



## **Celebrating anniversaries: Have your cake and eat it, too**

**By Alex Itkin**

In some organizations, celebration of an anniversary or important milestone begins and ends with cake in a conference room. Not only is this a boring and unimaginative way to celebrate success, it is also a missed opportunity. Anniversaries can be internal education, customer appreciation and publicity opportunity gems. Use this significant milestone to educate your employees, highlight your company's progress and success to industry colleagues, and create awareness of how your brand has contributed to the community over the years.

Employees, customers, vendors and your community are ultimately responsible for your organization's success. An anniversary is not only a perfect occasion to acknowledge these valuable contributors, but to educate them on how your industry has developed and changed over its lifetime – and how your company has directly contributed to its growth. It's an opportunity to create subject matter experts and brand evangelists! Celebrating the milestone publicly will stimulate a sense of pride in your supporters and is also a way to reinforce their roles as advocates for your brand.

Here are some ideas on how to celebrate and capitalize on important milestones:

Create an anniversary-year themed campaign. Get inspired by a traditional list of anniversary symbols – typically used for weddings, these symbols can easily be spun into a business campaign. Chocolate represents the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, apples & oranges represent the 29<sup>th</sup> anniversary, maple represents the 33<sup>rd</sup> anniversary, and so on. Let the symbol for your anniversary year inspire business anniversary ideas for promotional campaigns directed to customers, prospects, employees and community supporters.

For example, Pauline Bartel of Bartel Communications suggests that a company celebrating its 33<sup>rd</sup> anniversary (maple) could send maple-flavored candy to customers with a card, announcing the milestone and thanking customers for a “sweet success.” To thank employees for their loyalty and hard work, hold a pancake breakfast served with commemorative bottles of maple syrup. Plant maple trees in a local park as a community-service project to thank your community for its support.

Embrace the milestone as a PR opportunity. Make this milestone an opportunity to create a news story or editorial piece for local or industry publications. Offer a pitch aligning with a hot current event or highlight your organization's experience or contributions on an industry-wide scale over the lifetime of the organization. This may create an opportunity to incorporate mentions of product or campaign launches planned for the anniversary year.

Offer special anniversary-year packages. Consider offering unique business anniversary-year pricing/packageing. A company celebrating a 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary may discount services by 15 percent for the first month of the company's business anniversary year. A law firm celebrating

a 5<sup>th</sup> business anniversary could offer a fixed-price package for five services. Mention these special anniversary-themed prices and packages in all promotional campaigns and advertisements.

Do you not have a milestone of your own to celebrate this year? Celebrate your employees or customers on milestones that are important to them or that mark joint successes. Appreciation efforts can range from a handwritten note to a surprise free service, product order or gift. Being noticed and feeling appreciated always brings out the best in people. Recognizing the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a client's first order, for example, turns another day on the calendar into a memorable event, especially if the remembrance is tailored to the interests of the recipient.

John C. Maxwell once said, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." This is what it all boils down to: appreciate your employees, maintain rapport and intimate relationships with clients, and educate and inform your community and industry colleagues. These seemingly small gestures will strengthen and shape your brand into a positive entity and reliable resource.

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