

Employee Gifting: Trends and Strategic Opportunities

A research brief for HR executives and employee recognition program managers



Employee gifting has matured from a customary gesture into a strategic lever for building organizational culture, strengthening employee relationships and driving measurable business outcomes. As work becomes increasingly remote, distributed and impersonal, thoughtfully designed gifting programs offer HR leaders a tangible way to maintain the relational bonds that sustain engagement and loyalty. This brief outlines what employee gifting entails, why it matters, where the market is heading and how organizations can move from ad hoc practices to a holistic, intentional strategy.

What Is Employee Gifting?

At its core, employee gifting communicates a simple but powerful message: the recipient matters. It is fundamentally about forming connections between an organization and its people. Modern employee gifting typically takes one of several forms:

Curated milestone gifting: Employees select from a curated set of gifts when they or the organization reaches a defined milestone such as a work anniversary, an important project completion or a company-wide achievement.

Symbolic gifting: The organization sends a gift of practical or symbolic value to all employees, either as a broad expression of appreciation or to acknowledge a collective accomplishment.

Points uploads: A flexible variation of gifting in which employees receive points to redeem within a gifting platform, giving recipients greater choice.

Life-event gifting. A more recent and increasingly popular approach in which managers and peers use a gifting platform to recognize major personal milestones such as weddings, new babies, graduations and similar moments.

Each approach serves a distinct purpose, and the most effective programs deploy a mix tailored to organizational needs.

Employee gifting strengthens relationships, increases ties to the organization and reinforces strategic objectives.



Why Gift? The Business Case

Gifting builds social relationships and reinforces ties to the organization: When deployed intentionally, it supports several strategic objectives:

- 1. Building and maintaining organizational culture:** Gifts reinforce shared goals, values and a sense of belonging.
- 2. Fostering commitment and loyalty:** Tangible recognition in the form of a gift deepens the employee-employer relationship.
- 3. Enhancing motivation, engagement and job satisfaction:** Gifts for individuals and teams express appreciation for their contributions, promoting higher discretionary effort.
- 4. Marking meaningful milestones:** Both professional and personal events become opportunities to connect. One of the fastest-growing categories of gifting is for recognition of life events that occur beyond the workplace.

In an era when many employees don't share physical space with colleagues, these touchpoints carry outsized importance in sustaining relational bonds.

Current Market Trends

According to the Incentive Research Foundation's Industry Outlook 2026 Report, employee gifting is shifting toward practical, high-value and flexible options. Key findings include:

- Gift cards are overtaking merchandise in popularity, reflecting recipient preference for choice and flexibility.
- 65% of North American companies plan to increase the number of employees receiving non-cash incentives, even amid budget pressures.

Key Takeaway

Investment in gifting is growing, with an emphasis on flexibility and perceived value over the volume of physical goods. Programs that offer choice and practicality are best positioned to meet evolving employee expectations.

Building Your Employee Gifting Strategy

Identifying Opportunities to Promote Gifting

Gifting delivers the greatest return when targeted at specific organizational challenges. Recognition program managers should look closely at gifting opportunities in organizations that are:

Navigating changes in work approach (remote, hybrid, or in-person transitions), where gifting helps maintain connection across distance.

Struggling with turnover, where recognition can reinforce loyalty and reduce attrition.

Seeking to change or reinforce culture, where gifts serve as tangible expressions of values.

Aiming to improve or celebrate KPI performance such as sales, customer satisfaction, safety and productivity, where gifting reinforces desired behaviors and outcomes.

Developing a Holistic Gifting Strategy

Despite its importance, many organizations approach gifting in an ad hoc manner, missing the opportunity to realize its full potential. Becoming more strategic can begin with a few practical steps:

- 1. Audit existing practices.** Examine when you gift, who is eligible and what you give. Identify what is working and where gaps exist. This baseline understanding is essential before making meaningful improvements and helps you allocate budget where it will have the greatest impact.
- 2. Offer employees choice.** Whenever possible, give recipients a say in the gifts they receive. Offering a curated menu of options, across categories, price-equivalent tiers or experiences acknowledges that people value different things and helps every gift land as personal rather than generic.
- 3. Blend event-driven and calendar-driven gifting.** Move beyond reacting only to events by adding predictable, calendar-based moments. This combination ensures consistent, equitable recognition while still preserving the spontaneity and emotional resonance of unexpected gestures.
- 4. Listen to employees and be creative.** Meaningful gifting starts with understanding what employees value most. Use surveys, focus groups or informal feedback to identify gifts and occasions that feel relevant to your workforce. Creativity does not have to be extravagant—consider moments tied to your culture, company values, team milestones or life events, and offer choice whenever possible to make the experience feel personal and authentic.

A holistic strategy aligns gifting decisions with organizational goals, ensures equity across the workforce and creates a predictable rhythm of recognition rather than sporadic gestures.

Employee gifting turns appreciation into a meaningful experience and strengthens the impact of your recognition strategy.



Recommendations for HR Leaders

- 1. Treat gifting as a strategy, not a ceremony.** Connect every gifting decision to a clear organizational objective.
- 2. Prioritize flexibility and choice.** Reflect the market shift toward gift cards, points and curated selections that empower recipients.
- 3. Balance event- and calendar-driven gifting programs** to ensure consistency and inclusivity.
- 4. Measure impact.** Track engagement, retention and KPI movement to demonstrate ROI and refine your approach.
- 5. Sense and respond.** Continuously gather feedback to keep gifting relevant and meaningful.

Employee gifting is no longer a peripheral nicety. It is a measurable, strategic tool for building culture, loyalty and engagement in a changing world of work. Organizations that move from ad hoc gestures to intentional, employee-informed strategies will be best positioned to strengthen relationships and achieve their people goals.

About Hinda Incentives®

Hinda Incentives is part of the E2E group of companies and helps organizations motivate sales teams, foster deeper employee engagement, and enhance relationships with customers and partners through innovative incentive and recognition programs.

From program design and technology to reward fulfillment, our tailored solutions make it simple for your organization to celebrate the achievements and behaviors that truly drive success. Our customized approach ensures you can cultivate lasting engagement, loyalty and high performance; all aligned with your organization's unique goals and purpose.

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