

Last-minute Business Gifts

Gifts That Give Back to the Community

It has always been difficult for companies to gauge return on investment from holiday gifting because it is, by definition, an unconditional gesture. A business gift is used to say thank you for past business and, at most, that you hope to retain them as a customer in the coming year.

Complicating matters is the increasing existence of restrictions by companies limiting the value of gifts its employees can receive or prohibiting them altogether.

The emergence of socially responsible gifts has helped to soften the edges of corporate gifting. Doing well for an underprivileged third party, while providing a token of appreciation to a client, has proven both memorable and meaningful.

That's the concept behind Helping Hand Rewards, a company that serves as a conduit between social enterprise organizations that make merchandise and businesses that want to use those products as gifts, employee rewards and consumer incentives.

“Corporate social responsibility is becoming more important in every company. It's a trend that has arrived,” says Michael Arkes, president of Helping Hand Rewards. “There is an awareness now by companies that they can incorporate this into their incentive and business gift programs.”

Arkes, whose “day job” is CEO of Hinda Incentives, a full-service incentive company, founded Helping Hands Rewards in 2006 after meeting the director of The Enterprising Kitchen, a Chicago-based non-profit organization that provides workforce development for underprivileged women by operating a business that produces soaps and spa products.

Arkes helped increase The Enterprising Kitchen's corporate business, and then decided to build an alliance of similar non-profit merchandise manufacturers under the Helping Hand Rewards brand. Helping Hand Rewards currently has six



Guatemalan pottery, jewelry and accessories are among the items available to your business gift recipients through the Helping Hand Rewards program.

partner members that produce everything from baked goods to Guatemalan jewelry and accessories.

Arkes says partners in the endeavor must consistently provide top-notch customer service, as well as have a suitable socially responsible mission.

Corporate customers have the option of sending actual merchandise, or using a gift card that allows recipients to shop online at any of the partner businesses. Each gift comes with an explanation of how the gift is helping underprivileged people.

Arkes used the gift card himself for some Hinda clients and received not one, but two handwritten thank-you notes from one recipient. “She wrote us when she received the gift card and again after she selected the item she wanted and received it. That's when you know people are connecting to this,” he says.

YOU CAN FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HELPING HAND REWARDS AT HELPINGHANDREWARDS.ORG OR E-MAIL MARKES@HELPINGHANDREWARDS.COM.

