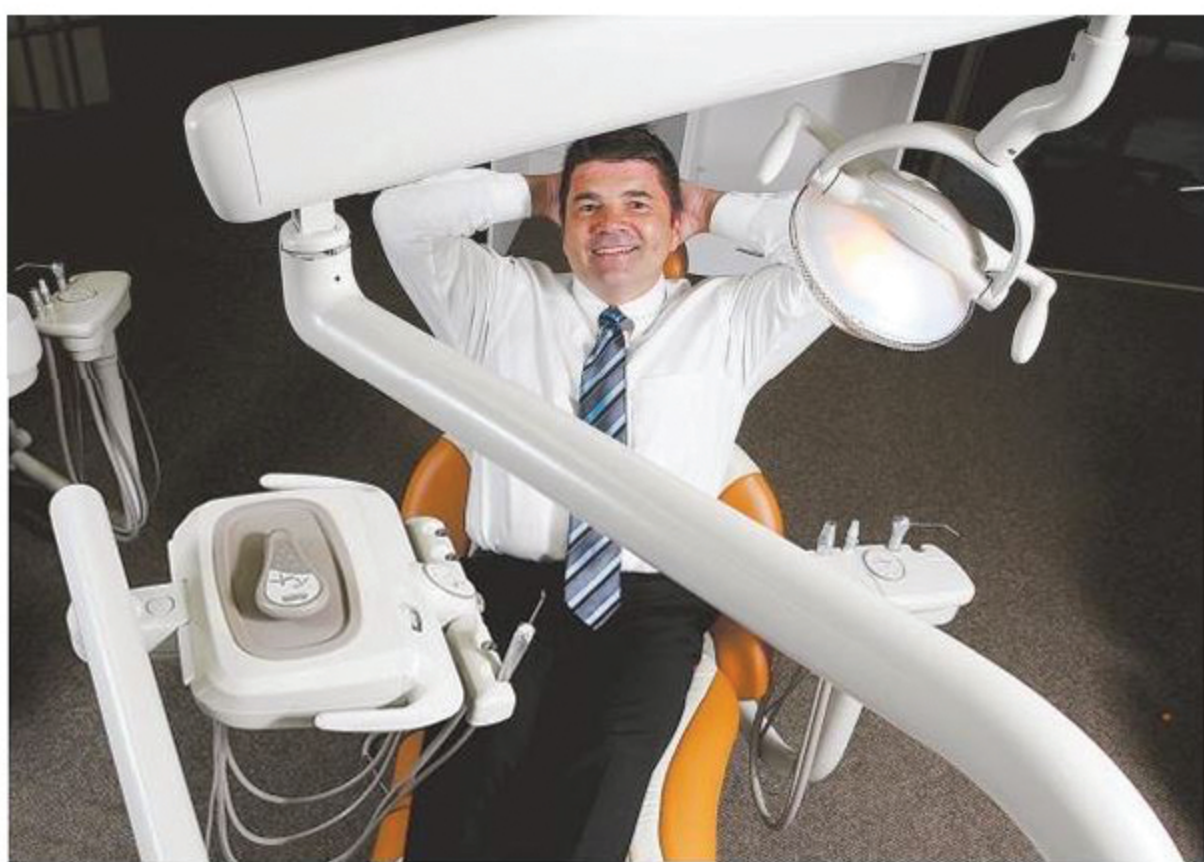


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Tom Pizio, K Dental Inc. sales and business development manager, uses prepaid cards to cut the firm's carbon footprint.

Peter J. Thompson, National Post

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Denise Deveau, **Financial Post** · Tuesday, Aug. 31, 2010

Locked away in K Dental's offices is one of its more successful marketing tools: A handful of prepaid incentive cards it rewards customers with for supporting its green efforts.

K Dental was looking to reduce its carbon footprint, says Tom Pizio, manager for sales and business development at the Toronto-based dental equipment supplier. "We realized clients were buying just a few items at a time. In some cases, we were sending 10 to 15 shipments a month to one customer."

Blanket discounts didn't get them to combine shipments. So, K Dental turned to Berkeley Payment Solutions to develop a customized incentive program with Visa prepaid gift cards.

"Now, about 50% of our customers have reduced the number of shipments to support our eco project," Mr. Pizio says. On average, he says, K Dental sends out more than 100 "thank-yous" each month.

A prepaid corporate incentive program is different from picking up some gift cards at the local drug store when the mood strikes. This is a full-fledged managed program that allows businesses to give company-branded Visa cards to customers, business partners, employees or prospects as a reward or to say thanks.

"This program works much better than simply picking up generic cards," Mr. Pizio says. "We did that once in an emergency and quickly discovered if you have to buy \$1,200 worth of cards, suddenly the world stops at the checkout line. It's also better in terms of accounting and security, because each card has a distinct number. It's more flexible because you can choose the amount you want to put on each card, and we get to showcase our brand."

The idea of a branded prepaid corporate incentive card is definitely gaining momentum with small to mid-sized businesses, says David Eason, chief executive of Berkeley Payment Solutions in Toronto.

"A lot of small businesses don't have the scale or reach to be part of customized online merchandising or catalogue programs," he says. "A Visa prepaid incentive program is turnkey." Besides, it's always difficult to anticipate what people want when it comes to rewarding them, he says. "It just takes the guesswork out of it all."

All businesses have to do is set up a data file and order cards through Berkeley or a Scotiabank branch. Setup costs vary depending on the number of cards and customization requirements, but they're typically a one-time fee of \$250. Processing costs range from \$3.50 to \$5 per card.

The program can be used for any number of cards, starting around a dozen, Mr. Eason says. "If you want less than that it might make more sense to go to a retailer."

The cards take four to eight weeks for delivery, depending on the level of customization. "So don't order your program on Dec. 15 if you want it in time for Christmas," he warns.

The cost of a managed prepaid incentive program is nothing compared to what K Dental has saved in terms of delivery and invoicing administration expenses, Mr. Pizio says.

"The processing fees are easily saved in just one less delivery trip a month. And it works. A lot of our customers go out of their way now to get to the thresholds on each order to cut down shipments."

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