



RGCA Interview

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**Karen Brooker, Vice President
Marketing Card Technology (MCT)**

Karen Brooker took her first position as an administrative assistant working for a card manufacturer more than 30 years ago. She soon transitioned into customer-facing roles and has held sales and marketing positions in the card industry for most of her career since.

As Vice President at [Marketing Card Technology \(MCT\)](#), Karen works both on brand marketing and sales strategy initiatives for the organization. In addition to her involvement with the RGCA, Karen also serves in a volunteer capacity on the Board of Directors of the [International Card Manufacturers Association \(ICMA\)](#), an organization dedicated to providing its members with the resources, training and advocacy needed to thrive in the card industry.

In this Q&A, Karen will share some of her personal sentiments about gift cards, how she sees the industry evolving, and how the industry has impacted her career journey.

What do you like most about gift cards?

There are two things that I absolutely love about gift cards. First, they significantly reduce the amount of unwanted “stuff” laying around. I’ve moved three times in the past 12 years, and my space is limited. I love receiving gift cards because I can use them for items I really want. And gift cards offer the luxury of time—I can hold onto the card and spend it later on an item that’s coming out next week, next month, or next year.

The other thing I love about gift cards is that they give me permission to treat myself to something special that I might otherwise talk myself out of buying like a nice dinner out, a new outfit, or a fun game or gadget.

What do you think makes the gift card industry special?

I’ve been in the card business for a very long time and I’ve spent time working with people from a number of different industries. What I find unique about the gift card industry is the strong sense of community. The gift card industry is diverse, welcoming, creative, and genuinely fun and friendly. Gift card people love to spend time together!

What do you wish consumers knew about gift cards that they may not be aware of?

I wish consumers knew how popular gift cards truly are. I think too many consumers still feel a little guilty giving a gift card, as if they had an obligation to keep looking for that very specific perfect gift. The truth is that surveys have shown consumers overwhelmingly love receiving gift cards. Who knew that a gift card would actually be the perfect gift?

How do you see gift cards continuing to play a deeper role in peoples' lives in the coming years?

I see the universe of innovative gift cards continuing to expand. If you think about it, we can already use gift cards to give education funds, vacations, stock in a company, charitable contributions, and more. As the world of gift cards expands to cover more products, services, and experiences, the industry will continue to grow and innovate to accommodate the new ideas.

How has working in the gift card industry impacted your career journey?

I've been in the card industry since the 90's and grew up in the business surrounded by smart, creative people from some of the industry's most iconic brands and marketing teams. I loved that. Up until recently, on-site press approvals were almost a given during product refreshes and it could be exhausting spending a day and a half on press trying to get just the right hue of beige. But it could also be delightful, having the chance to partner with a brand on prototypes or experiment with new approaches to ink layering or custom embellishments.

Cards are frequently the focal point of a program or campaign. For this reason, they get lots of attention during design and production. The gift card industry still has some of the most creative people in business. I feel like my exposure to the industry has strengthened my own sense of design and has really taught me how to listen and apply new ideas.