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It's in the Cards

WHY VALENTINE'S DAY IS THE ULTIMATE CARD HOLIDAY

This may be the first year in a long time that kids don't pass out Valentine's Day cards at school. Going in to the new year, the seasonal section of most stores is lined with cards featuring fun characters from superheroes to unicorns. Handing out cards is now a well-loved tradition, but have you ever wondered how Valentine's Day became one of the biggest card-giving holidays of the year?

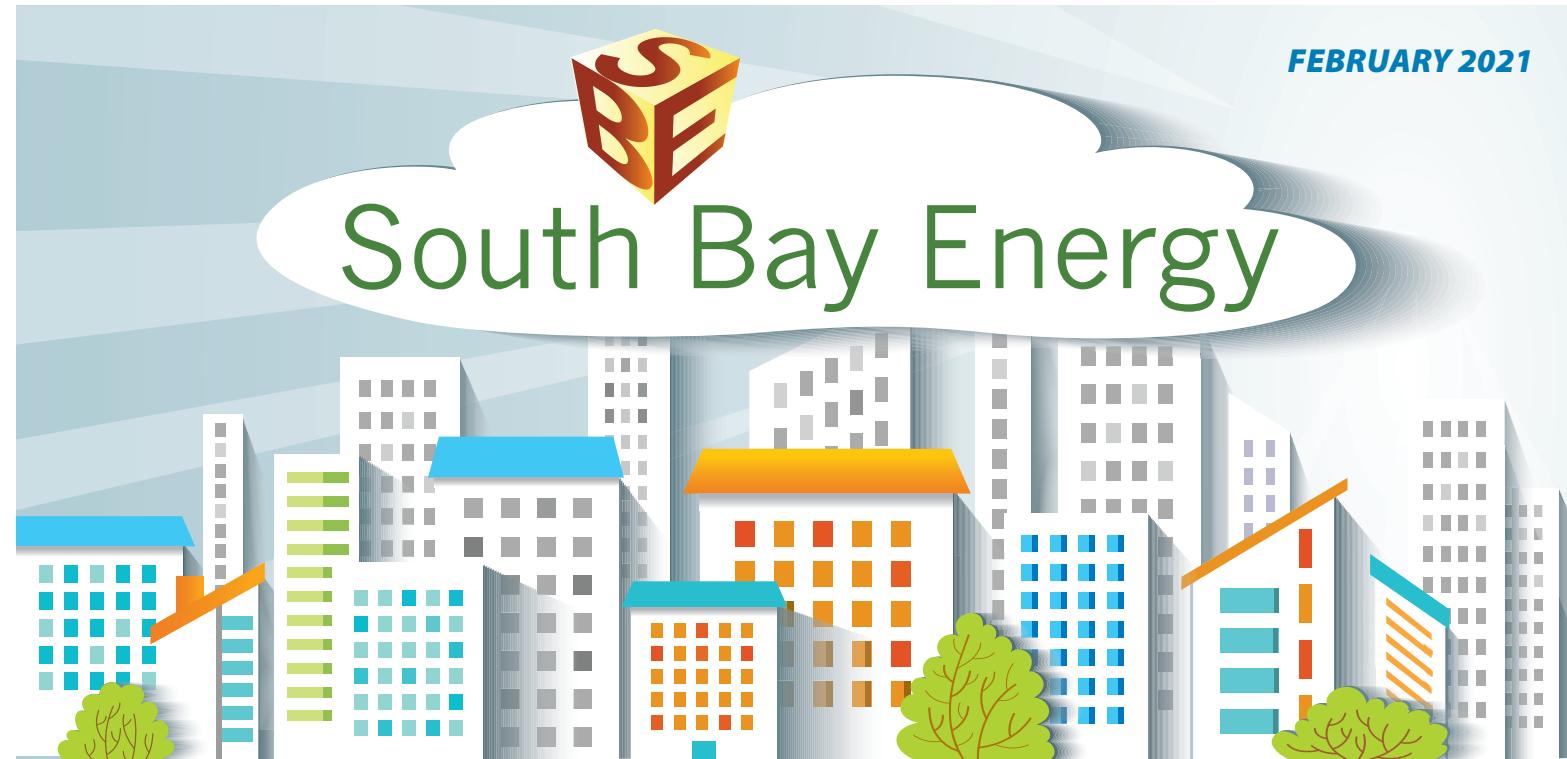
Like many holiday traditions, the convention of handing out Valentine's Day cards goes back centuries. During the 1700s, it became fashionable to trade Valentine's Day cards with a short poem or verse. The popularity of swapping cards only increased throughout the 1800s. Sometimes, people would go as far as to paint or draw spring-like images on the cards. They were much more elaborate than what we typically see today, though they were still usually very small.

But where did those folks get the idea? People of that era were likely inspired

by stories that go back even further. There are legends that the originator of this holiday tradition was Saint Valentine himself. One story says that on the night before he was set to be executed, Valentine wrote a small letter to a jailer's daughter. He ended the note with "Your Valentine."

It's unknown whether that story is true, but to 18th century Europeans and Americans, it was inspiring! So inspiring, in fact, that the entire Valentine's Day industry began to gain traction. A guidebook called "The Young Man's Valentine" was published in 1797 to help suitors garner the attention of their love interests through the written word. Eventually, books aimed at women were also published, including "The Lady's Own Valentine Writer," which served much the same goal.

These publications, along with young people writing notes to one another every February, have made Valentine's Day cards an ingrained tradition, and now people can't get enough of them!



South Bay Energy

Steve's Update

I am writing this newsletter just after the New Year. This was quite different from every other year. I really missed the company of my extended family. My kids, I am sure, missed seeing their cousins, aunts, and uncles. This year, it was just the immediate family celebrating Christmas and the New Year. We did not have any guests. I sure hope that we can get through this pandemic and have a normal holiday next year. The kids are older now. Tina and Jimmy just turned 17, so they understand why we had to celebrate alone.

We did get hit with an early snowstorm this past month. I was so happy to break out my freshly tuned up snowblower! It was low on gas, so I grabbed the gas can and put what little gas was in it into the snowblower. After finding another gas can in my garage, I poured that in as well. However, this felt funny — then I noticed it was the gas can I kept old waste oil in! I just poured old waste oil in my snowblower! As you can imagine, I was horrified. I tried to drain it out — get it out of the gas can and carb. No luck. It would not start, and I had to shovel all that heavy snow. Thank goodness my kids and wife were there to do most of the work. Now I have to call the local guy to come back and fix this thing. I might be able to figure it out, but I think I'll have a heart attack trying to fix it. I will just pay him to fix it himself. Hopefully, he can get to it before it snows again. That's me in the pic with the offending machine.



My back did not do well with all that shoveling. It doesn't usually bother me, but whenever I do any physically strenuous work, it flares up. It's no fun getting old! I should say it is no fun getting older and also fatter. With all this quarantine nonsense going on, I guess I let myself stress eat a bit much. Whatever little weight I lost last year, I put back on — and then some. I have promised myself to get on the scale every Tuesday to force myself to see what my weight is doing. In my first week, I lost a couple of pounds. Hopefully, I can keep it up and drop some weight, which will help my back, too. Next month I will give you guys an update on how much weight I've lost! Hopefully, this public declaration will give me some accountability!

- Steve Mellis

Well, That Was Fast

Almost a year ago, most of the United States entered a period of lockdown in an attempt to thwart the spread of COVID-19. For marketers facing an economic crisis, this presented a conundrum unlike any they'd seen before. On the one hand, it was likely that spending would drop, although the increase in nationwide unemployment payouts helped mitigate that. On the other hand, they now had a "captive audience" like never before, with people streaming movies and television from home at a record rate.

The lifestyles of those consumers had changed dramatically — could advertisers meet the challenge?

They certainly tried.

For retailer Carvana, the virus was almost a boon. The Tempe, Arizona-based auto seller had already gained fame for its

"car vending machines" in several large American cities, but it had yet to crack the national market. As their ads put it, they wanted to be a coast-to-coast solution for new car sales, and our newly confined circumstances meant many more Americans were interested in Carvana than before. The company dumped money into its streaming ads, and the results speak for themselves: Bottoming at \$30 million in March, their stock was valued at more than \$200 million just a few months later.

Some advertisers settled for merely reflecting the new norms of remote life and work in their advertising, with mixed results. If we weren't tired of the Zoom-focused Progressive ads featuring Flo and cohorts back in spring 2020, we've surely grown tired of their hard-to-parse antics by now. No matter who's doing the advertising, studies done as early as April 2020 found

ADVERTISING IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

that many consumers were tired of being reminded of the pandemic every time they sat down to watch TV. With national anxiety at an all-time high and mental illness spiking during the pandemic, that's no surprise. People didn't want to face the reality of the virus every 10 minutes due to advertisements.

On the other hand, some businesses were just hampered by circumstance. Carnival and Norwegian Cruise lines both ran aground with their streaming ads focused on spring and summer getaways. These seemed especially tone-deaf given that cruise ships made headlines at the time as vectors for massive COVID-19 spread.

But the true loser of 2020 advertising was Corona beer. The poor beverage company never stood a chance.

IT'S NOT JUST FOR SILICON VALLEY ANYMORE

The COVID-19 Economy Demands Happy Employees — Even Remote Ones!

You know those businesses that are just *different*? Think of Costco, Vistaprint, Whole Foods, and Southwest Airlines; they are great to do business with, you can tell the people who work there are happy — and you just *know* they're killing it from quarter to quarter on their earnings report. Even during COVID-19, they've kept on trucking.

The secret they know is that one great employee equals three average employees, and it's cheaper to pay superstars 150% or more of the average industry wage to keep them around. What would it look like if all your employees were superstars? For starters, you might have weathered the pandemic better. Those kinds of employees are flexible problem-solvers who roll with whatever is thrown their way, and they stick around through tough times.

On the flip side, if you saw people quit, I doubt they were all that happy or adding value in the first place. But how do you stop other employees from following in their footsteps?

To make employee transitions easier, try the open exit. Under this plan, employees notify their manager when they start looking for a new job, sometimes months in advance. This allows you to keep

their schedule flexible for interviews, and they can use you as a reference. In turn, during times of turnover — like the pandemic — you'll have 6–8 weeks to find and train their replacement, and your business won't be short-staffed while you ramp up a new hire. Ideally, that new person is at full capacity by the time the old employee actually walks out.

It pays to show the love. That can be tricky with remote workers, but good pay is one good way to do it. Benefits are another: Resist the urge to make your remote employees contractors! But don't neglect the small things, either. A birthday card or note of appreciation in the mail can make all the difference. It's tempting to view the flexibility of remote work as a reward in and of itself. But do your systems allow for true flexibility, or do they keep your employees stuck at a desk or constantly on the phone? Streamlining your business, with employee input, is something we should all be doing.

Many books and training programs have other ideas on this topic. Try "Uncontainable: How Passion, Commitment, and Conscious Capitalism Built a Business Where Everyone Thrives" by Kip Tindell. I also recommend "Delivering Happiness: A Path to Passion, Profits, and Purpose" by Tony Hsieh. Finally, D.H. Hansson and Jason Fried's "Remote: Office Not Required" is required reading for anybody doing business remotely these days.

It's anyone's guess what 2021 has in store, but no matter what it is, you can't afford unhappy employees. Read up, and then level up your business.

Share the Love This Month

4 Ways to Support Your Loved Ones This Valentine's Day

Every Valentine's Day, people want to find the best ways to show their partner or even a close friend how much they care. It is easy to get sucked into thinking you have to give them the most expensive or elaborate present you can find, but sometimes, the most meaningful gifts are the simplest. Here are four easy ways to show your loved ones how much you care this February.

A TEXT A DAY

Knowing someone has your back throughout the year, no matter how difficult things can get, is a great source of support and love. In addition to the usual communication you share with your loved one, add in a supportive text each day, whether it's simply letting them know you're thinking of them or wishing them luck on a presentation or interview. The best part about these texts is that they can be sent year-round.

A MORNING MESSAGE BOARD

Whiteboards are fun to draw on and make great calendars, but they can also be used to share heartfelt messages with your roommates or spouse. Writing positive messages like, "I hope you have a wonderful day!" or "You matter!" can make all the difference. Waking up to a loving note from someone they care about could mean the world to them and shift their entire mood for the day.



A DAILY JOURNAL ENTRY

February and March are usually when New Year's resolutions begin to falter. To encourage yourself and your loved one, consider starting a daily journal. Leave a journal where you both have access to it and write positive messages inside for the other person. This acknowledgment of hard work is exactly what you both need to continue pursuing your goals this year.

RANDOM GIFTS

You don't have to wait for a birthday, Christmas, or Valentine's Day to give your loved one a gift. Buying small gifts lets your friend or spouse know you've been thinking about them. Whether it's a treat they enjoy, a book, or even a small gift card, these thoughtful gestures are sure to make them smile.

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