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BY PAUL NOLAN

Is ROI overrated?

In a business environment that is consumed with tracking, measuring, A/B testing and finding metrics for every metric, there remain business investments that are made simply because it's the right way to run a company.

Corporate gifting is one of those. We sounded out dozens of business leaders for this report and, while all agreed that corporate gifting is an important long-term strategy for companies, not one claimed to have a formula for measuring the return on investment.

"For us, gifting is less about immediate ROI, and more about reinforcing long-term loyalty," said David Wurst, owner of [WebCitz](#), a digital marketing agency. "A well-timed gift, whether it's a cheese and sausage box or a branded coaster,

keeps our company top-of-mind during the quieter months when other companies may not be reaching out."

"I don't look at corporate gifting as something that can be measured in terms of ROI," added Rose Molz, co-founder and president of EZ Office Products. "We do it because we want to give customers a surprise that day."

EZ Office Products is headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin. The company has 14 employees, six of whom deliver products by truck every day to customers throughout Wisconsin. Customers range from mom-and-pop businesses to national and international corporations.

This summer, Molz purchased 300 ears of corn from a local farm, bagged four each in burlap sacks, and had her delivery drivers hand them out as they made their runs. When they



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were gone, they were gone. Last summer, she did the same with soft pretzels that were sourced from a favorite Philadelphia vendor in homage to her husband's hometown. (He doubles as her business partner.)

What's the long game? For starters, Molz said she simply likes sweet corn and soft pretzels (with yellow mustard), and she thought her customers would, too. She trusts there is a business return to her gifting, but she's not overly concerned about measuring it. Molz said positive feedback from customers rolls in from the delivery drivers at the end of the day.

And speaking of trust, Molz doesn't handpick which customers her delivery drivers should give the gifts to. Whoever is on the route on the day she hands over the gifts will be the lucky recipients. "Every customer is valuable to us," she explained.

### Huge and Getting Huger

Despite its nebulous ROI, the [annual spend on corporate gifting](#) is massive. Estimates put it at more than \$765 billion annually worldwide and over \$300 billion in the U.S. The category includes everything from low-cost, branded swag like pens, tablets and T-shirts, to high-end food baskets, tickets to live entertainment and even travel.

To put that expenditure in perspective, it's estimated that U.S. companies invested \$109 billion in 2024 on AI, \$212 billion on cybersecurity and \$325 billion on digital advertising.

Reasons for corporate gifting include building brand image, boosting employee morale and loyalty, nurturing customer relationships, opening doors with prospects, and expressing thanks for business. A sizable percentage of corporate gifting has always been done at the holidays and end of the year, but many companies are pivoting from that practice so their efforts are not lost in the clutter.

This summer, a global insurance company reached out to [Cultivate](#), a Boulder, Colorado-based company that provides an online gifting platform, with a desire to give 11,000 of its independent insurance agents a thank-you gift. Tom Romine, founder and CEO of Cultivate, said the company previously gave these reps a gift card to the insurance company's branded merchandise store, where they could select apparel, office products or other goods with the insurance company's logo on it.

## The Impact of Corporate Gifting on Business Relationships

GiftAFeeling research shows that corporate gifts help build stronger business relationships, including greater trust and long-term loyalty.



- 306%** **INCREASE** in customer lifetime value
- 47%** **HIGHER** client retention
- 2.3×** **MORE LIKELY** to influence positive actions when gifts are unique
- 70%** of recipients **FEEL MORE CONNECTED** to the giver
- 61%** are **MORE LIKELY TO DO BUSINESS** with them again

## The Impact of Corporate Gifts for Employees

[GiftAFeeling](#), a Canadian multinational supplier of corporate gifts and promotional products, reports research it has conducted on employee recognition reveals that a thoughtful corporate gift at the right time helps employees feel proud, stay longer and work harder.



- 78%** of employees said they **FEEL MORE VALUED** when they receive meaningful gifts from their employer.
- 69%** reported **INCREASED MOTIVATION** after receiving a personalized corporate gift.
- 73%** said that thoughtful gifting **IMPROVES THEIR RELATIONSHIP** with their manager.
- 65%** said **TEAM MORALE INCREASED** when group achievements were recognized with corporate gifts.
- 60%** of employees said corporate gifts helped **REDUCE BURNOUT** and made them feel more supported.
- 82%** agreed that regular gifting made them **MORE LIKELY TO STAY** with the company.
- 57%** of HR leaders confirmed that gifting **POSITIVELY INFLUENCED RETENTION** rates.
- 85%** of employees said a strong recognition culture, including gifting, would influence them to **RECOMMEND THEIR EMPLOYER** to others.



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An executive at the client company told Romine they wanted to do something different, namely, recognize these reps' efforts with a gift that each recipient truly wanted. The budget was about \$50 per recipient plus shipping and taxes.

Selecting a single gift for 11,000 sales reps would undoubtedly miss the mark with many of them. Using Cultivate's online platform, each recipient was able to select an item from a collection of about 50 options that the Cultivate team had created specifically for this client's program.

The gifting program for 11,000 independent reps was developed and launched within a week. Response, Romine said, was immediate. Cultivate's platform invites recipients to respond instantly with a thank-you to the gift-giver. Romine said about 80% do, often sharing what they selected and how grateful they are to have been able to choose it.

### Making It Personal

Choosing the right gift for a sibling, friend or child's birthday can be stressful and seemingly a crapshoot. Imagine, then, choosing a gift for hundreds or thousands of employees, customers or other business associates.

Gift cards are a popular corporate gift option — as they are for people's personal gifting occasions — because they provide the recipient more choice. Also, gift cards are easy to deliver to multiple recipients, can be sourced on short notice and, when purchased in bulk, often come at a discount to their stored value. The Incentive Research Foundation estimates more than \$24 billion is spent annually on corporate gift cards.

No matter the gift, experts emphasize personalizing in some fashion is essential to make a lasting impact.

## Top Corporate Gifting Trends

Here are some top corporate gifting trends in 2025 based on insights from Coresight Research, ResearchAndMarkets and Cognitive Market Research.

- 62%** of companies prioritize **personalized gifts** with employee or client names, logos or custom messages.
- 55%** invest in **sustainable gifts** like reusable products, eco-packaging and low-waste merchandise.
- 44%** of companies use **automated gifting platforms** to streamline and scale their gifting campaigns.
- 39%** of gifting programs now include **eGifts or virtual experiences** — ideal for hybrid or remote workforces.
- 31%** of organizations say **event swag kits** (for virtual and in-person events) are their most engaging gift option.
- 28%** of companies tie gifting to **employee recognition programs**, helping boost morale and retention.



Cutting corners on packaging is a corporate gifting no-no. Jerina Vincent of JNJ Gifts and More creates custom boxes for her corporate gift clients.

“Companies are looking for a competitive advantage; being the sender of a gift that has the recipient's name, logo and personalized message is going to stand out a lot more than a generic gift card,” said Gavin Paye, head of marketing at [Virginia Hayward Ltd.](#), a UK-based company specializing in creating luxury food and wine hampers. “I still remember the handwritten note attached to a bottle of whisky I received from a supplier 24 years ago — and I still buy from them.”

Closely tied to personalization is presentation. Jerina Vincent, founder of [JNJ Gifts and More](#), a corporate gifts supplier, said investing a little extra in packaging produces a big payoff on first impression and memorability. JNJ Gifts works with a custom packaging company to tailor make boxes that fit the gift.

“It's not just the taste or the quality. Presentation is what makes our company unique. It all plays a part in gifting. That's how recipients remember getting something for a long time,” Vincent said.



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### Designate a 'CGO' – Chief Gifting Officer

Business endeavors that get similar-sized budgets as corporate gifting receives at many companies typically designate someone to oversee how the budget is spent and what results that expense is producing. While it's true it can be challenging to measure the real return on business gifting, it's also true that any endeavor that receives that sort of budget should be highly scrutinized.

Gifting should be done methodically and led by an individual or a team that understands best practices, helps shape an overall objective, and develops some means of measuring success.

"No one we speak with has a title of 'chief gifting officer' or 'head of gifts,' or even 'gift manager,'" said Cultivate's Tom Romine. "There's a great opportunity for companies to take the dollars they already spend [on gifts] and pause to ask, 'What am I trying to do here? What are the net results? Do I want to make an impact with this?' If you do that, you're going to end up in a good place. If you're just trying to solve for ease and speed, that's where you're going to get into trouble."

Romine said his company often works with sales managers because gifts are frequently used with clients or sales reps. HR

professionals are another common position that Cultivate reps work with. Romine said it's unlikely that a full-time employee will ever be devoted to developing corporate gifting strategies, but the role shouldn't be handed off willy-nilly each time a gift program is initiated.

The head of gifting at a company should keep copious notes regarding each program's objectives, structure, outside partners assisting with the program, and how success is measured. Recording these aspects clarifies what to monitor and measure. If the program is deemed successful, having the strategy in writing makes it easier to repeat the steps with future gifting efforts.

Molz said she has three key rules when creating a gifting moment for her EZ Office Products customers: Give something unexpected (like four ears of corn), don't expect anything in return and, whenever possible, buy local — it helps you steer clear of the cliché and often makes the gift more meaningful.

Molz trains her team to ask, "If I were the customer..." as a guide before sending emails, making good on a misstep or taking almost any other action. It works wonderfully as a corporate gifting guidepost, she said. **SMM**

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# Avoid These Common Corporate Gifting Mistakes

Gifts can go a long way toward building business partnerships, reinforcing employee relationships or creating customer loyalty. However, there are corporate gifting mistakes that can leave recipients questioning the gift-giver's common sense or even damage a relationship beyond repair.

## **Waiting until the last minute –**

It's immediately evident when a gift is hastily chosen and packaged. Bringing a corporate gift campaign together often falls to an administrative assistant at the last minute. Gift cards may be easy to administer on short notice, but even they should be accompanied by a handwritten note whenever possible. Jerina Vincent, founder of JNJ Gifts and More, said gift suppliers need four to six weeks' notice to properly tackle a corporate gifting campaign – more if it's at the holidays.

**Choosing the wrong gift –** One would think it goes without saying to not send a basket of sweets to a diabetic or a fine wine to a teetotaler, but the gift suppliers we spoke with said it's an embarrassingly common mistake. Market researcher Arizent reports that 40% of all corporate gifts end up in the trash. A campaign that includes hundreds or thousands of recipients may opt to use a broader gift such as a gift card, an opportunity to select a gift online or an apolitical charitable donation. One size definitely doesn't fit all.

## **Turning the gift into a marketing**

**tool –** Rose Molz, co-founder and president of EZ Office Products, said she never uses branded swag or anything her company sells as a corporate gift. "Sometimes I get the feeling businesses are cleaning out their old inventory when they send me a gift," she said. One company sent her a logoed tape measure that was stuck in its casing. Another sent

her a Starbucks gift card that had expired.

## **Cutting corners can cut**

**effectiveness –** It's better to send nothing at all rather than something cheap and unlikely to ever be used. "If it's not thoughtful, useful and of high quality, it's a wasted opportunity," said Sara Celotto, founder and CEO of [The Vision Catalyst](#), a consultancy and fractional COO. That includes spending a bit more on packaging to make your gift stand out.

**Poor timing –** It's easy to get lost in the clutter of corporate gifts that arrive at the end of the year around Christmas, Thanksgiving and New Year's. Instead of sending a "Thanks for the business" message at year's end, why not send it on your company's anniversary? Surprise is half the delight of receiving a corporate gift, and the surprise is lessened at the holidays.

## **Repeating the same gift –**

Remember, an important aspect of gifting is to surprise. If you repeat the same gift year after year, the surprise element is lost and the gift is less impactful. This is especially true if you're not personalizing the gift to each recipient's tastes. Sending an unwanted gift once is careless; doing it repeatedly is insulting and a self-inflicted wound you may not survive.

**Tiering gifts –** This one's debatable, but giving different clients different gifts with substantially different values can get you in trouble. In most industries, word gets around more than people realize. If one of your gift recipients learns that their gift from you was two or three cuts below what you sent another customer, it can be a business blunder that is hard to overcome – often, without you even realizing it.





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# Strengthening Partnerships Through Corporate Gifting

BY DOROTHY WOLDEN

In business, relationships are everything. The right connection can open doors and expand your reach faster than any paid ad ever could. A great channel partnership promises to do just that, but maintaining a great connection is no easy feat. Partnerships require more than contracts and KPIs to thrive. They need trust and plenty of care. And, yes, they need moments of genuine appreciation through smart corporate gifting.

True appreciation demands a strategic, human-centered approach that reinforces loyalty, motivates performance and reminds your partners they are valued — not just when they close the deal, but always.

## Partnerships Are Built on Reciprocity

When a reseller, distributor or channel partner receives a thoughtful, high-quality gift, something shifts. It signals recognition. It builds goodwill. And it sparks a very human reaction: to return the favor with loyalty, renewed effort or another referral.

## Where Corporate Gifting Really Moves the Needle

Channel partnerships are critical revenue drivers, but not all partner programs are equally successful. To stand out and strengthen channel partnerships, gifting can't be generic or last-minute. It must be smart and personal. Here's how leading teams are using gifting as part of their growth playbook:

- **Performance-Based Recognition:** Reward those important sales milestones, new customer acquisition or strategic referrals. Instead of a basic thank-you, top programs incentivize with personalized gifts that let the recipient choose something meaningful to them.
- **Onboarding and Enablement Moments:** New partners need more than PDFs. A curated gift at onboarding creates an emotional touchpoint that makes your brand unforgettable from day one.
- **Event-Based Engagement:** Whether it's a virtual kickoff or an in-person summit, corporate gifting helps build buzz, drive attendance and turn a good event into a memorable one.

## Smart Gifting Practices That Make a Difference

Success doesn't come from sending out branded notebooks and hoping for the best. It comes from integrating gifting into your broader partner incentive strategy. Here are four practical steps we recommend:

1. **Personalization matters.** Let recipients choose. Flexibility and freedom make the gift feel authentic, not transactional.
2. **Get the timing right.** Align gifting with business milestones — deal closes, anniversaries, holidays or key



performance wins. These are your moments to celebrate, and gifting reinforces the value of those achievements.

3. **Tie gifting to goals.** Whether you're increasing partner engagement or accelerating renewals, gifting should support your business outcomes, not distract from them.
4. **Track your results.** Measure the impact of gifting on partner retention, performance and satisfaction. The insights will make your strategy smarter over time.

## The Numbers Back It Up

Still wondering if it's worth the investment?

- [57% of companies](#) use strategic partnerships to acquire new customers (The Event Planner Expo).
- [54% say partnerships](#) drive more than 20% of total revenue.
- Referral partnerships lead to [19x higher conversion rates](#) and 74% shorter sales cycles than cold outreach (Software Oasis).

And the loyalty management market is worth [\\$4.43 billion](#) and growing. In short: investing in connection is just good business.

Smart companies don't treat gifting as a seasonal activity. They treat it as a relationship tool, one that drives value all year long — especially with partners who help them grow. Whether you're managing a global reseller network or a handful of regional affiliates, the right gift — delivered the right way — can move relationships from transactional to transformational.

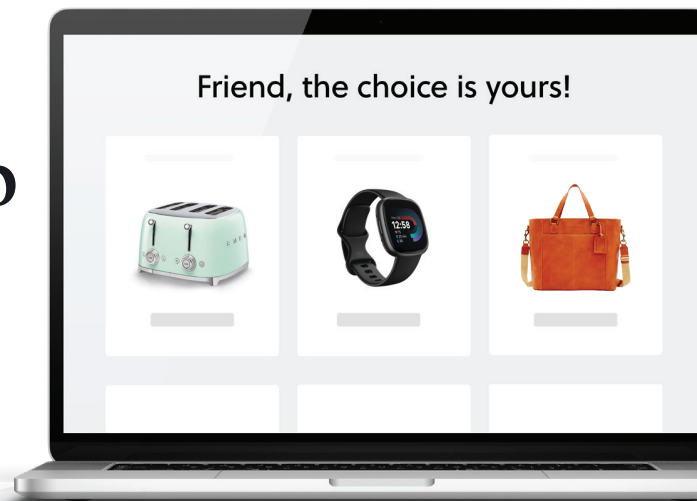
Dorothy Wolden is vice president of marketing at Cultivate, a provider of an online corporate gifting platform as well as on-site gifting services at meetings, group incentive travel experiences and other corporate events.

Discover how Cultivate can help you build deeper channel relationships through strategic gifting. [Contact us](#) to learn more about our [Online](#) and [On-Site Gifting solutions](#), or request a demo and see how seamless (and powerful) appreciation can really be.



# Strengthen Every Channel Partnership with Cultivate

Show your partners they're valued with personalized, timely gifts that build trust, boost loyalty, and turn every business milestone into a memorable connection.



## Gifting Drives Real Results

- ✓ Increases partner engagement and retention
- ✓ Accelerates deal closes and renewals
- ✓ Delivers **19x** higher conversion rates
- ✓ Shortens sales cycles by **74%**
- ✓ Reinforces brand loyalty

## Transform Transactions Into Lasting Relationships

Make gifting a strategic advantage. Move beyond generic gestures and create authentic, data-driven appreciation that motivates their performance and deepens every channel partnership, year-round.



Connect with a Gifting Expert



# Gifting Creatively and the Problem with Gift Cards

Excerpts from a podcast interview with Cultivate founder Tom Romine

A common and egregious error with corporate gifting is treating it as a task that needs to get checked off a to-do list. That's when authenticity and genuine gratitude are susceptible to being overrun by frenzy and an aura of obligation.

Cultivate, a corporate gifting specialist, offers an online gifting platform as well as on-site gifting experiences that take the hard part of gifting off a gift-giver's plate. Using Cultivate's digital platform, a company can create a gifting program for one recipient or several thousand. Each recipient can choose from a collection of items that the Cultivate team has curated to match the targeted audience's tastes.

The company was founded in 2012 by Tom Romine. We interviewed him for a podcast episode that you can [listen to here](#). Here are some highlights from that interview.

## On one unique way a company is using the gifting platform

We've got a SaaS company right now that's actually testing a sales velocity opportunity where they're trying to improve their chances of booking meetings with high-value target prospects — C-suite mostly. They're using the platform and inviting them to select a gift just to thank them for their time in advance, and then they let them know that they're going to bring the gift to the meeting. They're measuring that against not using gifting in any way, which I think is great, because they're trying to actually prove the ROI on it.

## On the risk of gifting being cut from budgets in a down economy

Gifting doesn't get cut as often as you might think. When you look at the percentage of dollars spent on gifts, it's still pretty low, and it's a risk probably not worth taking. There's been so much

evidence now that, when there is this history built up, when you take it away, it serves as such a negative that they don't want to risk it. When you look at businesses that are going through cycles of challenge, the last thing you want is your top performers to not feel appreciated. The easiest tangible way to have them not feel appreciated is to skip the gifts.

## On the risk gift cards pose when included in corporate gifting efforts

I was talking to a client who [uses] a massive reward and recognition platform where they track progress and you can measure all types of behaviors across all different departments. This client was just sharing that when they look at the redemption of [reward] points, 95% of the redemption is going to gift cards. The No. 1 gift card right now is Amazon; No. 2, I think, is Target. When you redeem for those types of gift cards, you're essentially redeeming for cash, because you're taking that Amazon card and you're spending it on household purchases. The company is missing an opportunity for someone to really celebrate and redeem those points right then and talk about it. No one's going to, months later, talk about the Amazon gift card they got for their work anniversary and how they spent it on dog food and diapers. We're spending all this money on these points, and it's just going to household purchases. There's a big miss there that we can improve upon.

## On gifting as a means to tackle new business challenges

We've got remote workforces — [some companies] are trying to bring some back. And there are different generations of people that have lived through COVID.



TOM ROMINE

What we're trying to do is help build connection back — [connect] people to their company and their teams — and trying to use gifting as a way to make a tangible connection among people. That's why they really need to know their audience when they're doing their gifting, so that they're not tone deaf on sending a collection out to folks that are going to go, 'Wait, what? Why would I want this? This is not me.' It's the first question we ask any client: Tell us about the people that you want to appreciate. It's the most important thing. It's trying to understand where these people are at, so we can meet them where they're at and find things that that they're going to go, 'Wow, That is me! That's thoughtful! That's personal!' That's what we're trying to help our clients do. **smm**

Listen to the full podcast interview with Tom Romine and check out our full archive of podcast interviews at [salesandmarketing.com/podcasts](https://salesandmarketing.com/podcasts).