



PHOTO: This Year, Make Thanksgiving the New Christmas for Expressing Gratitude to Your Customers and Clients, Says John Tantillo

For Immediate Release

NEW YORK/EWORLDWIRE/Nov. 16, 2009 --- John Tantillo, nationally known marketing and branding expert ('<http://www.mdaltd.com>'), argues that the time has come for smart businesses to embrace Thanksgiving over Christmas as the time for expressing their thanks to their customers and making their brand stand out in increasingly competitive economic times. He offers the following open letter to business owners:

Is Christmas the time that you thank clients and customers for their loyalty and business? If this is the case, you need to ask why. In these challenging times, it is imperative that you be concerned with maintaining or growing your market share as well as rethinking your strategies for the holidays. You simply can't afford to miss an opportunity to connect with your clients and customers.

So why Christmas? After all, if everyone else is doing the thanking at this time of year, then everyone's message has less of a chance of making an impact. The thanking space is far too cluttered. Moreover, in an increasingly multi-faith landscape, the December holidays can muddy the waters, not clarify them - and genuine brand-building should always be crystal clear. Remember, the first rule of marketing your business: do no harm; the second: never be ambiguous about your brand.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting that you abandon Christmas and New Year entirely as a time to express gratitude to customers, but what I am suggesting is that you initiate a smart brand refocus that takes advantage of an as yet unexploited niche in the market. When resources are scarce and competition fierce, you must not only think outside the box, you've got to act decisively outside that box as well.

It simply makes sense to thank the people who have made your Thanksgiving possible on the very holiday when thanking for the year's bounty is the order of the day. The Thanksgiving approach will make immediate sense to those you thank. It will also get their attention and has the great advantage of making your business stand out as an independent thinker and a loyal partner really concerned about them - not just another biller going through the same-old holiday gratitude dance. Without the clutter of other thank yous, your brand will be more deeply recognized and appreciated.

Now the question of how to thank and what to give is ultimately as customized as the crafting of your brand. Here are a few guidelines:

First, branding is never just a logo or scrap of stationary; it is built around the core characteristics of your business. A brand is who you are, what you do and how you do it.

Everything that you give away and the way in which you express your thanks must re-enforce your brand image. If you are a bank, don't give away novelty items - banking has had too many surprises lately; if you're a novelty company, don't give away a plastic piggy bank unless it does something novel and funny.

Above all, be consistent in whatever messages you transmit. yes, a gift is a message and an extension of your brand position. It is the consistency of your message to your customers and clients that will firmly and positively establish your business in their mind.

Lastly, the greatest, most enduring brands really do have heart, and you want your customers and clients to be able to immediately know your's. You also want them to immediately be able to identify any gift or token of appreciation that comes from your business. That said, gratitude - like the successful marketing of a business - is best done by knowing and responding to what your Target Market really values and needs. Do they need or want another paper weight? In other words, determine a) what gift is consistent with your brand image and b) what your recipient will genuinely like.

Marketing is built on research. So consider doing an informal survey to identify the best way to fill that need

whether in terms of a creative promotional item or even just the best way to say thank you.

Remember, whatever data you collect now will serve you for years to come. You are developing client intelligence and customer empathy, and this has significant bottom-line value.

Traditions are important, but business is about being always ready to change. In marketing your business, traditions are only worthwhile if they accomplish two things:

- 1) serve to strengthen your brand
- 2) serve your Target Market's needs

A business that simply sticks to a tradition because "it is something we have always done" will probably face the agonizing death of slow or declining growth. Ask yourself again, is Christmas and the end of the year really the best time to thank my customers and clients? If the answer is, "No," and Thanksgiving looks like the better bet, you might even consider applying the Thanksgiving Gratitude plan to your employees.

One last point. Marketing gets a bad rap, but at its core, marketing is about recognizing needs and serving them actively, intelligently and dynamically. Businesses small and large must always be ready to re-assess themselves and change if change is needed.

Most of all, marketing is about looking outward at others' needs. Whether you are thanking your customers, clients or employees, thank them in the way that they want to be thanked. Gratitude is a one-way street: it's not about you; it's about them. Is your thanks genuine? It should be, because without them, your business would have very little to be grateful for this Thanksgiving.

By the way, there's a historical footnote to support the use of Thanksgiving to help business in tough times. Roughly seventy years ago, Franklin Roosevelt pushed the Thanksgiving holiday back a week - one week earlier - to give embattled retailers some extra time to make some extra Christmas sales. The plan never caught on because it didn't make sense to most people. The Thanksgiving Gratitude Plan is different. So go ahead and harness its spirit of common sense, business inventiveness. I suspect it will take you far.

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