



'Tis the Season For Giving

Companies across the country will spend millions of dollars on gifts for clients, employees and business associates during this holiday season

By Rebecca Esparza
Contributing writer

It is not uncommon for corporate customers to walk into Oh, Gosh! and spend \$5,000 on Godiva chocolates or \$4,000 on Mont Blanc pens for their client's holiday gifts, said store owner Ross Burney. "Something delicious like Godiva chocolates is very popular," he said. "And pens, well, they are the gift that keeps on giving."

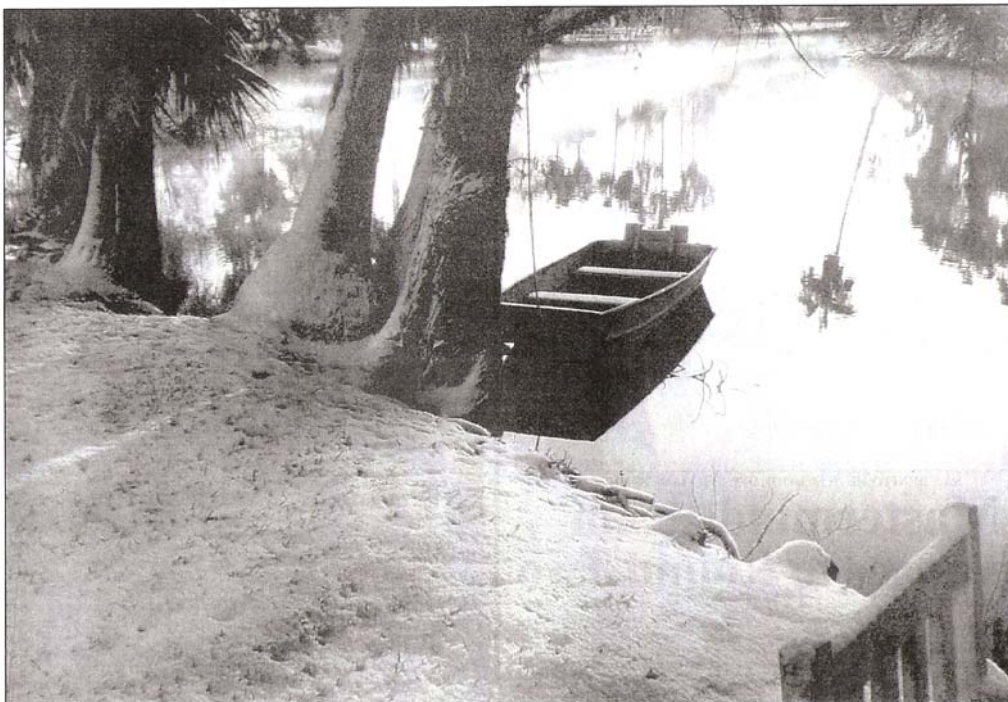
From pens to other office knick-knacks, or books and gourmet foods, companies across the country will spend millions of dollars on gifts for clients, employees and business associates during this holiday season.

"Generally, my corporate customers don't buy trendy or fad items," he continued. "My business customers tend to buy high-end gift items, so they know when their clients receive it — they will really respect and enjoy it."

Burney and his wife Marcia have owned the shop specializing in unique gift items for 18 years at the same Staples Street location. "A few years ago we added another 4,500 square feet of space, so now at over 10,000 square feet, we've probably got the largest selection of invitations in the entire state." Personalized holiday party invitations and greeting cards for business clients are still popular for both small and large companies, he added.

The newest popular item is a flame-less fragrance lamp, Burney added. "It's perfect for the home or office because they are safe, make the air smell good and even help control allergens."

MORE SNOW



EDINBURG, TEXAS - DECEMBER 2004



Opposite page: Ross Burney, owner of O Gosh!, shows customer Linette Brazina the array of holiday gift baskets the specialty store has to offer. Gift baskets make perfect holiday gifts for clients, employees and busi-

ness associates. Just ask Ester Perez Schlimper (above left), owner of www.ABasketSaysItAll.com. Each holiday season she prepares hundreds of baskets for her local clients. Other popular corporate gift giving ideas include pens, silver letter openers, boxes and key chains.

But more conservative gift items like silver letter openers, boxes, key chains, and paperweights, are still most popular, especially when they are personalized with engraving.

Business etiquette coach Lou Kennedy reminds business gift-givers to ask their intended recipients if they are allowed to accept gifts and if so, find out if there is a dollar value limit on the gift item.

"It can be such an embarrassing situation for both parties involved if a business associate must decline a gift," she noted. "There is one obvious way to avoid this and that is by asking first. Checking with your business associate and intended recipient is absolutely necessary."

A former Corpus Christi resident who now lives and works in Boerne, Kennedy also advises recipients to show graciousness for a gift even if it's not what you would have hoped for.

"Always be appreciative of the thoughtfulness for a gift, even if you don't like it. And be careful you don't re-gift it to the same person next Christmas," she said with a chuckle.

To avoid that conundrum, Kennedy suggests doing adequate research beforehand to learn about favorite hobbies or preferred food items. "Find out what would be appreciated. Perhaps they like to travel or garden. Gifts tailored to a person's specific tastes are sure to go over well."

She also cautions gift-givers to ensure presents are appropriate and neutral.

"The best business gifts are not personal in nature and leave no room for misinterpretation. And if you have to ask yourself if it's appropriate, then reconsider," she explained. "Books, CD's, theatre tickets or food gift baskets make perfect gifts, while jewelry

and perfume are far too personal."

Sometimes gifts for the entire office are more appropriate, especially if you deal with more than one person in an office setting, points out Ester Perez Schlimper, owner of locally operated online store www.ABasketSaysItAll.com, which specializes in preparing gift baskets filled with various gourmet food and corporate gift items.

"We can fill a gift basket with almost anything," she noted. "Our most popular snack baskets include truffles, Ghirardelli chocolates and specialty gourmet snacks." Making gift baskets out of her home-based

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BUSINESS ETIQUETTE COACH

business since 2003, Schlimper said she takes orders from across the United States and internationally, although during the holidays she tries to focus on the huge orders of her Corpus Christi clients.

"This year, we began to get busy before Thanksgiving," she noted. "I had one client who decided to give Thanksgiving gifts, which made his business stand-out. I always advise businesses through the various networking organizations I belong to that corporate gift giving is an important element of business relationship marketing."

Schlimper added it is also an ideal solution for businesses trying to attract new clients and for those wanting to keep them on a long-term basis. "Everyone knows it costs more money to go out and find

new clients than retain the ones you currently have."

Gifts that can be imprinted with a company logo are also quite popular. "We can etch a company name or sometimes even a logo onto almost any item, such as glasses, vases or even ribbon," she said.

Kathryn Childers, publisher and creator of "Snow" and "More Snow," said many local businesses have used her book as a gift for clients and associates. "We've sold hundreds of books to numerous local banks and realtors," she said.

Buying corporate gifts with a philanthropic spin is the best of both worlds, noted Childers. "If you can give a nice gift that happens to benefit a non-profit organization, everyone wins," she said. Her books chronicle the surprise 100-year snow in South Texas two years ago during Christmas.

"These books provide an incredible memento of a wonderful memory, while at the same time supporting a worthwhile project. It's the best of all worlds and a positive thing," she added. All of Childers' books have a portion of its proceeds benefit the HEB Literacy Project.

Childers added she is a great believer in buying holiday gifts locally. "We've been able to create a local product with our books, but there are many other local projects that benefit a non-profit, as well," she said.

Whether it is a calendar benefiting a local wildlife organization or a year-long membership to the Art Museum of South Texas, local gifts are ideal for business clients, Childers advised. "You can even make a donation in a client's name to buy a new neonatal incubator at Driscoll Children's Hospital. It's not something you can just go to the mall and buy. It's more special."

Paul Iverson photos