

Giving a little bit can bring high rewards in return

When the boss wants to give staff a boost without it costing too much, a quality present can be just the thing, says **Lucy Battersby**.

Many people have heard about the animation studio where staff are encouraged to use the company's mini golf courses, basketball courts and adult-sized toys to help their "creative thinking".

While few organisations are that generous, many do realise the benefit of rewarding staff with small gifts, with the sale of such gifts to companies annually now generating more than \$1.5 billion in Australia.

But companies who give out these gifts, as a thank you and a means of generating loyalty, can forget about the cheap pen stamped with the corporate logo. These gifts should be useful or entertaining — preferably both — and of high quality.

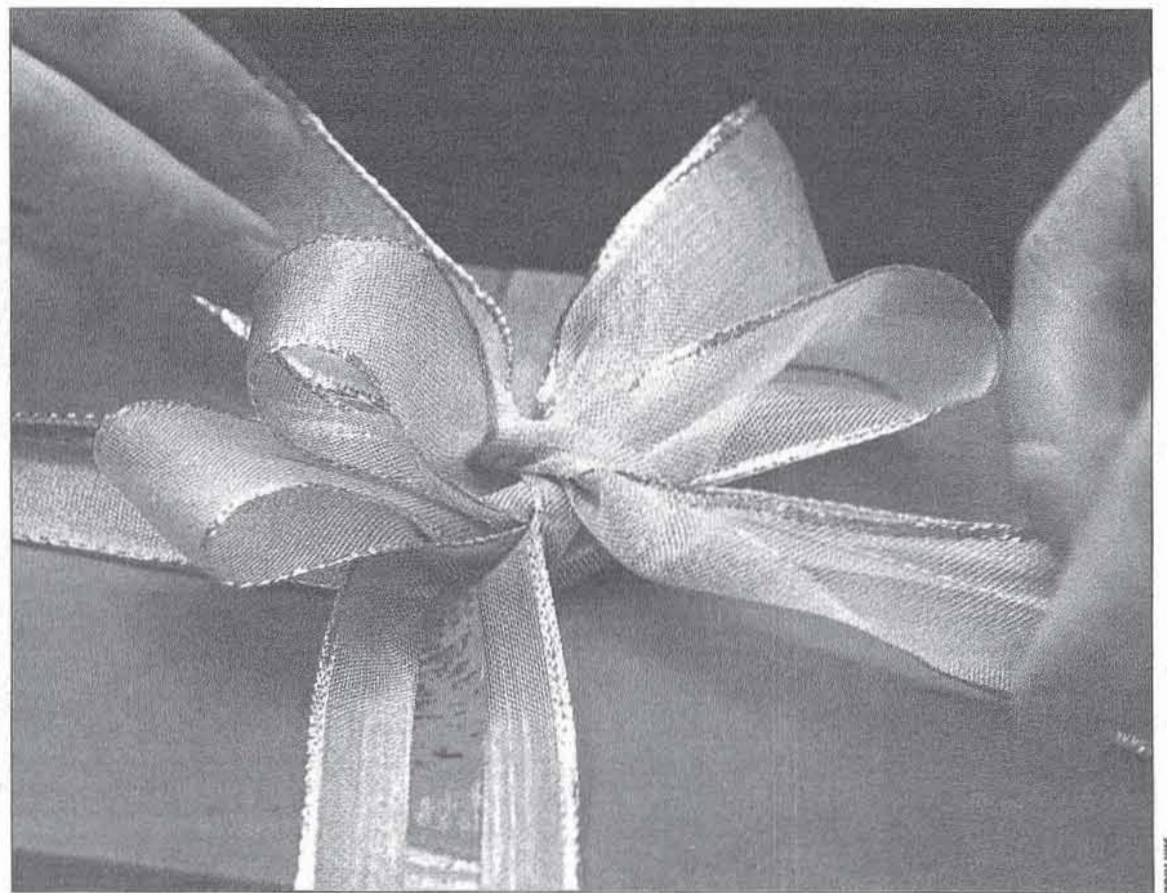
These gifts can range from powered toy hamsters in running wheels to foam bricks, presumably for throwing at retreating managers, to small manicure kits and footballs

which can be branded with a corporate logo.

Or employees could be encouraged to remain fit and active with company-provided sunscreen, outdoor equipment, caps and pedometers. So, what kind of presents are a proven success?

Darren Campbell, director of Business and Development at LatestBuy.com, an online gift store, says the outstanding presents for his company last year were a desktop photo frame which turns normal photos into 3D images and a SIM card back-up key chain. Campbell says personal items, ones that people can take home and incorporate into daily use, are much more popular than items limited to office use.

The Australasian Promotional Products Association's (APPA) research shows the industry has grown 35 per cent in the past few years, up to \$1.56 billion in 2004.



APPA says motivated employees boost a company's productivity and revenue and incentives are a creative way to retain staff for longer periods of time.

There is also a perceived shift

'Before, it was cheap and nasty little things. Now there are quality items.'

towards high-value items that reflect the creativity and professionalism of the company, over cheap toys or stationery.

Mark Ward, owner of Handy Imprints, a web-based over-branding company, says employees are given gifts as a sign of recognition, as a bonding tool for training days and sometimes to offset the inconvenience of a large-scale relocation.

He adds that high quality products receive good feedback and

are often re-ordered by management at the request of employees.

"It's a growing trend because before it was just people getting cheap and nasty little things. People [would] use it twice and then it would break. Now there are quality items that people will be using for years with a company logo on it, and that's great exposure for someone. If you get it right, people are going to use it day to day or every second or third day, then you know you're really getting impact."

To get out of the pen-and-mug rut, visit the annual Asia Pacific Incentive and Meetings Expo (AIME), which will be held at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre on February 13th and 14th this year.

Rosemarie Sama, AIME Event Director, says the expo is expecting 2600 visitors and buyers. There will be seminars on the how and why of incentives and planning successful incentive programs.

Just for you

- Gifts can be a reward or an incentive.
- They can be used as a bonding tool for training days.
- High quality gifts bring good feedback and can be great exposure if the item lasts and is used on a daily basis.

Gifts can build bridges but don't forget the golf

Make it useful and don't falter on quality, advise the gift experts, says **Chris Tolhurst**.

The use of gifts may be growing but only high quality items will really do in this area, and preferably something that is practical so it will be used often.

In addition, gifts should take into account the increasing emphasis on work-life balance.

Promotional products expert Jennifer Conomos says that more companies are using targeted promotional marketing strategies that employ the use of branded items.

Conomos says technology items have grown in popularity as corporate gifts in line with the expanding use of technology and computers in society.

"Simple items like flash drives are excellent gifts as they can carry a presentation and then be used for business use, and to hold photos and

other information. They can be used for home and work which broadens the scope of use.

"Most people will be carrying on them a piece of technology at any one time."

Her company, Conomos Corporate Marketing, uses branded gift ideas such as USB-related products for laptop computers, modem cables for those travelling with their laptops, mini mice that are smaller and more convenient to travel with and even digital photo frames.

The item should also be of high quality, as there is a direct correlation between the promotional product that carries their brand or message and the company's image. "If the gift is cheap the recipient also thinks of the company in the same light," says Conomos.

"With quality items, the use of the



item grows substantially. The general rule of thumb is if it is practical and of high value, it will be used for some time. There is no greater value than that in an advertising product — if it is loved and used.

"There is also a much greater emphasis from corporate Australia and around the globe on having more of a work-life balance. People have more flexible hours so they can be at home more, pick kids up from school and there is a large percentage of people working solely from home.

"Additionally, with the objective of the spend being 'let's give them something they will use', savvy

organisations are looking to leisure style products so people will take them home and use them on the weekend or in their homes.

"There is such a broad range of gifts available now that the hardest part of selecting the gift is narrowing down the choices."

She says many corporate and sales deals today are being transacted on the golf course. As a result, companies are hosting elaborate golf days featuring numerous branded items for each player to wear or use on the day and to keep as a memento thereafter.

"It becomes a keepsake of what a great day it was and which company made it possible," Conomos adds.

Quality counts

- Corporate gifts are often in line with updates in technology.
- If a gift is cheap the recipient tends to think of the company in the same light.
- Branded golf accoutrements have proved a big winner.