

Incentives... A Year Of Highlights & Discovery

TO say the least 2009 for the incentive industry as a whole has been an awakening experience. Not because there has been a significant decline in the number of programs or the lost income as a result but because of the discovery of new and interesting ways to make corporations realize that the key to new growth and revenue is through being a good corporate citizen and engaging the workforce, customers, vendors and stockholders in the well being of the business.

Incentive companies and those corporations who operate their own incentive programs have moved in several directions this year to support charitable causes, green initiatives, sustainability and engagement.



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Having a charitable or social responsibility element built into an incentive program not only helps the employee who earns the incentive feel good about reaching their goals and objectives but also creates a sense of social awareness for the corporation. It stands to reason then on an incentive trip that instead of spending time on the golf course or in a deluxe hotel's spa that incentive winners and the corporate sponsors use this time to do a worthwhile project for a community at the destination. Likewise if the incentive is an online merchandise program than a portion of the points earned by participants can go to a charity of choice either as a cash donation or for select useful merchandise. In either case an incentive program with a social responsibility aspect provides companies with a strong moral backbone and most of all, they help their or other communities visited with worthwhile projects such as house building, helping at orphanages and environmental conservation. These programs are rewarding experiences helping employees feel valued and improving staff morale and loyalty plus it helps justify the expense of such programs particularly where the ROI is difficult to measure.


Sustainability and green initiatives kind of work hand in hand. While sustainability seeks to provide the best outcomes for the human and natural environments both now and into the indefinite future, green initiatives

take more of a now approach. For example, a travel incentive program selecting a destination that is walkable, resorts practicing eco-friendly solutions that reduce their carbon footprint and selecting hotels that use products that are eco-friendly for every function like not using plastic cups but instead using biodegradable corn-based plastic cups, signage made out of cardboard instead of foam board and vinyl, biodegradable cleaning products, onsite recycling and the elimination of bottled drinks.

Smart businesses of all kinds are looking for ways to cut costs and make operating expenses more predictable. This goal ties in perfectly with the growing shift toward green business behaviors and has carried over to the corporate incentive programs as well. Companies who have embraced the fundamentals of environmental sustainability are often surprised by how much it positively impacts their bottom line. Companies can enhance their incentive programs and profitability as well as their reputation by authentically going green.

THE ENGAGED ENTERPRISE!

The new buzzword in incentive vernacular these days is "Enterprise Engagement". Just what does this mean? Simply put it's really the same as motivation or performance improvement but with a twist. Instead of just recognizing employees or sales people, enterprise engagement also tries to bring into focus that if employees are emotionally engaged and intrinsically really like



their positions that these positive emotional feelings will also have an effect on the way the customer feels about the company or brand and they (customers) will also become more engaged with the company which will translate into financial gain for the company. Additionally this emotional connection between the corporation and its employees and customers will also as an organizational strategy spill over to channel partners, vendors and other stakeholders.

Thus the connection between an engaged employee and a corporation's bottom line can be significant. For example Watson Wyatt's 2008/2009 WorkUSA Report, which surveyed more than 13,000 full-time U.S. workers, identified the

following benefits of having a highly engaged workforce:

- 26 percent higher employee productivity
- Lower turnover risk
- More likely to attract top talent
- Realized 13 percent greater total returns to shareholders over the last five years.
- So how do you create an engaged enterprise? Quantum Workplace in a recent study outlined these five characteristics:
- Setting a clear, compelling direction that empowers each employee
- Open and honest communication
- Continued focus on career growth and development
- Recognizing and rewarding high

performance

- Employee benefits that demonstrate a strong commitment to employee well-being

A big driver to increase productivity, to excel in training and development, and recognize these accomplishments is the reward program established by companies and or their incentive agencies that are serious about an engaged workforce. While intrinsic motivation can be fostered by a corporate strategy that encourages engagement there is much to be said for the reward platform that is the vehicle to accomplish that strategy.

Best wishes for a great holiday and... Have a Rewarding Day!