

What my realtor taught me about giving bad gifts.

Michael Halloran | October 14, 2019



Giving a gift to a client is a great way to solidify the relationship. But if you find yourself tempted to make the gifting process all about you, branding and the transaction, you're wasting a golden opportunity to turn that client into your advocate.

The story you are about to read is true. The logos have been pixilated to protect the innocent.

This is a tale about a poorly branded gift I once received.

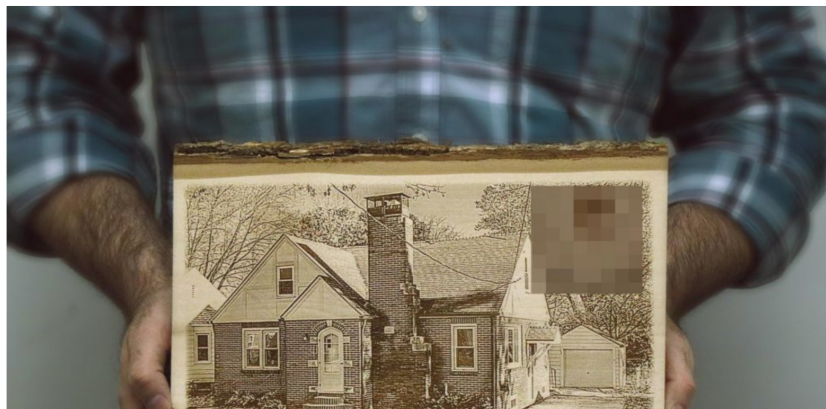
In December 2018, I was offered a job as a copywriter at [Rocket Referrals](#) HQ in Des Moines, Iowa. Woo-hoo! But it meant moving my family 110 miles due west.

House shopping time. We found ourselves a realtor who found us a really nice home—a cozy [Beaverdale Brick](#) no less.

Everything went well... house inspection was good, the seller agreed to all our requests. Closing day comes along, and we head over to the bank to sign the papers. Our realtor arrives and—strangely—he smells like a campfire.

After signing off on that massive binder of docs, and shaking hands with everyone there, we were proud homeowners, keys in hand. Sweet.

Then the reason for the campfire smell became obvious. Our realtor pulled a flat piece of wood out of a bag with a laser-engraved image of our house on it. It was beautiful. My wife and I loved it. That is until we noticed something totally unwelcome. The realtor had stuck his company's logo in the top-right corner.





A missed opportunity: About 1/3 of the picture is taken up by the logo (pixilated).

Ugh. The present was ruined in our eyes. What was he trying to achieve with this? It wasn't about building a relationship with us at all. It was a clumsy branding exercise and left us numb. What could have been the perfect conversation starter (something we would've hung up in our living room) was just a kitschy, ugly advertisement.

There's a time and place for branded material, but not when it's a house-warming gift.

But hold up: I'm not saying you should never give branded items. Of course not. T-shirts, pens and tchotchkes are all fun. That said, there's a time and place for branded material, but not when it's supposed to be a personalized, house-warming gift.

How to do a personalized gift right.

Okay, I'll cut the guy a little slack. I guess our previous realtor had spoiled us and raised our expectations. He'd made an obvious effort to give us something unique and meaningful. So, let's get in the time machine and head back to March 2016 to see what that realtor got right.

We had just closed on our house in the [Amana Colonies](#) (you've got to check them out sometime—a unique place in America). A couple of days later, our realtor popped by to see how we were settling in. It was a complete surprise, and he brought us two very special gifts: hand-painted [Amana Easter Eggs](#) and a gift card good for any store in the colonies.

This blew my wife and me away. The eggs were exactly the kind of heirloom gift we'd cherish and use every year. Talk about the perfect relationship builder.

Don't pull a Homer.

As anyone who's seen episode 5, season 3 of *The Simpsons* knows, “pulling a Homer” means to succeed despite idiocy. But for our purposes, let's give it a second meaning: to give an obviously selfish gift that's really for you. Like when Homer gave Marge the bowling ball that had his name engraved on it. Don't pull a Homer, people.



The selfish gift reaction shot.

The Rocket Referrals five rules for the perfect gift.

So, let's bring it all together. Based on my realty experiences, and [a tenuous Simpsons reference](#), here are a few rules to follow so you too can avoid giving bad gifts.



The five rules for giving the perfect gift.

1. Choose a gift they're going to like.

Get to know the person. What are their interests, their hobbies? Choose something that speaks to them as an individual. Could be tickets to a game, a potted plant or a gift card to their favorite store.

2. Pick something they're going to use.

The more they regularly interact with the gift, the more likely they'll remember you for it. That can help start conversations with their friends and family meaning you're more likely to get a referral in the long run.

3. Make it something their whole team (or family) will benefit from.

If the gift is to a vendor, or you're friendly with the client's whole family, consider a present the whole group will enjoy. Maybe something for the office kitchen, a game they can play on their downtime or just buy them all pizza. The more people who benefit, the more meaningful it will be—and the more stories that get told.

4. Surprise 'em.

Don't connect the gift to any transactions. People love receiving things unexpectedly and they'll take note of the extra effort on your part.

5. Don't make it about you.

People are going to resent a gift that ignores who they are and puts *your* needs front and center. It also increases the likelihood of souring the relationship. Unless it's an absolutely standalone superb

gift, avoid branding it, too.

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