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 or swap 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.
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 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 hosts” (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. “It’s best 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 employee 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 overture 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 overtly 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 EPL 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, lawsuits are so 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 **Ten Ways to Protect Your Business During a Holiday Party**

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Planning for that Big Holiday Office Party

By SYDNEY CHAFEЕ

If you have decided to have a holiday office party this year, you have to do some planning. And depending on the size of your business, 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 taking a dinner cruise or going to a fine dining restaurant.

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

PICK A SUITABLE DATE

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 location 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 amount of food and drinks available.

DECORATIONS TO CREATE THAT PARTY FEELING

While doing your holiday party planning, pay special attention to the decorations. They should match the season and the holiday.

GAMES AND ACTIVITIES TO ENJOY

Be sure to plan games and activities that 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 have 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 party one to remember!

Sydney Chafee is a freelance writer.

REIMAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES

Fresh off an $11 million renovation, the newly re-energized Warner Center Marriott Woodland Hills doesn’t just offer a great night’s rest; it offers a total resort-like hotel experience.

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M CLUB LOUNGE
I you're thinking about canceling the annual company holiday party, don't! Get creative instead. It's been a tough year with the country experiencing layoffs, skyrocketing unemployment and budget cuts, and your employees are probably long overdue for a morale boost. Planning a successful party takes time, but doesn't have to break the bank.

VENUE: If possible, get out of the office. An afternoon affair for 2-3 hours at a local restaurant or hotel will be less expensive than an evening event on a premium holiday date.

DATE: Have a few dates and times to run by the boss to make sure all important people are available for the party. Finding out the boss is in Tahiti on your party date would be a disaster.

TIME: Start your party after lunch and end before dinner to eliminate the need to serve a full meal.

INVITATIONS: Once you have your date, time and venue, order fabulous invitations. An awesome holiday party invitation sets the tone for the occasion and lets employees know what you have planned. Don't send out a boring memo or uninteresting letter sheet of "who, what, where and when" start. There are affordable custom printed invitations available that will get party goers excited about your event.

FOOD: Choosing an array of appetizers and sandwiches will lower your food costs, eliminate chefs and limit the number of attendants needed.

DESSERTS: A dessert station with mini bite-size portions cut costs as most guests take a few bites and leave the rest.

DRINKS: With an afternoon party, you could eliminate alcoholic beverages and potential liabilities too. Choosing to serve only wine and beer might be another alternative and skips the expense of an open bar that might be expected at an evening party.

ENTERTAINMENT: You can hire a DJ instead of live entertainment or maybe a magician or a fortune teller (only good news) would be fun for your crowd.

APPRECIATION: No matter what type of party you decide on, be sure to emphasize that you value your employees. Give them a boost to bring in a wonderful new year, your company’s morale might depend on it.

Follow these tips and you’ll be hosting a party thats bound to have everyone talking about their great time the next day. Keep in mind that insurance is a key component to a successful holiday party. Consider getting liability insurance for the event. Many companies already have liability insurance 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," 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.

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