



# The complete guide to holiday gifting campaigns

Transform your year-end marketing into long-term success



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# Introduction

Most companies approach holiday gifting as a nice gesture to thank customers for their business. But recent research reveals that high-performing companies use holiday gifts strategically, as investments in business relationships that drive customer retention, referral generation, and deal acceleration. These companies succeed because they approach holiday campaigns with clear business objectives, strategic recipient selection, and systematic follow-up.

This guide shows you why the right gifts matter, how to craft a winning strategy that aligns with your business goals, and what it takes to set your company apart from competitors who treat holiday gifting as an afterthought. You'll discover research-backed insights from top-performing companies and practical frameworks you can implement immediately to turn seasonal goodwill into lasting business value.





1

## Effective holiday giving: The science behind the strategy

Holiday gifting campaigns are impactful because they tap into fundamental human psychology.



# Why giving works

Understanding the science behind gift-giving helps explain why holiday campaigns can be so effective for nurturing business relationships.

## **The science is straightforward: giving makes everyone feel good**

Both giving and receiving gifts activates reward centers in the brain and releases dopamine, which creates a sense of pleasure and social connection. Research from the University of Arizona shows that this neurological response is real and measurable, creating positive feelings that people will associate with your brand.<sup>1</sup>

## **External rewards motivate specific behaviours**

Incentive theory research shows that external rewards like gift cards “pull” people toward specific actions and goals.<sup>2</sup> This explains why holiday gifts can boost engagement, encourage referrals, and strengthen business relationships.

## **Small acts of kindness create measurable impact**

Research published in the New York Times demonstrates that simple actions like expressing gratitude or doing something kind provide measurable boosts to happiness, even in the short term. These findings suggest that even modest holiday gifts can meaningfully improve how people feel about your business.<sup>3</sup>



# The “value now” consumer

Understanding consumer sentiment will help your team position holiday gifts in ways that resonate with how people are currently thinking about money and value.

## Consumer confidence remains fragile despite improvements

The Conference Board of Canada data shows consumer confidence rose to 48.4 in April 2025 after hitting record lows but remains well below historical averages as people continue to express concerns about current financial circumstances and trade uncertainties.<sup>4</sup>

## Consumers are more cautious than global counterparts

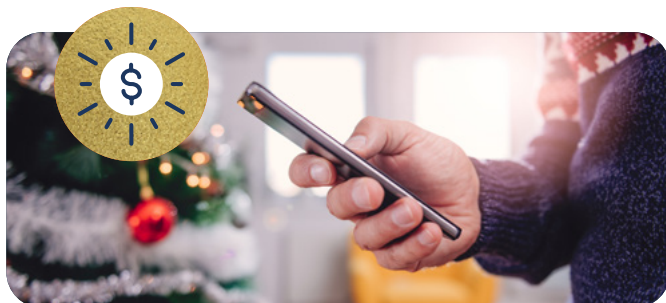
Retail Insider research shows that, while global consumers have faced economic challenges in recent years, Canadian shoppers “do not feel as much optimism” about the future as other regions, leading to more disciplined shopping habits and careful purchase planning.<sup>5</sup>

## People are aggressively seeking value and deals

Research indicates that 78% of consumers are trading down to cheaper alternatives, while 69% plan to wait for Cyber Week promotions before making major purchases.<sup>6</sup> This reflects a strong focus on getting “the biggest bang for their dollar.”

## Consider framing gifts as budget support

Given this economic context, you might want to position your holiday gifts as tools that help recipients stick to their budgets or get more value from their spending. This approach aligns with current consumer psychology and makes your gifts feel more thoughtful and relevant, though the right positioning will depend on your specific customer audience.





# 2

## Getting started and choosing your audience



The most effective holiday gifting campaigns start with clear goals and thoughtful recipient selection.



# Goal-driven recipient targeting



The key to successful holiday gifting is matching your investment to the potential return from each relationship.

## Start with your business objectives

Do you want to retain at-risk customers? Generate referrals from satisfied clients? Close deals before year-end? Your goals should determine who receives gifts and how much you spend on each group.

Amounts vary across industries but the following ranges for spending are meant to serve as an example.

### High-impact recipients (\$100–500+ gifts)

These are your most valuable relationships that justify larger investments:

- **Brand advocates who regularly provide referrals and testimonials**
- **Strategic partners who expand your market reach or capabilities**
- **High-lifetime-value customers who might be considering alternatives**



### Growth-focused recipients (\$25–100 gifts)

This segment offers strong potential returns on modest investments:

- **New customers acquired in the past 12 months**
- **Bottom-of-funnel prospects who have completed demos or received proposals**
- **Mid-range gift amounts in this category help recipients stick to their holiday budgets while showing genuine appreciation for their business potential**



### Relationship building (\$10–50 gifts)

Small gestures can create meaningful connections:

- **Mid-funnel prospects actively evaluating your solution**
- **Potential partnership prospects you want to nurture**



## Work with your internal teams

Sales, customer success, and partner teams know which relationships matter most. Get their input on recipient lists and gift amounts to ensure your campaign aligns with ongoing relationship management efforts.



# Modern segmentation strategy

AI-powered personalization is transforming how companies approach customer segmentation, creating new opportunities for more targeted and effective holiday campaigns.



## AI achieves remarkable segmentation accuracy

Research published in the Journal of Business and Management Studies found that AI algorithms can achieve 95% accuracy in customer segmentation using RFM analysis (recency, frequency, and monetary behaviour), efficiently organizing customers into distinct clusters based on their similarities.<sup>7</sup>

## AI uncovers deeper customer insights

**Generative AI can analyze unstructured data** like customer service calls and browsing behaviour to identify specific preferences and motivations.<sup>8</sup> This deeper understanding allows for more thoughtful gift selection and messaging that resonates with your recipients.

## Consider delivery preferences by audience

Younger recipients may prefer instant digital delivery, while senior executives might appreciate the tangible experience of a physical card with premium packaging. Match your delivery method to your audience's preferences and your relationship goals.



# 3

## Holiday selections and the value for gift cards

Traditional corporate gifts can create more problems than they solve. Branded merchandise sits in drawers, wine bottles collect dust, and food baskets spoil or don't match dietary preferences. Gift cards eliminate these issues by allowing recipients to choose exactly what they want.

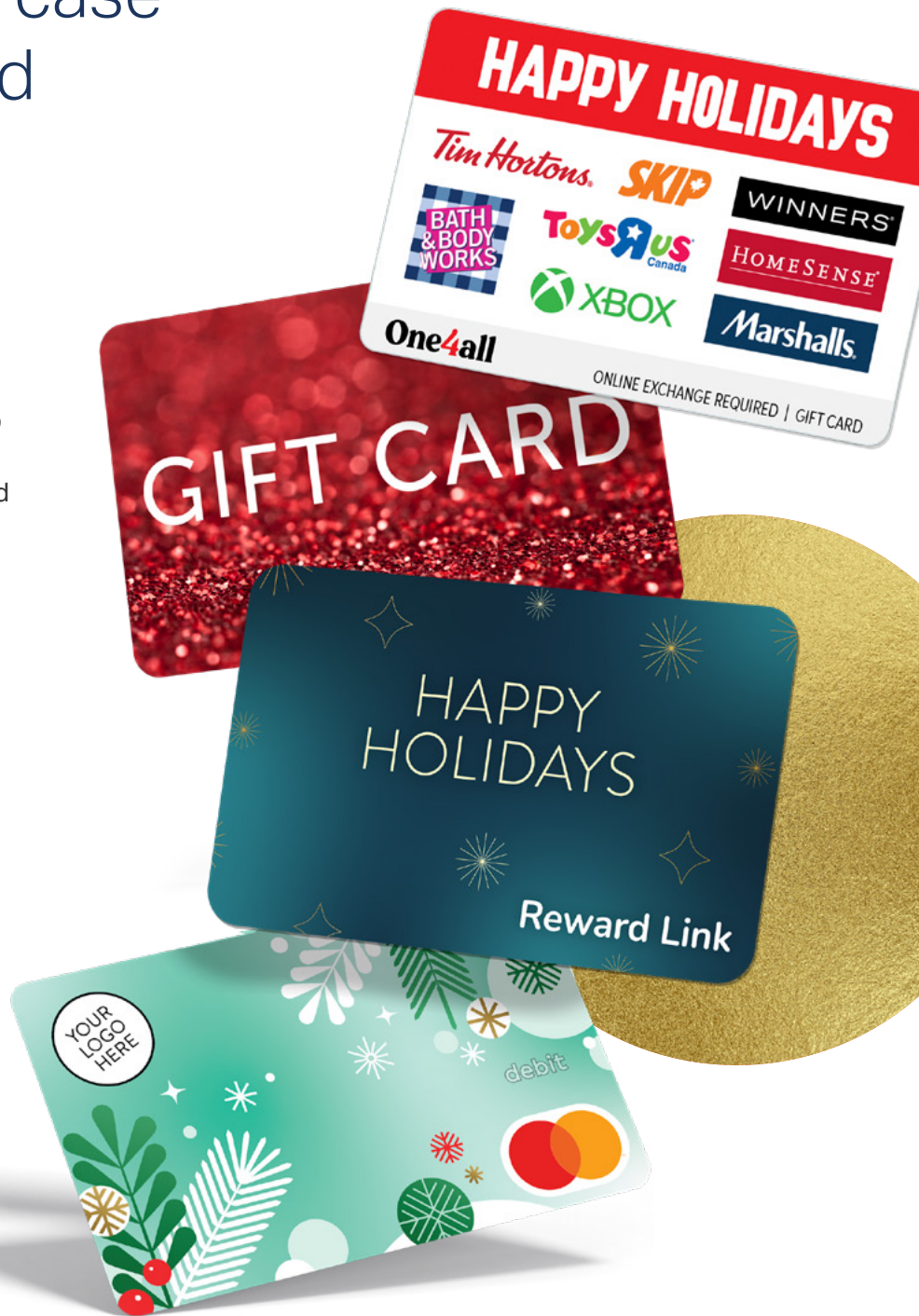


# The data-driven case for gift cards and prepaid cards

Research consistently shows that gift cards outperform traditional corporate gifts in both recipient satisfaction and business practicality. In 2025, gift cards top the list for most desired holiday gifts.<sup>9</sup>

The Canadian gift card market is expected to grow 7.5% annually to reach \$8.43 billion CAD in 2025, with the market projected to expand to \$10.83 billion CAD by 2029.<sup>10</sup> This showcases gift card resilience even amid ongoing inflation and cost-of-living concerns. In 2024, 60% of Canadians purchased a gift card, indicating ongoing popularity.<sup>11</sup>

For businesses, gift cards offer the added benefit of simpler logistics, no possibility of shipping damage, and no concerns about dietary restrictions or personal preferences.



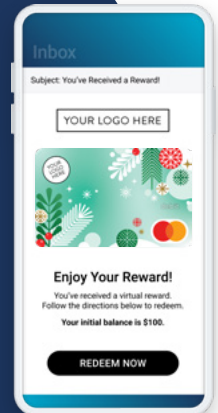
# Digital and physical delivery options

Both digital and physical reward cards offer distinct advantages. Choose the format that best matches your relationship with recipients and your campaign goals.

## Digital delivery benefits

Digital cards work especially well for large-scale campaigns or time-sensitive situations:

- **Instant delivery with no shipping costs or lead times**
- **Easy global distribution with real-time currency conversion**
- **Growing popularity: 72% of buyers now send cards via email<sup>11</sup>**
- **Flexible delivery methods including email and text/SMS**



## Physical delivery benefits

Physical cards create a more premium experience for high-value relationships:

- **Tangible unboxing experience that creates a memorable moment**
- **Branded packaging opportunities that reinforce your company image**
- **Traditional appeal for recipients who prefer physical gifts they can hold**
- **Premium presentation that enhances the perceived value of your gesture**



## Both formats deliver lasting value

Regardless of format, gift cards provide benefits that extend well beyond the holidays. Blackhawk Network research found that 78% of recipients love using their cards post-holiday to take advantage of sales.<sup>11</sup> 74% of younger shoppers and 62% of older shoppers plan to spend their card in the next two months.



# Essential features

The right reward card solution should include capabilities that make your campaign easier to manage and more valuable to recipients.

When selecting a card program or partner, look for these capabilities that enhance experience for your customers and your team:

**Wide selection and choice flexibility** give recipients the freedom to find something they truly want. Look for platforms that offer diverse retailer options across categories like dining, shopping, entertainment, and experiences.



**Charitable donation options** let recipients redirect their gift to causes they care about. Donations work especially well for recipients who may have policies against accepting business gifts or who prefer to give back during the holiday season.



**Global currency support** simplifies international campaigns. Look for programs that offer a [global catalogue](#) with a range of currencies across multiple countries, including automatic conversion at current exchange rates.



**Data security and compliance** protect both your company and your recipients. This is especially important for business gifting where you're handling customer information and company funds.





# 4

## Personalization and customer experience

The message and presentation of your gift matter as much as the gift itself. A thoughtful approach to personalization and delivery creates stronger connections and better business outcomes.



# Making meaningful connections

Research shows that personalization significantly impacts how people respond to business relationships and marketing efforts.

## Personalization drives loyalty

Deloitte research found that only 60% of consumers feel satisfied with the level of personalization they receive in their brand interactions.<sup>12</sup> This gap represents a significant opportunity for business gifting, where a personalized message or thoughtful delivery method can help your company stand out and strengthen professional relationships.



# Delivery best practices

How you deliver your gift can be just as important as what you give.

## Digital delivery strategy

Digital gifts require careful attention to email presentation and timing:

- **Subject line optimization:** Mention the gift graciously in your subject line so recipients don't delete your email thinking it's promotional content. Try "A holiday thank you from [Company Name]" or "Holiday gift enclosed--- thank you for your partnership"
- **Branded templates:** Use consistent visual design that reflects your company brand but feels warm and personal rather than overly corporate
- **Optimal timing:** Early December works well for most industries, giving recipients time to enjoy their gift before holiday vacations begin
- **Mobile-responsive experience:** Ensure gift redemption works smoothly on smartphones, since many recipients will access their gifts on mobile devices





## Physical delivery strategy

Physical gifts create opportunities for premium presentation that digital delivery can't match:

- **Premium packaging:** Branded boxes or high-quality envelopes create anticipation and enhance the perceived value of your gift
- **Personal touches:** Handwritten notes or customized card designs show extra effort that recipients notice and appreciate
- **Timing considerations:** Account for shipping time and potential delays to ensure delivery before recipients leave for holiday breaks



## International considerations

If your recipient list spans multiple countries, make sure your chosen platform can handle the complexity:

- **Global reach:** Choose a solution that manages supply chain conditions globally, so you can easily provide recipient choice
- **Security compliance:** Look for PCI DSS and ISO 27001 certifications to protect both your company and your recipients
- **International physical shipping:** Reliable carriers and customs handling for physical card distribution



# 5

## Long-term value creation and follow-up systems

Holiday gifts are just the beginning. The real business value comes from how you follow up and leverage the goodwill you've created.



# Immediate engagement strategy

The period right after gift delivery offers your best opportunity to deepen business relationships.

## Personal outreach works best

Sales reps should send simple, genuine messages like “Hope you’re enjoying the gift we sent!” within 48–72 hours of delivery. Keep it personal by referencing specific conversations or shared experiences rather than generic thank-you messages.

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genuine messages  
within 48–72 hours  
of delivery

## Share valuable resources

Use the increased attention from your gift to offer new year planning guides, industry trend reports, or educational webinars that provide genuine value and reinforce your expertise.

# Referral program activation

Satisfied customers who have just received a thoughtful gift are in the perfect mindset to help you find new business.

**The business case is compelling.** Harvard Business Review research demonstrates that referred customers make 31%–57% more referrals than customers acquired through other channels, creating a compounding effect.<sup>13</sup>

**Set up dual incentives** where both the referrer receives \$50–\$250 and the referred prospect gets \$25–\$100 for completing their first purchase or demo. Gift cards help people discover new brands, with 35% of younger recipients discovering new options through their gift cards.<sup>11</sup>

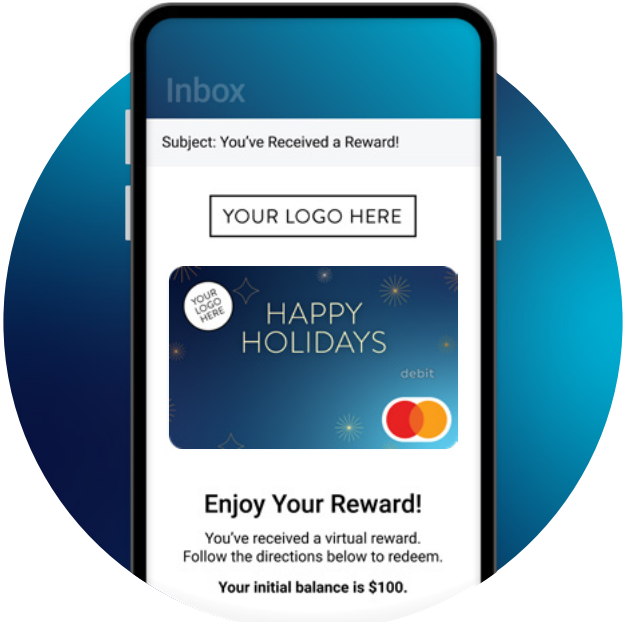


# Gather social proof

Holiday gifts create natural opportunities to collect testimonials and reviews.

## Survey incentives can work well during the holiday season

Offer \$10–\$25 gift cards or prepaid cards for completing customer satisfaction surveys or verified platform reviews. Include open-ended questions that often turn into usable testimonials with minimal editing.





# 6

## Success measurement and ROI framework

Measuring the success of your holiday gifting campaign requires tracking both immediate results and long-term business impact.



# Key metrics to track

Start with these fundamental measurements to assess your campaign's performance.



## Redemption rates

tell you if recipients value your gifts. Target 80% or higher for digital gift cards and 70%+ for physical cards. Lower rates might indicate poor gift selection or delivery issues.



## Engagement tracking

reveals relationship strength. Monitor email open rates, response rates to sales outreach, and participation in content or events you promote after the gift campaign.



## Pipeline impact

shows business results. Measure changes in deal velocity, close rates, and meeting acceptance rates for prospects who received gifts.

# Long-term impact measurement

The most valuable results from holiday gifting often appear months after your campaign ends.

**Customer retention metrics** matter most for existing customers. Track churn rates, renewal rates, and expansion revenue from gift recipients compared to those who didn't receive gifts.

**Referral generation** creates compounding value. Monitor both the quantity and quality of referrals from gift recipients compared to baseline rates.



# Success framework

Create a systematic approach to measuring and improving your campaigns over time.

## Review in phases to capture both immediate and long-term impacts:

- **Q4 analysis:** Assess redemption rates and initial feedback within 30 days
- **Q1 follow-up:** Measure engagement and early referral generation
- **Ongoing optimization:** Track retention and relationship indicators over 6–12 months



**Focus on 5–7 core metrics** that directly tie to your business objectives rather than trying to track everything. Organizations with clear KPIs are **27% more likely to outperform their industry peers**, and this applies directly to holiday gifting campaigns.<sup>14</sup>





# 7

## What top performing companies do differently with customer rewards

North American research from The Incentive Research Foundation recently analyzed 600 companies to identify what separates high-performers from their competitors.<sup>15</sup> Only **22.5%** qualified as top performers based on revenue growth, goal achievement, and customer retention success.



# Key findings that apply to holiday gifting



## Strategic alignment drives results

**59% of top performers rate their program alignment to business goals as “excellent” compared to 50% of others.**

For holiday gifting, this means connecting your campaign directly to objectives like customer retention or referral generation, not treating gifts as generic goodwill gestures.



## Executive support creates success

**99% of top performers have strong leadership backing, with 64% rating it as “excellent” versus 54% for other companies.**

Secure buy-in by presenting your holiday campaign as a strategic business initiative with clear ROI projections.



## Cross-functional collaboration amplifies impact

**93% of top performers benefit from collaboration across departments versus 65% of others.**

Involve sales, customer success, and partner teams in recipient selection and follow-up planning to ensure your gifts reach the right people with appropriate follow-up.



## Higher investment pays off

**Top performers allocate significantly higher reward values, with non-travel rewards averaging \$1,660+ versus \$1,465 for others.**

Don't default to the lowest-cost option for your most important relationships. A \$100 gift card to your most valuable customer may generate significantly better ROI than ten \$10 cards to less strategic recipients.



## Gift cards are the preferred choice

**94% of top performers use gift cards as rewards because they offer recipient flexibility and high perceived value while being operationally efficient.**

This validates gift cards as a strategic choice for holiday campaigns, eliminating guesswork about recipient preferences while providing the flexibility that research shows drives satisfaction.

# Implementation roadmap for top performance

Here's how to apply these top-performer insights to your holiday gifting campaign:

## Weeks 1–2

### Foundation building

- Secure executive support with clear business case and ROI projections
- Align campaign goals with customer retention and growth objectives
- Involve cross-functional teams in planning and execution
- Segment recipients based on business value

## Weeks 3–4

### Strategic execution

- Invest meaningful amounts for your most important relationships
- Choose flexible reward options like gift cards
- Launch with optimal timing
- Begin systematic follow-up sequences

## Ongoing

### Performance optimization

- Track both financial and relationship metrics
- Implement referral programs with proven frameworks
- Document what works for future campaigns



This approach can provide a meaningful competitive edge. While most companies send forgettable holiday gifts that end up in junk drawers, **your team can use these research-backed strategies to create campaigns that recipients remember and respond to with measurable business actions.**



## Ready to transform your holiday gifting strategy?

**Contact a holiday rewards expert today.**

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