



Bring Christmas to your Business Every Day

**Written By
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<http://www.firelightwebstudio.com> ~ Website Services that Help MicroBusinesses Earn More

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For Christmas in July

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Introduction



Christmas is the biggest holiday of the year. So much so that some cultures whose traditions prohibit the celebration of Christmas, have created other holidays to substitute. The urge to indulge in the giving of gifts, and the opportunity to apply festive decorations is difficult to deny!

In tackling the topic of bringing Christmas into a business all year round, we faced the difficult task of isolating those things about Christmas which people love, and which, if used intelligently, can bring excitement and originality to a business in a way that will make the business memorable in the minds of their customers.

It isn't about trying to maintain a holiday all year. A frenzied fever pitch of excitement is simply not sustainable for more than a few moments at a time. One of the charms of Christmas is that it does only come once a year. It is more about capturing the essence of what people

love about it, and infusing that into the daily operations of a business.

It is our position that by looking closely at this holiday, we can find clues to encouraging success within almost any business. You must choose how to apply the concepts here, simply because every business is different, and we cannot provide specifics. Hopefully though, the concepts will serve as useful guidelines that you can adapt into your own business.

Christmas is about more than just getting people into a buying frenzy. It is more about providing a means for people to realize their desires – at Christmas time, that means partly a desire to find the perfect thing to give to someone else. It is more about giving, and less about getting. And that is what we are focusing on – helping you create a business that is the means of helping other people realize their goals.

Christmas has many lessons to teach us.



A Sense of Fun



No matter how you approach Christmas, it has a sense of fun. There is nothing un-humorous about a fat man in a red suit trying to stuff himself down every chimney in the world in a single night without getting soot on his suit!

Christianity is about fun too! It is about happiness, enjoying life, and having fun doing good. And anyone who thinks that God does not have a sense of humor has never tried to read Malachi on a hot summer day (persist... you'll get to the joke...).

Many of the most successful businesses have become so because they managed to put a sense of fun into something that was distinctly lacking in fun. Of course, entire empires have been built on the concept of fun and enjoyment exclusively, but we aren't talking about that. We are talking about figuring out how to have fun selling insurance, without losing your professionalism – if a Gecko can do it, you can too!

Humor is one of life's great gifts. A gentle chuckle, or a belly laugh, is perceived of as a gift. So it hits double on the Christmas theme – first because it is fun, second because laughter is a gift worth giving.

If you are in a highly professional business, then humor must be intelligent, and never crude. It must also never be at the expense of a client – that smacks of violating client trust. Wit should not be exercised over things that matter either – making a joke of a mistake on your part is not ok.

A sense of fun is easy to find if you really love your work. People pick up on that, and it is easier to get them to respond in a positive way.

For other, less conservative types of businesses, professionalism is still important, but you are free to laugh about more things, and to instill a sense of fun and humor into more areas of your interactions with your customers. **If people have a good time when they are around you, or if you make a difficult task easier to face, or if shopping with you makes them feel good, they'll come back again and again.**



A Touch of Glitter



Glitter isn't about visual glitz... Glitter is the sparkle in your business and in the way you do business. Something unique, catchy, and impressive. Your own personal "wow" factor.

Glitter is the one thing that stands out in your business as being better than any other competitor. For us, in our Web Design services, it is warmth. Our entire marketing message is designed around warmth, and warmth is how we do business. For our Institute, it is practical instruction in something needed that nobody else teaches.

For one of our clients, it is the awesome photography on her site – it echos her marketing message with a lot of power. For another it is his credentials and the sheer wealth of his knowledge that he shares. For a third, it is the high quality and style of her work. Another offers free personalized service in conjunction with product sales, in a market where others are charging for the service. Each has a distinctive "wow" factor that sets them apart to those who are interested in that facet.

Glitter does not have to be expensive. It just has to be instantly visible. Something that immediately says, "we're the one you want".

Glitter IS opulent. It is something that is dished out with a lavish hand, no stinting. Anything less, and you'll blend into the morasses of "almost impressive" clones out there.

So what is your glitter? What will make people say, "wow!" about your business?



Warmth in the Midst of Cold



Here is where MicroBusinesses can excel over corporations. In our world, the standards that are developing in the corporate world are not ones that are friendly to customers and clients. Here are some examples:

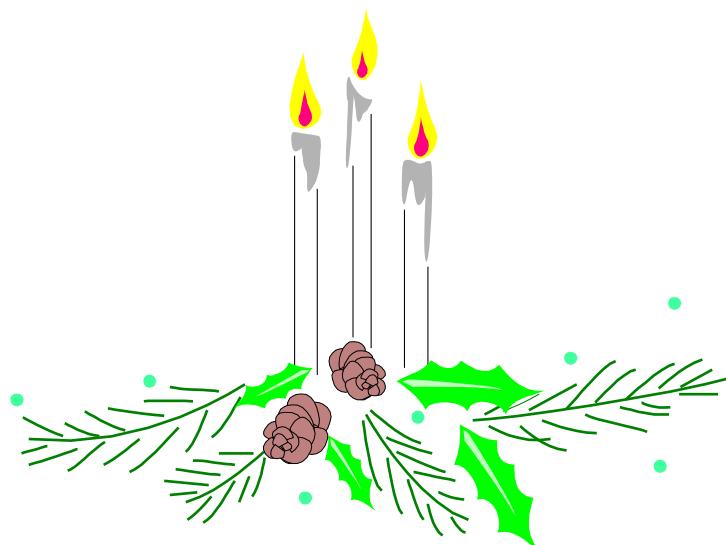
1. You are a number. We have a lot of customers, and just one isn't enough to change the way we do things.
2. The bottom line is king. No matter who it hurts.
3. If we leave out something you need, it won't matter as long as you never figure out that you needed it for the product to really work, or as long as we can get you to purchase it separately.
4. We don't have to support you after the sale – at most, we can put up a forum and an FAQ. You don't have to be able to reach a real person. Even if you bought something expensive, we can abandon you.
5. Phone menus are for the purpose of keeping people from talking to real people.
6. People are clones. We can mass-produce everything needed, and classify everybody into a broad group. Personal fit, personal style, and personal results are not necessary.
7. Customers are to get something from, not to partner with.

You can think of other attitudes you see in businesses across the world. Automation has made the world a cold and unfriendly place to shop in many markets.

Christmas happens in the coldest seasons of the year. People find cheer in the midst of harsh weather. Even in the chill outside, the feeling is a warm one. Just think about the difference between the feeling of the last week of December, compared to the first week of January, even if they both have the same weather!

Bringing warmth into your business means taking time to be a real person, and to see your customer as a real person. And it means that when you have to systemize, automate, and streamline your business, you never try to streamline the important personal things. Your customers are always people whom you treat as friends, and as people who matter.

Do that, and they'll feel that you really care. No large corporation can match that.



A Bit of Mystery



Christmas is surrounded by a delightful aire of mystery. How else do you explain the tradition of fruitcake?

Our family has always put the presents under the tree as they are purchased and wrapped. So the pile grows through the month. Something about a box, wrapped and bedecked with a ribbon, piques the curiosity in a delightful way.

Someone thought of me. Someone wrapped something up to surprise me, and they thought I'd like what they picked. **The sense of anticipation and mystery is delightful!** We can hardly wait, yet we force ourselves to, because you just don't cheat on Christmas. Once in a while, someone hands you an early gift and insists you open it now, and you do, and enjoy the moment. But you don't cheat if they don't tell you to!

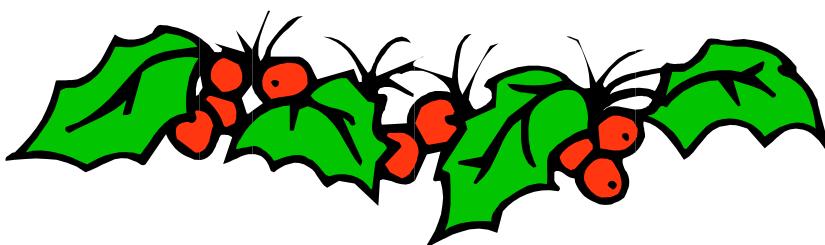
People love mystery and surprise. They love free gifts, they love the unexpected treat, and they love a sense of anticipation. You can use this in marketing tactics, and in how you do business.

Don't abuse this one. Overuse, or misuse will kill the effectiveness. **If you offer a free gift, make it something desirable, and make sure that the actual result lives up to the promise.** Otherwise, they'll feel cheated instead of feeling honored.

Think about how you can use contests, door prizes, and bits of intrigue in your presentations. Be subtle and honest in how you use it – you don't want to sound spammy.

Many websites have a “specials” or “closeouts” section. People love to click those links, because they wonder what might be behind there that they can get a good deal on. The word alone implies something good behind it.

Whether you use mystery as a regular marketing tactic, or whether you use it as an occasional perk, it can add a great deal to the success of your endeavors if you use it wisely.



Wrap it up Pretty



When you give someone a gift, you do not leave it in the bag and toss it to them while telling them, "You can have that if you want it."

You wrap it up in pretty paper. You worry if you run out of the right kind of tape. You stick a ribbon on it if it is special. The wrapping itself becomes part of the gift. The presentation sends a message all its own.

Is your product or service special? Is it a wonderful thing? Do you want people to feel that it is a wonderful thing? If it is, then present it like something wonderful, not like something leftover that nobody cares about.

Good presentations run through your marketing materials, your manner and speech, your website, and your packaging. They do NOT need to be expensive. They do need to be professional, and efficient.

Efficiency implies that they get the job done correctly without waste. You would not use 10 feet of wrapping paper and a spool of ribbon for a toaster. Nor should you waste where your own presentations are concerned. Frugal is fine. Tacky is not!

Consider the presentation you are making, and coordinate everything together so that the presentations, products, and delivery all echo a similar message. Some things you want your presentation to say:

- 1. I'm professional. I know my job and I know how to do it right.**
- 2. I care about my customer. I won't treat your product or service carelessly.**
- 3. I care about my reputation. I'll stand behind what I do.**

You will want to add other messages to that – each business needs slightly different messages beyond that.

Wrap it all up with care, and coordinate the wrapping with the gift. You'll be more successful at getting, and in keeping customers.



The Spirit of Giving



One of the overwhelming and visible feelings at Christmas time is the desire to give that permeates the air. And it is not just presents. People go out of their way for each other in ways you just don't see as readily at other times.

This quality is one that can benefit a business in a variety of ways. It does not just accomplish one thing, it accomplishes many.

- If you give someone something, then they feel you care.
- If you are in a relationship where giving goes both ways in a fair manner, you have a feeling of friendship.
- Giving first helps to smooth the initial hurdles in building a relationship of trust.
- People will listen to marketing given by someone who has given them something first.
- The right kind of giving shows your quality or expertise.
- Giving first is a show of "good faith" on your part that helps them feel they can trust you to deliver on your word later.
- Giving has a tendency to not stay in one place – if you give, then the person you gave to feels more like giving, and somehow your reputation gets attached to all that good feeling.

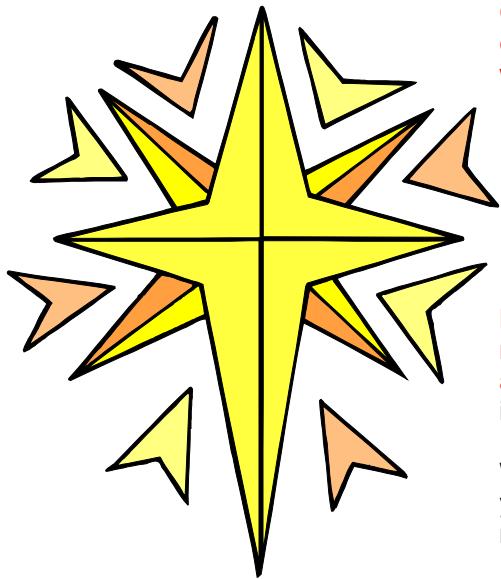
Giving can be done in a number of ways. Just like Christmas, it is more than just a present. Some people feel that the way to accomplish this goal is through freebies – but in our experience, freebies are often viewed with suspicion already, unless they are given as "help" more than a gift. While there is a place for freebies, there are additional things you can give which may have much more power.

- **Genuine help** – if your target market has a problem to solve, then you can give them a little bit of genuine help, and charge for the rest.
- **Information** – if the information is truly useful, it will be appreciated.
- **Time** – sometimes just listening to something that has nothing to do with your business, when a customer needs it, can be a great gift. If you have time for nothing but business, your customers feel depersonalized. Give a bit of time and personal attention, and they feel cared about.
- **Quality** – not just the quality that you have to give, but a little extra. Something rare and unexpected. The "extra mile" really shows.
- **Volunteering** – choose to volunteer a reasonable amount of time for something that you are qualified to do – if the volunteer opportunity is related to your business, it helps your business grow as well as helping someone else. As web designers, we volunteer time for one specific non-profit, and we donate a free service with each non-profit contract. We feel this gives us more than it costs us.

At Christmas time, when someone gives, they do so with no motive for gain. They just act kindly because they feel like acting kindly. If your business contains elements that feel like that for the customer, you are offering them a bit of Christmas cheer every time they do business with you. They WILL notice, and it will benefit you.



A Bigger Purpose



Christmas also brings us back to our place in the universe. It catches us up into something bigger than ourselves. Something wondrous, and universal.

Does your business do this to you? Do you have a purpose other than making money? Does your business make the world a better place? Do your customers feel like you have not only sold them something, but that in doing so, you've blessed them?

In my experience with small business owners, the happiest and most successful ones are those who feel that their business is about more than just themselves. They feel a passionate interest in improving something through their work.

When you are involved in something bigger than yourself, and when you truly feel the value of what you do, you think better, give more, and receive more.

If you stopped doing business tomorrow, would anyone else care? If you stopped promoting your product or service, would the world feel the absence? Even a small corner of the world counts. If you have just one or two customers who depend on you for something good, then your business has worth beyond its appearance.

Feeling like you have a purpose beyond just making money is what helps a business owner stay determined to weather the hard parts – to stick it out when it looks like it just isn't working. It is what helps impel someone to go back and reassess and make adjustments that are hard, or which they just do not want to make.

Christmas is about what is good in the world. Bring a bit of that into your daily schedule, and you'll feel like you are part of something worth doing.



Something Intensely Personal



The best gifts at Christmas are pondered over, and suited to the recipient. They are personal – and well thought out. They need not be expensive or elaborate, just meaningful.

This is how the best businesses treat their customers. When they offer a service, they round it out with all the bits that make it fit their target market well. They allow their customers little ways to make the product or service theirs, so it fits them even better. And they treat the customers with respect in the choices that they make in customizing the item. If they offer bonuses or freebies, they are also well thought out, and meaningful.

Anything that sends the message, "I value you, and I thought about you." will give your product or service line that extra bit of personalization that makes the customer feel just like they've been given a gift that someone put a lot of thought into. Make your customers feel special, and valued, for more than just the money they put in your pockets, and a lasting relationship develops that benefits you both.

It doesn't matter whether you sell flowers, typing services, or blenders. You could sell steel-toed boots or gas masks, and you still have the opportunity to make your customers feel like they just received the best thing!

You can work personalization into your marketing messages by correctly identifying what you are selling – you aren't selling steel-toed boots, you are selling safety. You aren't selling blenders, you are selling personal convenience. You aren't selling rocks, you are selling dream homes and garden parties. Realizing the end result of what you sell is part of making people feel that you understand their desires and goals.

And you must include personal attention and touches in your delivery. Good follow through, extra care to unusual situations, well designed packaging, messages on the packaging or receipts, etc.

It means you do not just think about how to devise an efficient system to get from marketing, to order, to delivery, to follow up – It means you think about the customer experience through each step, and consider how you will go about making the customer feel taken care of through each step. And then take the time to create that ideal customer experience, from start to finish.



Your Very Best



Christmas is a time that brings out the best in people. And if your business receives your very best, then you are communicating something to your customers in a million unspoken ways.

Your best doesn't have to be perfect. It just needs to be an honest effort to give integrity, quality, and follow-through. Sincerity is an identifiable characteristic. People know when you are taking a shortcut, and they don't like it. They feel when you give all you promise and keep their best interests at heart – and they respond.

Sometimes business is hard – it can be very discouraging, tiring, and facing the day and getting through the mindless tasks can be difficult to face. At those times, a commitment to diligent effort is often the factor that gets a business owner over the hump.

Giving your very best is a two sided thing – there is the effect it has on your customers. It is a good one. Then there is the effect it has on yourself. Another good one. It both encourages genuine customer loyalty, and lifts your own spirits and helps you feel good about what you do.

Sometimes we hold back, because we fear failure. Throwing ourselves into something scary IS risky. But it is the only way to win. Less than total commitment will guarantee failure. An earnest effort gives us a fighting chance to not only succeed, but to succeed well.



About the Author



This book was entirely written by Laura Wheeler, CEO of Firelight Business Enterprises, Inc.. She is a busy Mom of Eight children, five of whom are still at home. She homeschools, and works her business in around the needs of her family. She puts in long hours, and manages to complete the equivalent of full time work most days. She subcontracts some services to trusted sources, and works personally with her clients.

Way back in 1982, she took a two week course in computer usage. She failed it utterly, and could not understand the command line interface used at the time. About 14 years later, the family was gifted a Mac Classic. After a little tentative exploration of the use of it, she found that she could actually understand how to use it quite well. She bought a copy of Macs for Dummies, and within 6 months had reformatted the hard drive just to see if she could.

Within two years they upgraded their computer to a new model, and Laura was hired in a small school as a computer instructional aide. Her business was started a few months later. At first it was just printing, word processing, and data entry. Not many people had home computers in the small town they lived in, so she got a bit of work doing that. She kept learning more about computers, and built her first computer system shortly after. She learned graphics processing, page layout, and copy writing in this time period also.

She saw her first website in 1999. Five months later she was awarded a contract with the Town of Medicine Bow to redesign and maintain the town website. She began building websites for herself and others, picking up contracts with the Wyoming Dental Association, and the Historic Virginian Hotel, and several others. She built many websites for a variety of purposes, including craft sales, electronic specialty services, non-profit organizations, and many more.

When Laura began business, she had no money to spare. Her business was built around the ownership of a computer, printer, scanner, and later an internet connection. She bought software when she could afford it, and learned to use free software when she could not afford it. She knew that if she did things the "recommended way", she'd be heavily in debt, and might never crawl out from under it. There had to be a way to start with nothing but work and determination, and that is what she did. Since she was in a small town, her business evolved into several lines of work in order to fill local need. Her website services encompassed everything a client needed, because her clients could not afford to hire a team. This need gave her a broad base of skills in all areas of website design, layout, and administration.

In 2003, her youngest son was diagnosed with cancer. She resigned as web administrator for the Town and for several other contracts. Her business was streamlined so that it could be flexible enough to accommodate sometimes unpredictable medical needs. Her websites were closed down, and new ones were established which would adapt themselves to a more flexible work schedule. Basically, she took her experience and equipment, and started over. Most of her business lines involving house calls, building or troubleshooting equipment, and anything else that was not portable, was shut down. She began putting more effort into her own website work and instructional writing. She began building shopping carts, exploring more web marketing strategies, and developed more expertise in the home business market. During this time she did not make a lot from her work, but spent a lot of time laying a good foundation. When the work began to pay, it did so whether her schedule was predictable or not.

Life interfered again with a difficult pregnancy. Near the end she was put on bedrest and bought a laptop. Her baby died a few minutes after birth, and after a month of heavy grief during which she could not bring herself to face the task of writing down the story, she began hard work on her websites again. She feels that work saved her sanity during this time. The worst part about losing a child is the emptiness and the purposelessness. Work kept her occupied and she made rapid progress with her sites. Within five months she built and established over a dozen sites. Her client base began to grow again, and her ability to offer more extensive services grew also. Her business is now fully portable, and she has gained the ability to work in spite of family crises (which have occurred with regular frequency), and in almost any location.

One reason Laura is good at working with shoestring startups, is because she has done it. Not once, but twice,

and with multiple business lines. She knows how long it takes to get orders or traffic. She knows the inexpensive ways to get that traffic, and she understands what makes a customer or visitor feel comfortable on a site so that they will purchase or come back. She is also skilled at teaching other people what she has learned, and knows how to explain it in terms that they can understand if they have no experience with it.

The Town of Medicine Bow has reissued the web contract to Laura. They contracted with her to redesign their site, and to write an extensive website administrative manual for the Town. After the completion of that, she has since maintained and expanded the site for them. They feel she is simply the best person to do the job, in producing a quality site for the town, marketing it effectively without unnecessary or ineffective expenditure, and in making good design decisions that suit the resources and specific needs of their small businesses. The Town Council also trusts her to give them accurate information about what is genuinely needed, and to honorably fulfill the terms of the contract.

Her experience and expertise are unique. She knows the backroads that nobody else travels, which can save time and money. She understands which of the "experts" are telling the truth, and which ones are just trying to get you to buy their product. She knows that there is one truth for large corporations with healthy advertising budgets, and another nearly hidden truth for small startups that don't have money to waste. She understands how hard it is in these times for the little guy to get a foot in the door and make a place for himself in a world that is dominated by the mega-corporations. And she understands which back doors will actually get you inside, and which ones will get you mugged. She is good at assessing individual needs so she can give good advice on what is a useful feature and what is a waste of time or money.

Her niche is one that almost nobody else wants to occupy. The expertise required in this area is difficult to acquire, and it shuts the door on many of the perceived "cash cows" in the web business world - but for Laura, it opens up possibilities for herself and her clients that provide very real opportunities. Not only is it a tough niche to occupy, but many pros do not want it because there is no profit in telling people that they DON'T need the nifty gadget you just learned how to install! Laura makes her profit from building cost efficient sites for shoestring startups (her overhead is low so she can offer quality at affordable rates), and from producing information on various home business topics.

Life has taken her in an unexpected direction. Some of that direction has hurt, and then benefited her in unlooked for ways. All of the happenstance, strategy, and research that she has done to learn and develop a high level of expertise in helping startup website and business owners in all aspects of developing a successful web presence, combine together to give her a combination of skills which sets her apart from virtually every other web designer in the nation.