

What Do Contact Center Employees Really Want?

(Does Your Idea Of the Best Incentives Match The Real World?)

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A key tenet of human motivation is that behavior is influenced by an effort to achieve something desirable. This is certainly true in a work environment. If you try to motivate someone with an incentive reward that they do not view as something they really want, your efforts will fall short of your expectations. This begs the question: what do your call center employees really want? You've undoubtedly seen numerous reports claiming that personalized incentives, high value "trophy" rewards, team recognition and the like are the best rewards and incentives. There are many experts with just as many opinions. This should cause you to seriously contemplate the question in the title above.

I would like to offer some evidence based guidance rather than leave you to the pronouncements of experts or vendors whose business models depend upon selling a specific product or from academics who conduct surveys in the theoretical world.

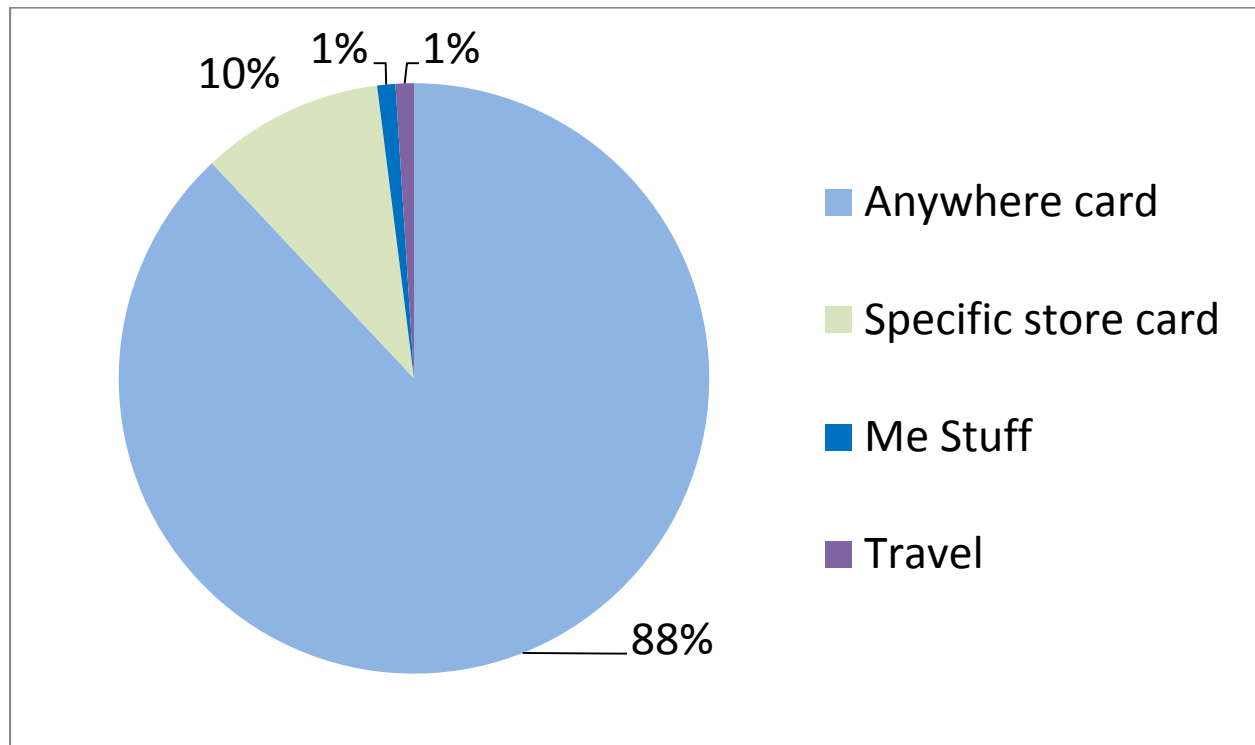
First a little background; our company offers a turn-key incentive program that is based upon earning points for desired behaviors. Among other redemption options, points can be converted to a Visa stored value card that employees can redeem for what they really want, not what you want to give them. Our business model is "fee for service" so we do not have an axe to grind when it comes to the incentives that our clients offer their employees. However, clients will discontinue service if they are not successful and as a result, our customer advisors are not shy about offering their opinions and suggestions regarding incentives that work and those that don't. Without divulging confidential information, I can tell you that our clients have tens of thousands of employees on our program and those employees make hundreds of thousands of reward and incentive transactions every year involving many millions of dollars. The point is that there are more than sufficient numbers of events to make the study highly accurate and reliable.

Our servers provide a treasure trove of data that we periodically mine for insight, trends and direction. We have just completed the survey for 2010 and offer the following data about incentives and rewards that were selected by the employees of our clients.

Clients offer their employees a very wide range of rewards that I've categorized:

- **Spend-Anywhere gift/debit cards** (Visa, MasterCard, PayPal, American Express, Amazon)
- **Specific-Store gift cards** (Wal-Mart, Target, McDonald's, iTunes, Lowe's, Applebee's)
- **Me-Stuff** (extra break/lunch, leave early, casual dress, charity donation)
- **Travel** (air fare, hotel, trip, resort, Las Vegas)
- **Merchandise** (candy bar, iPod, book)

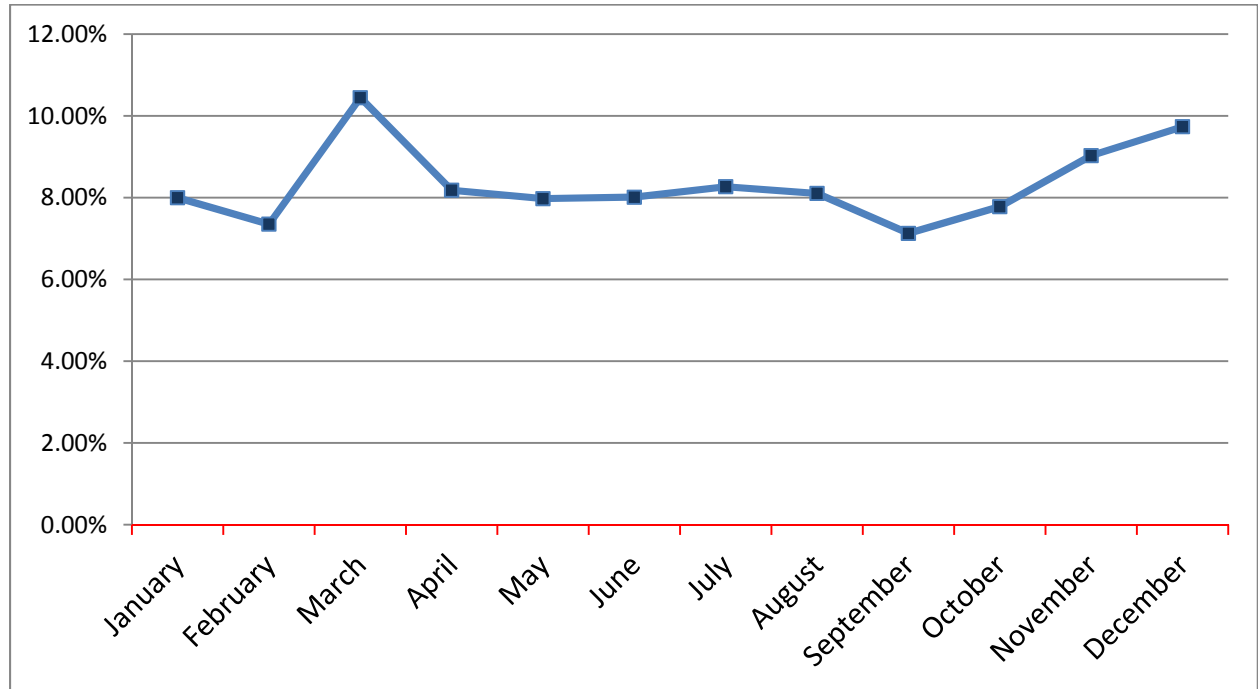
2010 Point Redemptions By Category (based on dollar value):



Results & Observations:

- **Spend anywhere cards (88%):** The results and trends are **overwhelmingly** for the “spend anywhere” cards. Some of them were for a fixed value and some were refillable. Most clients offered only one or two brands of these cards. In our prior survey, this category was 75%; we have just witnessed a huge increase.
- **Store specific cards (10%):** More than 250 brands of the specific-store cards were offered; most of the redemptions were for the best known retail stores and restaurants. I question whether it is necessary to offer specific-store cards because the employee would select spend-anywhere cards as an alternative and it’s almost impossible to have the right cards in the right denominations always available.
- **Me stuff (1%):** although redemptions were very small, it’s probably wise to offer me-stuff as a reward selection. Clients offered the extra breaks & time off both with and without pay.
- **Travel rewards (1%):** if you’re in the travel industry and can get a discount.
- **Merchandise (< 1%):** only stuff with your company’s logo. Even with that, check out all of the custom logo Cross pen & pencil sets for sale on eBay.

2010 Point Redemptions By Month (as a percentage of the entire year):



Observations:

- Look at the rising trend during the final four months of the year! Employees started to save and then use their points for rewards for Christmas presents. This has huge implications for reducing employee turnover (especially early-stage turnover). If a new employee can take the long-range perspective and view incentives as Christmas presents, they can more easily bridge the morale challenges exemplified by the “new job morale curve” as identified by the Menninger Clinic study.
- The spike in redemptions in March could have been due to a number of factors: beginning-of-year sales contest redemptions, employees using points to pay Christmas bills, March has 10% more days than February.

Recommendation:

Offering desired incentives is one of the four key components of a successful incentive program. This study should offer direction about what incentives are valued by your employees.

About Snowfly: Snowfly is the leading provider of Internet based employee incentive and loyalty programs. Snowfly's incentive system allows contact centers to harness the enormous motivational power of immediate positive reinforcement to focus employee behavior on company objectives. Compared with home-grown programs, Snowfly improves KPI's by at least 20% (sales, availability, adherence, attendance, call quality, turnover), reduces a huge administrative burden and reduces costs. The results are easily seen within weeks and there is no long term contractual obligation. Customers include multiple Blue Cross/Blue Shield providers, Hyatt Hotels, Time Warner Cable, financial institutions, utility companies, cable/satellite providers, various BPO companies (business process outsourcers), and collection departments/agencies. Snowfly's web site: www.Snowfly.com. For more information, contact Robert Cowen at 248-324-1161 or email rcowen@snowfly.com.