



# AwardEmployees

... with the award they would choose for themselves.

**Would You Go to a Foot Doctor for a Heart Problem?**

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I had a phone call the other day from a very pleasant woman who was selling business lists for email blasts or direct mail. While she knew we were in the “incentive business” (as our company name is Incentives, inc. it wasn’t too tough to figure out) it was clear to me that she didn’t have a good understanding of what this business really is. Actually she didn’t have a clue. She thought that if her lists worked for one “incentive” company it would work for all of them. What she didn’t know is that our industry is quite divergent and depending on what we are selling, to whom and to achieve what result, what we do and how we do it can be light years apart!

I’m sorry to say that many prospective client companies don’t really have a good understanding of our business either. They see us through the lens of their own needs. A meeting planner will see us as a travel company, for an HR specialist we will be a company that sells corporate recognition or years of service programs, for a sales executive we might be a merchandise or gift card company to provide the awards for a sales contest, for a marketing director a premium company for a consumer promotion. All too often, companies will see us through the persuasive selling ability of incentive suppliers calling on them. You can put some incentive companies in a neat and tidy little box; others may have to go into two or three boxes and still others put themselves into as many boxes as it takes to make a sale.

In my initial column with Incentives Online, I said that 2/3 of all non-cash incentive programs produce no results or actually decrease performance. In my opinion a lot of that is caused by companies choosing the wrong incentive supplier to do the job.

One of the most common misconceptions in our business is that an incentive or performance improvement program is the same as a recognition program. And a company that provides one can provide the other. That subject has been debated in this publication more than once and I will no doubt have a few words on it in future articles. It is a pet peeve of mine and the more information we can share on it, the better equipped a client will be to make educated decisions on what type of program to implement and who to call for advice. A good example of this is a friendly debate I’ve been having for years with a high level executive of a not to be named “quick service” world wide hamburger chain. He contends that the “pins” they use are what everyone in the crew wants as an award. I maintain that the “pins” are an excellent example of a item that can certainly recognize many different minor accomplishments, but are not the kind of award that would truly drive performance and produce profitable incremental results. I guess the debate is a draw. They still buy pins, lots of pins, but they also purchase gift card award systems from us that have achieved terrific incremental results.

## **Search for the Supplier**

I believe it is incumbent on the client to know what objective they want to achieve, how they intend to measure that achievement and how much they are willing to invest to realize results. Without those basic ingredients, the quest for the right supplier is nothing more than a hunting expedition often unfulfilled. After the basics are set, it is also up to the client to do a diligent search for those types of incentive companies that would have the expertise to implement the desired program. After that it is up to us to compete for the business, clearly define our service and deliverables, how they will be employed to achieve results, and the benefits of our recommendations.

## Not Rocket Science

A favorite phrase in this industry (and I suppose others as well) is...“It’s not rocket science.” While it surely isn’t that complex, there are still a myriad of details that need to be put in place to make an incentive program successful. Some suppliers are good at some things, some are good at others, a few might even be good at most, and all will have a bias to their own deliverables which is as it should be. But, I have seen way too many instances where clients purchase a deliverable from an “incentive” company, and that deliverable wasn’t what was necessary to achieve the results. In those cases, the program doesn’t work well, the client does not receive the results they were attempting to achieve, the participants don’t receive awards or awards they want, and the chosen incentive company doesn’t sell their products. Worse yet, as is too often the case in a fixed to spend budget, the supplier does sell a lot of their products but the client receives very little in return.

Would you really go to a foot doctor for a heart problem? Of course not! And you shouldn’t assume that all incentive companies are created equal with the tools to help accomplish your objectives. Take the time to find one with the ability to accomplish your objective. You’ll be glad you did.

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