



EFFECTIVE EXPERIENCES

In an age where business transparency matters, providing money-can't-buy experiences is easier to justify than giving expensive gifts. Adam Woods looks at the best awaydays the sector can offer

For employees, the most commonly voiced complaint about corporate gifts is that they don't get enough of them. However, their employers have another objection: that high-value gifts could constitute an inducement. And in an age where the line between relationship building, reward, and outright bribery is delicate to say the least, many companies understandably prefer to err on the side of caution.

So for incentive companies, the issue of the day is to continue to create imaginative experiential gifts and junkets that combine a work-related goal with a memorable activity.

"Companies are giving much clearer guidance to staff about these issues," acknowledges Philippa Foster-Back, director of the Institute of Business Ethics. "Some of them would specify the maximum value of a gift that can be received, though a lot of it is left to employees' discretion, with fairly firm



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Benoit Linossier, managing director, The Full Experience Company

guidance surrounding what is and isn't acceptable," she says.

Certain industries take a significantly more carefree attitude to corporate gifts and entertainment than others, either because their long-maintained culture dictates it, or on the basis that the value of the incentives is relatively trivial compared with the value of the client relationship they underpin.

"I deal with a number of brokers of financial printing, and a lot of them are very, very accustomed to giving gifts," says Benoit Linossier, managing director of The Full Experience Company. "Other companies – business banks or big multi-

nationals – are often wary about looking like they are trying to buy clients, so they will set constraints on the value of the gifts they can give or receive."

Some companies are so conscious of the issue that they simply bar employees from accepting gifts or incentives – pub chain JD Wetherspoon imposes this restriction on its marketing department, for example. Such companies are in the minority, but many others, particularly large businesses, remain extremely circumspect about the issue.

Acceptable behaviour

Pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline advises its employees that travel and overnight accommodation should not be accepted, on the grounds that they "are not considered entertainment that is reasonable in value".

Merck, another global drug company, goes as far as to break sporting invitations down into three levels of acceptability: ▶

