



Gifts that Spark Yearlong Conversations about your Incentive Program

By Tom Romine

After decades of experience in the incentive industry, and 500+ gift programs successfully delivered annually, Cultivate is challenging the old ways of thinking on how to maximize the impact of your gift programs, and turn your event into a yearlong conversation.



CULTIVATE

Introduction

Designing a gift program that leaves your attendees feeling appreciated, empowered, inspired, and that doesn't stop once the event is over can be a significant investment in your overall event spend. It's important to understand that thoughtful gifts spark meaningful conversations about your event and continue long after the on-site experience fades. But what exactly do meaningful conversations mean? In my experience, the conversations start when friends/family ask guests where they received their new gift. Being asked about a new gift gives guests a reason to talk about themselves and their success. Here's an example:

Michelle walks into a busy bar for happy hour with a few friends from grad school. They get together every month or so to catch up, their conversations usually revolving around family, the kids' activities, and careers. Michelle and her friends grab a high-top table, and she hangs her red handbag on the back of her chair. About halfway through their second round of drinks, Michelle's friend, Deb notices Michelle's bold colored handbag hanging from the bar stool.

"Wow, great handbag! What brand is this?" Deb asks.

"Rebecca Minkoff," Michelle replies. "I recently got it on the incentive trip I was just on with my company."



Michelle begins telling them all about her recent incentive trip to Hawai'i and how she got to select her new handbag from a variety of styles on-site. The best part? Michelle hadn't heard of the brand Rebecca Minkoff before, so she was eager to tell her friends what she learned about it. By being asked about her new bag Michelle was given "the right to brag" and share her success. Though it's important to ask, would the conversation start without Deb noticing Michelle's new stylish handbag? Would the bag still be called out if it was from a well-known brand you see everywhere?

In this paper, I'll be providing you with the top three factors to consider when planning your next gift program to spark meaningful conversations afterward. The more conversations that happen after your event, the more your attendees feel appreciated and inspired - driving home the outcome you want with your incentive program.

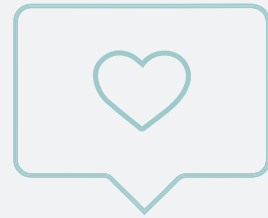
We've narrowed down the three yearlong conversation factors



1. Choice



2. Aspirational Brands



3. Frequency of Use



1. Choice

You might remember the days when planners would gift their entire group the same pair of sunglasses, like the Ray-Ban Wayfarer, as there were no other real options. But today, thanks to Maui Jim (where I worked for three years), Cultivate and other suppliers, know there's a better way to gift sunglasses at your event; a pop-up gift experience where guests try on and select their favorite from a variety of options. Choice is the simplest, most effective way to ensure every guest finds a gift they love. One they will use for months or years after the event.

Choice is so important it should be incorporated into every gift program, no matter what the category. Why take the chance that a percentage of your guests might not love their gift? Let's take apparel, for example, I recently attended one of our customer's sunglass gift experiences in San Francisco. Our client certainly understood choice as we worked with her to curate a mix of three unique brands and a total of 18 styles. But as I helped deliver guests their perfect pair, I was surprised to see every guest was carrying a red fleece jacket. Why is choice so important for a gift as simple as apparel?

- What if you're like me and don't wear red?
- What if you live in Florida and have no use for a fleece?

Will some guests love the jacket and wear it? Sure, but your program may result in disappointment if you think that every one of your attendees will feel the same.

If the guest takes that jacket home and hangs it in their closet, what three things happen a year later after not being worn?

1. It probably gets donated to Goodwill.
2. Your guest probably never got called out by a friend or family member while wearing it (remember, we want to spark a conversation about your incentive trip).
3. There's even a chance that some guests will dislike the fact that their company wasted \$150 on something they never used.

THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF CHOICE

Any amount of choice is better than no choice at all, but over the years we've learned that finding the right balance is a huge factor for your gift program's success. Too many options can feel overwhelming while not enough can end up making your gift program fall a little flat. Take sunglasses, for example, we've found that our mix of six styles from three unique brands is the perfect balance of choice for guests.



2. Aspirational Brands

The “art form” of selecting aspirational brands can make all the difference in the world. So what’s an “aspirational brand”? I’d like to think of it as:

- A product or brand that people aspire to own, but might not be excited about purchasing for themselves. It’s something you want, but don’t necessarily need.
- Product that is demonstrably superior and pleasingly different, one made with premium materials and upon initial review, immediately stands out as special.
- The discoverability of a new brand is equally important. When your guests are high achievers with discretionary income, they are often looking for the next cool brand. They want to be the first to discover it and share it with their peers back home.

The brands Cultivate offers on-site set us apart from our competitors because of our ability to educate guests on what makes the brand they’re selecting so amazing. Giving your guests the opportunity to discover new brands that they can brag about to their friends and family is going to give your program that extra wow factor you’re looking for.



3. Frequency of Use

Remember Michelle from the story above? What sparked a conversation about her incentive trip? It was the new handbag hanging from her chair. Handbags, small luggage and accessories, watches, apparel, and footwear all have relatively high scores when it comes to frequency. Ask yourself how important it is to have your guests continually use their gift. When people frequently use a gift, they continue to feel appreciated long after the occasion. With continued use, the gift-giving experience and the people involved in it become more memorable.

How about Yeti coolers? Assuming it was included in a carefully curated mix of options, it would certainly receive high marks with choice and aspirational, but what about the frequency? Even avid tailgaters or campers might only use their cooler a few times a season. Everyone else, even less often. So does that make it a bad gift? No, but if it was an item used more frequently it would help you achieve the following outcome: Yearlong conversations for your incentive program.



Bringing it all together

The key to designing a successful gift program that will continue to spark meaningful conversations long after the on-site experience fades can be measured using three factors: choice, aspirational brands, and frequency of use. Remember it all starts with a question:

“I love your new handbag, where did you get it?”

Questions like these set the stage for people to talk about their success. The gift is proof that they own the bragging rights. The goal is to make people feel valued as individuals rather than mere numbers in a large company. They’ll appreciate your efforts to make their gifts more personal.

WHAT MAKES CULTIVATE DIFFERENT?

- Pop-up displays
- Turnkey service
- Expert staff

Cultivate’s unique pop-up displays are designed to resemble a high-end boutique and our certified event staff is ready to help every guest find their perfect gift. Cultivate handles every detail on-site so you don’t have to. Our process is professional, seamless, and will help you achieve your event goals.



Since the beginning, we've honed in on our "why," bringing to light the reasons we're so enthusiastic about gifting and how we're different from the competition. We truly believe that the 500+ gift programs we deliver annually directly relate back to our core purpose—to appreciate and inspire amazing people, which also aligns with our perspective on gifting. Addressing the ideas of choice, aspirational brands, and frequency of use has helped shape us into an industry leader in creating on-site gift experiences for your corporate meetings, events, and incentive trips.



About Tom Romine

PRESIDENT & FOUNDER

Cultivate knows designing a gift program that continues to spark meaningful conversations long after the on-site experience fades isn't always easy. Tom can help educate your audience on how to maximize their gift programs using three factors: Choice, Aspirational Brands, and Frequency of Use. These factors are the driving forces for making an event memorable and in turn, will jump-start the conversations needed to turn it into a yearlong conversation. And while we understand that every event is different, we're confident that the tools Tom provides will help you create an event that will keep your guests talking for years to come.

Tom wasn't always the gifting expert he is today, he worked to build a career within the corporate gifting space before noticing an opportunity to start something that no one else was doing. The idea of offering guests a choice wasn't necessarily a new one, but other companies were too focused on bulk orders or logo products even though they were unsuccessful. Today at Cultivate, we truly believe that the 500+ gift programs we successfully execute annually directly relates back to our core purpose—to appreciate and inspire amazing people, which also aligns with our perspective on gifting. Addressing the idea of choice has helped shape us into an industry leader in creating your on-site gift experiences.