Nine Gift Exchange Ideas For Your Holiday Party

By TINA DIXON

Whether it’s to save money, boost the fun or create a new tradition, many corporate event planners are looking for new ways to engage in gift giving for those forthcoming holiday parties. Discover nine great holiday gift exchange ideas below:

• Drawing Names - To cut down on having to buy for many different people, a group of employees can draw names out of a hat! Instead of each person having to buy for everyone in the group, now each person just buys for one other person. Be sure no one draws their own name, though!

• Secret Santa - Building on the drawing names gift exchange idea, Secret Santa keeps it a secret who each person will buy for! Many times even after the gift is given, the identity of their “Santa” is kept secret from the gift recipient.

• White Elephant - This is a fun holiday gift exchange idea that goes by many different names! The main idea here is that everyone attending a party brings a gift and for however many gifts are brought, numbers are drawn for opening order. Although they won’t know who will be opening the gift, it doesn’t have to be generic or gender neutral because others will have the opportunity to take it home! The first person to choose a gift opens it. The second person to choose a gift opens theirs and then has the option to keep their own gift or swap it for the first person’s gift. Every new person who opens a gift has the option to keep their own gift or swap it for any other. After the last person picks and opts to swap or not swap, the first person is given the opportunity to swap the gift they ended up with. It’s great fun and a very popular gift exchange idea!

• Grab Bag - In this gift exchange, every party attendee brings an unusually shaped gift and secretly sneaks it into a grab bag so no one sees the gifts that are being added. When it comes time for gifts, the bag is brought out with all the mysterious gifts inside. Each person then reaches in and feels around for a gift that they might like to take home!

• Auction (live or silent) - Going once! Going twice! Auctions can be great fun and a terrific way to exchange gifts! Each party attendee brings a few gifts (or the hostess can provide all the gifts if she likes) and they are put on display and up for auction. Each party guest is given a certain number (usually 100) of points with which to bid. Once all of their points have been used to “purchase” auction items, guests can no longer bid on items. A live auction is great fun for a lively party, but if you prefer a more subdued auction, guests can write their bids on paper for each gift.

• Best Guess - If your party attendees are big fans of guessing games like Charades or Pictionary, you’re bound to love this fun gift exchange idea! Each person brings a gift or two. When it comes time for gift giving, each is given a turn to hold up their wrapped gift and the group guesses what might be inside. You can give clues or use charades or sketches to help them along (especially if it’s a particularly obscure gift to guess), and the first person to guess just what the gift is gets to keep it!

• Charitable Giving - For those organizations passionate about philanthropy, this is a great option. Decide on a charity to donate the money you would ordinarily spend on gift giving to help others. You can all pool your money into a single charity or let each would-be gift recipient choose their own charity.

• Recycled Gifts - No, we don’t want you to go rummaging through your cardboards and plastics looking for gifts. This idea is about re-gifting! Rather than holding your holiday party before the holidays, opt for a delayed party in the New Year. The only gift requirement is that you bring a gift you have already received! We all get presents around the holidays that we don’t necessarily need or want. And as they say, one man’s trash is another man’s treasure. Recycle those unwanted gifts for a creative gift exchange idea that won’t cost anyone a single dime!

• Homemade Gifts - This is a great frugal gift exchange idea that can be just as exciting as any of the others. Have a holiday party where the only gifts exchanged are homemade gifts. From homemade cookies to original paintings to homemade ornaments, quilts, knit hats and more, discover how talented your coworkers really are!

Tina Dixon is a freelance writer.
The Office Holiday Party: The Top 5 Reasons to Go Bowling and 5 Tips for Booking Your Event

Every year, companies across the country search for the perfect setting to host their holiday party and the perfect activity to engage, entertain, and reward their employees. So how can you make sure that your party stands out from the rest? One way is to treat your office to the team-inspired fun of bowling. Bowling? Really? Definitely. You may remember bowling from your childhood friend’s 10th birthday party, but today more and more companies are choosing to bring their teams to enjoy blacklight bowling and gourmet dining in impressively designed Bowlmor Lanes and Bowlero venues. Here Bowlmor AMF, the owner of LA’s ever-popular Bowlmor Lanes and Bowlero bowling lounges, shows you how bowling with your colleagues can turn your annual office holiday party into the Best Meeting Ever.

**TOP 5 REASONS TO GO BOWLING FOR YOUR OFFICE HOLIDAY PARTY**

1. It’s Interactive. When you’re bowling, everyone is engaged—and no one is feeling like that lonely guy or girl in the corner (office holiday parties can be notorious for that). Bowlmor and Bowlero take this engagement to the next level—incorporating dynamic video walls, up-tempo music, and laneside service to make the party experience undeniably immersive.

2. It’s Team-Oriented. Teambuilding is in bowling’s DNA; it’s built into the experience. When you bowl, your informal teams become a kind of mini-community for your party (and sometimes, well after the party). The takeaway: office camaraderie comes standard with every laneside holiday event.

3. It’s Upscale Without Being Stale. Bowlmor and Bowlero bowling lounges bring a fun, chic, classy vibe to your holiday party without the stuffy air of a fancy restaurant where people mingle but don’t actually have fun.

4. It Covers the Office Age-Gap. From the Baby Boomer boss to the Gen-X manager to the Millennial up-and-coming, everyone can get in on the fun—whether you want to enjoy a drink on plush laneside couches, roll like a rebel on the lanes, or hit up the arcade and unleash your inner child.

5. It’s Not the Conference Room. Taking your team out of the office shows that your party took some thought—and that it wasn’t just an afterthought. (What? People don’t like eating chips and salsa on the same table they prepare reports and hold meetings…? No, they don’t.) When you leave the office and hit the lanes, you have officially entered party-mode.

**5 TIPS TO BOOK LIKE A PRO**

1. Plan Early. Really Early. Area venues fill up quickly (our locations in Pasadena, Santa Monica, and Mar Vista can all attest to this). And it’s never a fun experience when you discover that your ideal venue has a months-long waiting list.

2. Plan Early. Yes, we mentioned it twice. It’s that important. Plus, you can usually get exclusive extras and special deals on your holiday party the earlier in the season you decide to book. (Take advantage of Bowlmor and Bowlero’s special early booking offer now—book before 10/31 and get Free $20 Gift Cards for each of your guests. Go to Bowlmor.com/holiday or Bowlero.com/holiday to learn more.)

3. Work With a Professional. A party planning expert can help alleviate the stress and frustration that can accompany planning your company’s office holiday event. Fortunately, Bowlmor and Bowlero venues feature on-site party planning professionals ready to facilitate every aspect of the process.

4. Know Your Numbers. It helps to know just how many will be in your party. Will you need a few lanes? More than 10? Or do you want to go all out and reserve the entire venue for your holiday event? Every Bowlmor and Bowlero gives you the flexibility to customize your party—from the number of lanes to the kind of menu items your guests crave.

5. Find the Venue That’s Right for You. The Greater Los Angeles area has three world-class options for businesses looking to book memorable office parties this holiday season: Bowlmor Pasadena, Bowlmor Santa Monica, and Bowlero Mar Vista. Each venue has its own distinctive style and approach to office holiday fun—with private bowling-lounges, semi-private event spaces, and patio-inspired lounge areas that can help set the tone perfectly for any office holiday party.

The clock is ticking... which means it’s time to start planning! Get the ball rolling and plan your office holiday party by visiting Bowlmor.com/holiday or Bowlero.com/holiday today!
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Ten Ways to Protect Your Business
During a Holiday Party

It is the holiday season, a time for office parties and charity events. While gatherings can provide opportunities for professionals to mingle casually with their co-workers and clients and can help boost employee morale, they can also prove to be a liability for businesses that serve alcohol. That is why businesses should take reasonable precautions to prevent any risks and financially protect themselves by making sure they have the proper insurance, warned the Insurance Information Institute (I.I.I.).

Forty-four states plus the District of Columbia have enacted liquor liability laws. These laws make it possible for a plaintiff to hold those who serve alcohol to an intoxicated or underage person responsible for any damage or injury caused by these same individuals after they leave the party. Most of these laws also offer an injured person, such as the victim of a drunk driver, a method to sue the person who served the alcohol. There are circumstances under these same state laws where criminal charges may also apply. Liquor liability laws were intended originally to apply to taverns, bars, and other establishments selling and serving alcohol. However, the liability laws have expanded over time to include “social host” (such as those holding a holiday party in their home or business) in some states giving them some exposure to the risk of liability for serving alcohol.

“In many states you can be held legally responsible for your employees’ actions after they leave the party,” said Loretta Worters, vice-president of the I.I.I. “If you are throwing an office party where alcohol is served, you have a responsibility to make sure that your employees are capable of driving safely.”

Worters noted that when business owners host a holiday party and serve alcohol as part of the festivities, liquor liability would most likely be covered by their commercial general liability (CGL) policy. “If you want to check with your insurance agent or broker first,” she said, adding that “if an employee becomes intoxicated and assaults another employee at the party, the incident might be excluded under the CGL policy.” In addition to a CGL policy, businesses should also consider purchasing an Employment Practices Liability Insurance (EPLI) policy. An EPLI policy will protect a business from discrimination, sexual harassment, emotional distress, and other workplace-related issues. When you buy the coverage, make sure it includes “third-party” coverage. Third-party coverage refers to claims made by non-employees, usually clients or customers, who allege that an employer engaged in wrongful conduct such as sexual harassment or discrimination. This can be important coverage, for example, if someone in management has had too much to drink and makes an inappropriate overtture to a client or customer. Without a specific policy endorsement for third-party claims, EPLI policy forms do not cover these types of exposures.

“Even innocent flirting or touching can be misconstrued and result in a lawsuit,” explained Worters.

In addition to overly inappropriate behavior, if someone posts a video clip or picture on YouTube or Facebook that could result in reputation-al harm, it is also covered under an EPLI policy.

Over the years, office parties have changed considerably. Alcohol used to flow freely, and employers would sometimes overlook inappropriate conduct, explaining away bad party behavior without taking any action. Today, lawyers are rampant that some companies have concluded office parties involving alcohol are not worth the risk.

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR BUSINESS

If you plan to host a holiday party at which you will be serving alcohol, the I.I.I. offers the following tips to prevent a lawsuit:

• Advise employees to be responsible. Include a statement on the party invitation, or circulate a written reminder to all concerned on the responsibilities to drink only in moderation and to avoid driving after drinking.

• Emphasize to management that they must lead by example.

• Hold the party at an offsite location. If problems do arise, it is better that they occur away from the business premises. The liability will generally be on the restaurant than the company. However, it is not unusual for an employer to be named as a defendant in a civil lawsuit if an intoxicated employee leaves any company-sponsored event and injures himself or herself or another person as a result.

• Do not pay for alcoholic drinks. Guest will drink less if they have to pay for the drinks themselves.

• If you feel you must furnish alcoholic beverages, consider a drink voucher system to limit the number of drinks served. Or, serve alcohol for only a short period.

• Consider hiring a professional bartender. Most bartenders are trained to recognize signs of intoxication and will limit consumption by partygoers.

• Offer non-alcoholic beverages and always serve food. It is proven that food can help counter the effects of alcohol.

• Do not serve alcohol to minors.

• Stop serving liquor toward the end of the evening and switch to coffee, tea and soft drinks.

• Arrange alternative transportation. Anticipate the need for alternative transportation for all employees and guests and make special transportation arrangements in advance of the party. Encourage all employees and guests to make use of the alternative transportation if they consume any alcohol.

Worters advised business owners to talk with their insurance agent or company representative about their liability insurance coverage and any exclusions, conditions or limitations to their policies for this kind of risk. “Appropriate liability insurance coverage is necessary. In some cases special event coverage may be available that will cover both liquor liability and other liability exposures specific to the event.”

The I.I.I. is a nonprofit communications organization supported by the insurance industry.

Planning for that Big Holiday Office Party

By SYDNEY CHAFFEE

If you have decided to have a holiday office party this year, you have to do some planning. Need some tips? Here’s what you should know. You may have to start planning well in advance.

You can make your holiday office party one to remember – provided you know what is involved in planning the perfect office party.

Here are some tips for your holiday party planning:

GET EVERYONE INVOLVED

Discuss the party with your employees and colleagues. Solicit company holiday party ideas from everyone who is interested. This helps in forging a sense of unity and avoiding resentment.

Then, consider forming a committee to organize the party. If your business is smaller, then everyone should be involved.

HOLIDAY PARTY THEMES

Decide on a theme for your holiday party.

Having a holiday party theme helps in organizing a more entertaining party. Try to think a bit differently; go for something new and exciting. Consider taking the company to play a round of golf, visit historical places, or take a dinner cruise or going to a fine dining restaurant.

The idea here is to opt for a holiday theme that takes you away from the mundane office environment.

PICTA SUITE SUITABLE

Decide on a date that is good for everyone. Christmas Eve usually isn’t very good, as most people want to take off early to be with their families.

Make sure you inform everybody well in advance, and that your holiday office party date does not clash with a holiday or fall on the date of an important company event.

Ask your employees if they think it should be held on a weekday or the weekend. This will ensure that everyone will be able to participate.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT LOCATION

The idea behind a holiday office party is for everyone to unwind and enjoy themselves.

Choose a location that is festive, comfortable and beautiful. When you choose the location, make sure that it is in a place that is convenient for everyone.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE CONSIDERATIONS

Naturally, the people in your office have different dietary requirements. Some may be vegetarian while others may be on a diabetic diet. Having a menu that caters to everyone is a good idea. It is always better to serve non-alcoholic drinks so that things don’t get out of hand. You can ask your employees about their dietary restrictions and preferences.

Make sure that you arrange to have the right beverages, consider a drink voucher system to limit the number of drinks served, or serve alcohol for only a short period.

GAMES AND ACTIVITIES TO ENJOY

Activities can help break the ice.

For example, you can organize games and have singing competitions. You can have prizes for the best-dressed person. Play lively music in the background. Try to hire a DJ if your budget permits.

Remember, this is your opportunity to show your employees your appreciation.

COOL GIFTS AND PRIZES

At the party, give gifts and prizes that are cool, fun and useful. They can be the latest electronic gadgets, party favors or gift certificates. Ask all your employees to pitch in when it comes to gift ideas – that way, everyone will feel that they have an opportunity to contribute.

Organizing a great holiday office party can be fun for everyone. Follow the tips above and make your holiday office party one to remember!

Sydney Chaffee is a freelance writer.