fall into poinsettias,

gift baskets and floral arrangements, occasionally. But probably the more popular items would be gift baskets and poinsettias at Christmas." Brian Wheat, owner of Lafayette Floral, Lafayette, Colo., and Hillger also feel that poinsettias are a hot item with corporate gift givers. Wheat points out that everyone loves to decorate during the holiday season, and corporations giving seasonal plants and arrangements to employees and clients for their desks help to create a festive air in the office.

Gift baskets, another popular choice, offer a range of possibilities for corporations. They can be individualized to fit the personality of each recipient, or, if the corporation needs a bulk order, they can be filled with generic goodies that are sure to please everyone. Gouldin finds that the corporate representatives he interacts with like to pick and choose what goes into gift baskets. "Generally speaking, you have a representative from the corporation, and if they're going to buy several of them, they'll come by, and they'll want to make a prototype and double check the contents of the gift basket, what the price will be for all the contents," says Gouldin. Sometimes the order differs depending on the company's location in relation to the garden center. "If it's going out of state, a lot of time they'll go with a Minnesota theme [for the gift baskets] like wild rice and maple syrup

and pancake mix and that sort of thing," Hillger explains. "If it's local people, then they'll go for more perishable product. Sometimes it's kind of the little gifty things. It can go anywhere from hand lotions and garden items to all edible product. Sometimes it's mixed: blooming and gift."

WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU

Garden centers and corporations have a symbiotic relationship: The corporations receive excellent service and superior gift products. Garden centers receive a host of benefits that make business more profitable. Dale Bachman, president of Bachman's, feels that providing corporate gifts adds to the relationship he has with current clients; he not only provides their commercial interior landscaping, but also fulfills their gift needs. He explains, "It's a value-added offering that we can make, and I think we can offer them convenience. Again, doing business with us, they already have that relationship, and I think that's an advantage for us, as we have the relationship, and we want to maintain that relationship over time and do a good job on their corporate gifts as well as the weekly visits that we make to their offices." Providing for all your corporate clients' needs — from gifts to landscaping — ensures that you'll have bustling business throughout the year.



Specific marketing like Bachman's can attract corporate accounts for increased holiday sales of poinsettias, gift baskets and floral arrangements. (Photos courtesy of Bachman's)

And with maintaining year-round business in mind, it is important to note that the corporate accounts you pick up specifically for the holidays don't need to be once-a-year clients. There are opportunities for additional corporate business at other times during the year — administrative assistant's week, bereavements, birthdays, anniversaries and so on. Corporations that are pleased with your work during the holidays are likely to keep you on board as their go-to garden center. Wheat gives an example: "If you sell 100 3-inch poinsettias [during the holidays], when they get ready next year to plant the petunias in front of their business, they're going to have that top-of-the-mind awareness to call you back if you did a good job for them, rather than look to somebody else. They've already got a relationship with you as a garden center or a florist." The recipients of the corporate gifts are also unlikely to forget who supplied them. Hillger finds that his corporate accounts can lead to non-corporate business: "As we have satisfied business clients, they also will recommend us or utilize us for weddings and anniversaries and that type of thing." The word-of-mouth advertising can lead to

corporations' employees and clients utilizing your center themselves and, additionally, their friends and relatives.

Another benefit of having corporate clients is ease of delivery. Simply by delivering to a corporation instead of a home, your shop can save time, money and mileage. Wheat summarizes: "Here's another thing about delivering to corporations: They're there." He points out that delivering to personal residences can be frustrating if the recipient isn't home during the day. You may be required to make a return trip in the evening to complete the delivery or arrange a pick-up from the store with the recipient. Conversely, when delivering to a corporation, someone is always going to be there to accept. "Even if the person is not available at that time or they went to lunch, then someone will just put the delivery on the recipient's desk, or they'll put them in their office," says Wheat.

Delivering corporate gifts also means giving gifts to multiple recipients in one stop. "At the holidays you may have 50 deliveries one day, and they're all individual houses. Just think if you could take 300 to one location, how that time factors. Boom. You're done." While you'll still be delivering to private resi-

LITTLE DETAILS COUNT

Brian Wheat of Lafayette Floral has an insider tip for corporate and business deliveries: Make their deliveries first thing in the morning. An extra-busy morning delivering to businesses can lead to an afternoon filled with additional orders. Be it holiday gift baskets, Valentine's Day flowers or Mother's Day potted plants, delivering to businesses immediately in the morning creates buzz around the office. The chatter around the water cooler will be about who received flowers and where the arrangements came from. In this way, it reminds those who have forgotten the special occasion that they should send their loved ones flowers or gifts, too. "When they see those 20 arrangements come in for 20 different people in that building first thing in the morning, it makes other people think 'Ah, man, it's Valentine's Day. I gotta call the florist.' If you take them later in the day, you miss an opportunity," explains Wheat. Later in the day, those forgetful individuals will be calling your location to place orders for their friends and family, resulting in extra business for you. Not bad returns simply for getting an early start with your deliveries.

dences, the ease of dropping multiple orders off in one location boosts the number of orders you'll be able to complete in one day.

WHAT TO DO NOW

Many garden centers hooked corporate clients without a calculated campaign; the gift needs of corporations and the services of garden centers seem to go hand in hand. "We've been a florist and garden center for some time, and corporate gifting is just an exponent of the balance of our busi-

ness," explains Gouldin. Despite the natural relationship between the two entities, marketing is still a valuable tool to gain new corporate accounts and inform existing ones of holiday (and year-round) gifting services.

The most direct way to reach corporations is through business-to-business marketing. In this type of effort, garden centers create media — a flyer, brochure, postcard, or the like — to inform corporations about the types of gift services they offer. This can be sent both to ▶

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existing and potential clients. While his company sends marketing to both types, Bachman points out that "Probably the most significant use of the marketing effort is to our existing customer to remind them that we're at their service." Sending the

information to current clients is always a good idea because they may not be informed about the full extent of your services.

If direct marketing is not appealing to you, it is also possible to market generally in places that corpora-

tions and other businesses are likely to see. Gouldin talks about his strategy: "[Business] comes as a result of our position in the marketplace, not because we direct market specifically to corporate giving. We do advertise in business periodicals,

Write in 854

Write in 857

Write in 847



so that's a form of focus on business." Local newspapers, newsletters and magazines are great places to place advertisements because numerous potential clients, including corporations, view them.

Another form of business marketing is networking among your peers. Getting involved with the other businesses in your community gives you a chance to talk up your services to them and maybe even find companies that will be able to assist you in some way. Being the owner and face of Lafayette Floral matters to Wheat: "Giving back to your community is one thing that's very important; it's priority to our company. So when I have to go to a chamber event, I go, and I network there. I'm there; they see my face. Nine times out of 10 I'm at a chamber or rotary event, people walk up and start talking plant material with me." Wheat even carries a small notepad with him to take floral orders from people he's networking with. "We don't know how much marketing or advertising we actually get from that, from us being out in the community, but we're pretty sure that community is supporting us so we're going to support it as much as we can."

No matter how you go about it, maintaining corporate business during the holidays is a benefit to your company. With improved client relations, the potential for year-round corporate business, no hassle deliveries and bulk sales, corporate gifting is an advantageous opportunity available to garden centers. 

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