THE ETIQUETTE OF GIFT-GIVING IN BUSINESS

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Choosing a gift for your colleagues and clients during the holiday season can be a challenging task. It is not always easy to come up with the perfect present while following business gift protocol. Whether you head for the mall, haul out those holiday catalogs or go online, the following tips should guide you to a gift that will be appropriate, appreciated and remembered for all the right reasons.

**Follow the corporate guidelines.**  Some companies have strict policies about what kinds of gifts, if any, their employees may receive.  If you have any doubt, ask your clients or check with their Human Resources department.

**Consider your client’s interests.**  Find out what sports, hobbies or pastimes your clients enjoy.  Perhaps your client has a favorite food or beverage. If you can’t determine this on your own, contact an assistant or associate. Make your gift stand out just as you want your company to stand out.

**Consider the cost.**  An inexpensive gift can make you look cheap. On the other hand, a lavish present could be embarrassing or alienating. Giving or receiving expensive items may be against company policy. Do your homework. What could be more embarrassing than to have your corporate gift returned or refused?

**Rethink printing the company logo on your gift.**  Make sure the item meets a certain quality standard and that your logo is understated enough so as not to look like a blatant advertisement.

**Be appropriate.**  Sometimes a gift given in innocence can be taken the wrong way, Avoid anything that is even slightly intimate when giving to members of the opposite sex.

**Think twice about a humorous gift.**  What seems funny to one person could be insulting to another.  Know your client’s sense of humor first.

**Consider a charitable donation.**Find out what charities your client supports and choose one of those.  Everyone wins. A charity is served, and no one has another unwanted gift to deal with.

**Presentation is important.**  Have your gift wrapped and presented in a festive way.  The packaging is part of the present.  A gift certificate or notice of a donation to charity should arrive in a special envelope with a handwritten note.

**Be generous with group gifts.** If you decide to send food to your client’s office, make sure there is enough for everybody.  The holiday season is not the time to cause a food fight.

**Keep the goal in mind.**  The purpose of gift giving is to show appreciation and have people think of you when it’s time to do business.  It’s also a means of expressing gratitude to those who support you.

**Proceed with caution when exchanging gifts with colleagues and co-workers.** Inner office gift-giving, although well-intended, can cause problems and confusion. Establish guidelines.

**Everyone in the office or department should be in agreement as to how this will be done. Will everyone be expected to have a gift for everyone else?** Will there be a drawing for names—like a Secret Santa–so that only one gift needs to be purchased? Will a price range be established? All of these are important questions to have answered before the holidays arrive. In difficult financial times, consideration should be given to each individual’s circumstances. No one should be made to feel embarrassed if entering the office pool is a financial burden.

**Do you need to give the boss a gift? The boss, whose salary no doubt exceeds yours, should give gifts to his staff, but not the other way around.** Often members of a department will contribute to a pool for the boss’s gift. As a result the boss ends up with the most elaborate or expensive gift of all. If you decide to give your boss a gift, choose something in a low to moderate range. Anything lavish looks as if you are attempting to curry favor.

**What if you want to give special gifts to just a few close colleagues and not everyone?** If that is the case, give your gifts at a time and place away from the office and other co-workers.

**The boss should be even–handed when giving gifts to employees.**  Everyone need not receive an identical gift—although it is the easiest route to go—but they should all be of equal value.

**When all is said and done, remember to say thank you.** Say it when you receive the gift, and say it again in a handwritten note

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# Japan Gift Giving Customs

[](http://www.giftypedia.com/File:Japan_Arch.jpg)

**Gift giving in Japan** is deeply rooted in tradition with gifts given not only for social occasions, but also for social obligations -- gifts given when indebted to others, both family and business. The emphasis is on the act of giving rather than the gift itself. The value of the gift is of less importance than the presentation and thoughtfulness in which it is presented.

In Japan, gifts are given on [anniversaries](http://www.giftypedia.com/Anniversary_Table), weddings, births, graduations, and [housewarmings](http://www.giftypedia.com/Welcoming_a_New_Neighbor_to_the_Community). Children's achievements are also celebrated with gifts. Though traditionally gifts are not given for birthdays or Christmas, this is becoming a modern **Japan gift giving custom**. Gifts or **Omiyage**(souvenirs) given to family, friends and co-workers are expected upon returning from a trip.

After receiving a gift, the Japanese send a "thank you" gift called an **O-kaeshi**. These thank you gifts are common for [illnesses](http://www.giftypedia.com/Gifts_for_the_Sick), funerals, weddings and births. The value of this gift usually equals half the value of the original gift.

## Business Gift Giving

Business gift giving in Japan is more extravagant and prestigious when humility is not the focus. Companies spend large sums of money on gifts to their clients and customers. With businesses gift giving, a sense of competition develops to give the most original or thoughtful gift.

[](http://www.giftypedia.com/File:Japan_Amer_flags.jpg)

* Gift giving in Japan is a central part of Japanese[business etiquette](http://www.giftypedia.com/Etiquette_for_Office_/_Business_Gift_Giving).
* Bring a range of gifts for your trip so if you are presented with a gift you will be able to reciprocate.
* There's an expectation a gift will be offered at the first meeting, and gifts will continue to be part of your business dealings. Come prepared to that first meeting with a beautifully wrapped, quality gift that's not extravagant.
* If you're bringing a gift from your home country, make sure it's not 'made in Japan'. Don't select items with your company logo. It may be seen as a promotional item and be viewed as cheap. Local food specialties from your region are appreciated.
* The emphasis in Japanese business culture is on the ritual of gift-giving, rather than the gift itself. For this reason, you may receive a gift that seems too modest, or conversely, extravagant.
* Expensive gifts are common. An expensive gift will not be perceived as a bribe.
* It is customary to comment that the gift you are presenting, even if it is extravagant, is "tsumaranai mon" ["an uninteresting or dull thing"]. This statement is meant to convey, "Our relationship is more important than this trivial item."
* A gift for an individual should be given in private.
* If you are presenting a gift to a group of people, have them all present.
* The correct Japanese etiquette is to [present and receive gifts](http://www.giftypedia.com/Receiving_a_Gift) with both hands.
* Before accepting a gift it is polite to refuse at least once or twice before accepting.

## Personal Gift Giving

[](http://www.giftypedia.com/File:Japanlaptop.jpg)

* For [Weddings](http://www.giftypedia.com/Gift_Giving_Etiquette_for_Weddings), the [traditional](http://www.giftypedia.com/Wedding_Traditions_and_Superstitions) Japanese gift giving custom is to [give money](http://www.giftypedia.com/Giving_Money) to the couple. Upon returning from their honeymoon, the newly-weds bring back souvenirs to give to their wedding guests. Money should be given in an envelope and the number of bills should be an odd number as superstition suggests that the couple may split if the money can be evenly divided in two.
* For new babies, the parents give gifts commemorating the child's birth to their family and friends.
* The second Monday in January is **Coming of Age Day**, a national holiday dedicated to the nation's young people who have reached the age of 20. Buddhist Prayer Beads or juzu are often given as a keepsake for this occasion.
* For [Valentine's Day](http://www.giftypedia.com/History_of_Valentine%27s_Day), the Japanese woman gives chocolates (honmei choco) to the man she is serious about. For her colleagues and other male friends, she gives obligatory chocolate (giri choco).
* On March 14, White Day, the Japanese man gives more expensive chocolates or sweets back to the woman that gave him a gift on Valentine's Day.
* For children's celebrations, [electronics](http://www.giftypedia.com/Tips_for_Buying_Electronics) are recommended.
* [For the sick](http://www.giftypedia.com/Gifts_for_the_Sick), flowers are the customary gift in Japan, and are the most popular gift to take along to the hospital. Keep in mind when choosing a gift that some [flowers](http://www.giftypedia.com/Tips_for_Giving_Flowers_as_a_Gift) and plants are not appropriate to give, such as: potted plants, flowers with vivid colors or with a strong fragrance and large bouquets. Such flowers like [Chrysanthemums](http://www.giftypedia.com/Chrysanthemum) or the quantity of 4, 9 or 13 are[considered bad luck](http://www.giftypedia.com/Gift_Giving_Superstitions). Potted plants are seen as inappropriate gifts for the sick people because it is believed that the illness will become more severe by taking "deeper root".

## Major Gift Giving Holidays

The two most popular occasions for *gift giving in Japan* happen twice a year. **Ochugen** falls during the middle of the year and **Oseibo** falls at the end of the year.

*Ochugen* originated as an offering to families who had a death in the first half of the year and still takes place two weeks before **Obon**, the [Japanese holiday](http://www.giftypedia.com/Japanese_Holidays) for honoring the dead. Nowadays, gifts are given as a gesture of gratitude to the people who are close to them. Bosses, colleagues, parents and relatives are common recipients.

*Oseibo* is more widely observed and began from the custom of placing offerings on ancestors graves. Oseibo gifts are typically given to friends, colleagues, teachers, clients or customers, and to anyone he or she is indebted to. These gifts are specifically given to pay back favors received during the year. The value of the gift does matter as the gift reflects the giver's evaluation of social indebtedness that he or she has incurred. The recipient can accurately determine the value of the relationship by the monetary value of the gift. Oseibo gifts are typically sent out by the 20th of December.

Gifts commonly given for Ochugen and Oseibo range from department store items to food and alcoholic beverages. People receiving gifts for these occasions usually express their gratitude either by writing or calling the person who gave them the gift.

## Gift Wrapping

In Japanese culture, the presentation of the gift is as important as the gift itself. There are many customs and rules specifically related to the wrapping of the gift that play an important part of the gift giving custom. They even go so far as to imply your feelings towards the person receiving the gift. Our [Japanese Gift Wrapping](http://www.giftypedia.com/Japanese_Gift_Wrapping) guide goes into more detail on this subject.

## General Guidelines

[](http://www.giftypedia.com/File:Japanbothhands.jpg)

* Gifts are always appreciated. Consider bringing a small souvenir that represents your hometown to give to your host (especially food). Don't be surprised if your hosts give you something from their country, too. If the gift is wrapped, don't open it until you leave. If the gift is not wrapped, make sure to express lots of appreciation (whether you like it or not). Ask some questions about the gift to show your interest.
* The correct etiquette is to present/receive gifts with both hands.
* Before [accepting a gift](http://www.giftypedia.com/Receiving_a_Gift) it is polite to refuse at least once or twice before accepting.
* Gifts in pairs are considered lucky. The numbers eight and three are also considered lucky. Eight stands for prosperity and three stands for birth.
* Money should be given in an envelope.

## Gifts to Avoid

* Lilies, lotus blossoms, and camellias are associated with funerals. White flowers of any kind are[gifts to be avoided](http://www.giftypedia.com/How_to_Avoid_Controversial_or_Inappropriate_Gifts). There is also a superstition that potted plants encourage sickness.
* Giving four or nine of anything is considered unlucky. This superstition seems to be less important nowadays.
* Red Christmas cards should be avoided, since funeral notices are customarily printed in this color.

## Japanese Social Etiquette

* Always take off your shoes when you enter someone's home.
* It is polite to say "o-jama shimasu" (sorry for disturbing) when entering someone's house.
* Avoid blowing your nose in front of others. It's considered rude to blow into a handkerchief and to put it back into your pocket. Paper tissues should be used.
* You should not eat while standing up. You should always be seated. Exceptions are made for eating at a counter or eating ice cream.
* Do not point using fingers, feet or chopsticks. Pointing gestures should be made with waving fingers and the palm of your hand facing downward.
* In general, you should keep your real opinion (honne) to yourself and be polite by offering public opinions (tatemae) that are meant to maintain harmony.
* Avoid interrupting people while talking or when they are getting ready to speak.
* Business cards should be given and accepted with both hands in formal situations.

## Gift giving

Gift giving among business associates is not common in Germany. There has recently been a move towards concentrating much more on the actual business at hand, and less on formalities and rituals like gift giving when travelling on business. However, for more social occasions, gift giving is relatively customary. The following issues are important to note when considering giving a gift:

* A visitor thinking of giving a gift should choose one that is small and of good quality, but not overly expensive.
* Acceptable gifts at business meetings are items of office equipment, good quality pens with your company’s logo or liquor
* When invited to a German home, it is appropriate to bring a gift of flowers, wine, chocolates, or a small gift that represents your home country or region.
* Flowers should be given in uneven numbers and unwrapped (unless wrapped in cellophane). Avoid presenting 13 of any kind of flower or red roses. However, this rule does not apply to bouquets arranged/wrapped by a florist.
* Do not give red roses as they symbolise romantic intentions.
* Do not give carnations as they symbolise mourning.
* Do not give lilies or chrysanthemums as they are used at funerals.
* Gifts are usually opened when received.

Germany generally has the same traditions as most other European countries in terms of gift giving.

**international Gift Giving Etiquette - France**

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| **GIFT GIVING IN FRANCE\* *- Gift Giving Etiquette***  ***BUSINESS GIFT GIVING***  **Selecting and presenting an appropriate business gift**   * **Be aware that displays of warmth and generosity between business associates are not the norm in French business culture. Giving presents is acceptable here, but exercise discretion.** * **Gifts are expected for social events, especially as thank-yous after a dinner party.** * **Don't be overly concerned about whether your gift is too expensive or inexpensive: select something you think the recipient will appreciate.** * **Esoteric books and music are often valued as gifts. Make sure, however, that you are reasonably acquainted with the recipient's interests and tastes before making this kind of gift purchase.** * **Good gift selections can also include coffee table books about your home country, or anything that reflects the interests of your hosts and is representative of your country.** * **French business etiquette dictates that you don’t include your business card with a gift.**   ***PERSONAL GIFT GIVING***   * **If you are invited to a French home, consider it a rare honor. Bring flowers, quality chocolates or liqueur to the host, and present your gift before the entertaining proceeds.** * **If you decide to bring flowers, remember that chrysanthemums are for funerals, red roses for lovers. A gift of carnations can often be interpreted as a sign of bad will. Moreover, ensure that the bouquet is in odd numbers, in accordance with the old European tradition.** * **Don't bring a gift of wine, since the host usually prefers to make the evening's selection. The only possible exception can be a special French dessert wine or high-quality liqueur.** * **If you have been guest at a dinner party or similar social gathering in a home, ensure that you send a thank-you note to your hosts the next day. Preferably, your note should be handwritten and delivered by messenger. Sending flowers or a basket of fruit is another thoughtful gesture.** * **Holiday cards can be appropriate, particularly as an expression of thanks to your business associates. The practice in France is to send New Year's greetings and this can occur during the whole month of January but not later.** |