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Client Appreciation: Showing Gratitude Truly Enhances Your Brand

In the realm of professional services, our business is people. That's why showing appreciation to our clients is such a vital part of what we do. But what does client appreciation really mean?

Client appreciation means more than providing accurate and timely reports. It means learning the clients business, not just their tax return, P&L, systems or regulatory officer. It means getting to know their families, their hobbies, their phobias and their dreams. And it means more than just sending out one of thousands of cards during the holiday season. While there is nothing wrong with mailing out cookie-cutter cards during the holidays, putting a little extra thought and care into your client interactions can make all the difference in the world.

The major holidays fall the same time ever year—for everyone; but, not birthdays. Birthdays are the one day of the year that is special to you and only you. So how about recognizing your clients on their special days? There are several companies that make cookies from scratch, baking them fresh daily, and these can make the ideal gift for every occasion or no occasion at all. Look for creative packaging including baskets or decorative tins that always stand out. Recognize your clients on their special day.

Another great way to show your appreciation to clients is dedicating an entire day just to them. It is a rare occasion that everyone working in an accounting firm is able to convene all in the same place, at the same time. It is even more of a rarity to be able to throw clients into the mix. A client appreciation golf outing, is not only a chance for clients to get to know other employees of your firm, but it's also the perfect atmosphere for them to network and pick the brains of others in the industry. Now, we know not everyone is Arnold Palmer, but who doesn't enjoy a beautiful spring day out on the green? If nothing else, a golf outing offers a great way for your clients to secure a break from the proverbial grindstone, get out of the office and interact with colleagues in a different form—all on you!

Admit it. Your firm would not be where it is today without committed, loyal clients and recognizing those clients who have been with you through thick and thin is an excellent way to show your appreciation. If you are a relatively new firm, maybe it's those clients you have served for five years. If you're an older firm, maybe it's the ones who have been with you for twenty. No matter what the tenure you choose as a long-term client, why not show your appreciation to them on the anniversary of that day? Have lunch catered for their employees; have a marble commemorative made for them to display; have an assortment of their favorite candy delivered to their office. Whatever you choose to do,

do something to let them know you are thinking of them and you care. Something to let them know your firm would not be where it is today without them.

Thanksgiving; what a perfect time to say “thank you” to your clients for helping your firm thrive. Thanksgiving is a unique time of the year to send a card to your clients because it is a chance for you to not only wish them well for the holidays, but also show them that you are genuinely grateful for their business. An out-of-the ordinary idea is to commission a local artist to custom design your cards. This will ensure that your cards are truly different than any others which they might receive at this time of year.

Another idea is to donate a coat to a child in need, or make a contribution to their favorite charity in their name. Instead of sending the same canned message to each of them, tailor each card with a personalized message, hand-signed by everyone on your team. Of course, don’t forget to show appreciation to your own employees for helping with the singing by throwing them a pizza party after all their hard work is completed.

Because professional service firms can’t offer something tangible that customers can assess on look, taste or feel, we have to offer them an experience that clients rate based on a sense of importance, respect and ultimately, appreciation. While client appreciation inevitably starts with treating all clients, both large and small, with the same high level of service, it ends with developing deep, personal relationships with each of them. Not only does this help to obtain more referrals and more revenue per client, the cost of providing stellar client service is next to nothing.

On the other hand, the cost of providing poor client service can be vastly detrimental to your firm. Always be sure to keep an eye and ear out. Ask them questions; shoot them a note when they have their first grandchild; perform a client satisfaction survey; or pass along an article on a business challenge they have been facing. No matter what it is that you do, make sure you do it; because let’s face it, the key to the success and longevity of your firm is ultimately their business.

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The Association for Accounting Marketing (AAM) is the only association in the country formed specifically to enhance the accounting marketing and practice growth profession through education, networking and thought leadership. Founded in 1989, the association has more than 800 members, comprised of marketing professionals, business developers, CPAs, consultants, service providers, educators and students. AAM strives to help its members become more effective and valued practitioners and executive leaders. To learn more about AAM, please call 856-793-0806 or visit www.accountingmarketing.org.