

RGCA Press Release

Five Reasons Why Gift Cards Are a Great Holiday Choice – Just Know the Rules

December 23, 2009

Forget the fruit cake. Pass on the popcorn tin. This holiday season, give people what they really want: fun, freedom and flexibility.

Gift cards are the most-purchased present during the holidays, primarily because they let the recipient get what they want when they want it. Especially when it is a last minute gift! Many national and local retailers offer gift cards online. They are safe to buy and redeem; may be personalized with a message; and are a thoughtful way to show someone that you were thinking about them.

“In this tight economy, those are important features to keep in mind,” said Bridget Moen, Gift Card Brand Manager for Applebees.

However, the Retail Gift Card Association advises buyers to know the rules of the game when choosing gift cards.

“Gift cards are like people this time of year: Some are on the nice list and some are on the naughty list,” said Rebekka Rea, Director of the RCGA. “Make sure you're buying a gift card that really is giving.”

The RGCA advises buyers to look for cards with these features:

- No hidden fees. “Reputable gift cards don’t charge the recipient things like an inactivity fee,” said Leigh Anne Ambrose, Gift Cards Senior Director for Marriot International. “Be sure the amount you purchase is the amount your friend actually gets to spend.”
- No expiration date. Gift cards should not expire. In fact, a card’s longevity is one of its most attractive features, said Marlene Miller, JC Penney representative.
- No-hassle balance check. Retail staff should be more than happy to check your balance – and be sure to use the remaining amount, no matter how small, says the RGCA. Gift cards are designed to be flexible so you can spend your gift in increments. Some retailers and restaurants even allow you to check your balance online, so you can plan ahead.

Why buy gift cards?

- Gift cards give the freedom to choose. Unless someone dog-eared a catalogue or sent you a link to their dream present, gift cards may be the best way to go because they let people choose what they want – and buy it when they want it. “Gift cards are a thoughtful, flexible choice. You choose the brand, the recipient chooses the gift,” said Rebekka Rea. For example, buy your gadget guru sister a gift card to an electronics store. She appreciates you knowing what brand defines her – and she appreciates being able to pick out the specific present.
- Gift cards give a good value. Why?
 - You can use them during a sale to extend the value of the card. Recipients can take advantage of post holiday promotions with their gift cards.
 - You can use them when the monthly budget needs a break. Because they're an “anytime” present, recipients can choose to use them when they need them most.

- Gift cards are a handy gift. Ever been caught by a neighbor who surprises you with a bottle of holiday wine and a plate of goodies? Gift cards are the perfect solution. Tuck a few of your favorite gift cards in decorative sacks and have them handy to reciprocate. “Gift cards are a great way to respond to random acts of kindness,” said Andrew Dodge of L.L.Bean. “Plus if you don’t give them away, you can save them for a later gift – or use them yourself. “ Short on time? Many retailers offer virtual e-cards that you can email to those who truly are being gifted at the VERY LAST minute!
- Gift cards offer peace of mind. Gift cards from America’s blue chip brands have staying power. “Reputable companies want people to redeem their gift cards, because they’re always looking to attract new customers or keep the loyal ones happy,” said Carman Wenkoff, Subway Program Manager. “Lots of people this holiday season will get gifts they don’t use. Gift cards shouldn’t be among those because the recipient can get what they want, when they want it.”
- Gift cards provide an experience. For some, a night on the town makes a better gift than a knick-knack. Gift cards that offer dinner, a movie or a play are a great choice for people hit hard by the down economy, since “fun” is the first thing to go on a tight budget. They're also a good choice for picky people. “If you don't know whether they like to shop for clothes or the home, this type of gift card is a fun choice,” said Bridget Moen, Gift Card Brand Manager for Applebees. Remember to look for gift cards with no expiration dates or hidden fees, so recipients can enjoy them on their own terms.

The RGCA is an association of retail branded gift card providers who commit to providing their customers with the highest possible standards for gift card products, including cards that never expire and which have no fees of any kind. For a complete list of RGCA retail Members, visit www.TheRGCA.org.