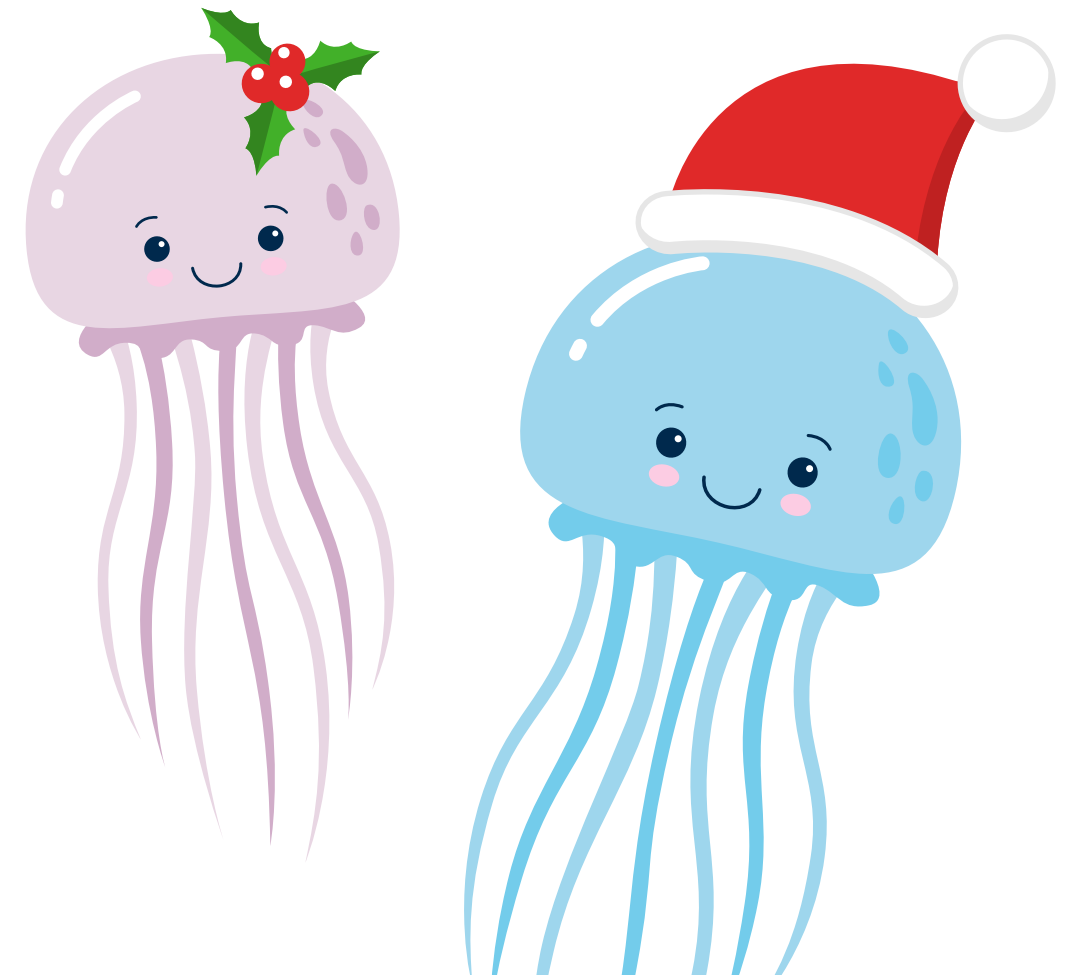# Your Holiday Guide to Building a Culture of Appreciation Through Technology

How to deck the halls with appreciation all year round

Table of Contents

Introduction

Hi there,

Here's a fact: Reward and recognition from managers and peers is a top factor that helps raise employee engagement, wellbeing and job performance. Through mutual and shared appreciation, team members feel more inclusion in the group and become more efficient with the work they perform together. Increasing the urgency for a solid, consistent recognition culture, recent research notes 74% of people looking to leave their job **would stay if they were recognised more.**

> **According to Reward Gateway research, 85% say it is important that their employer enables reward and recognition from peers and managers.**

I've helped hundreds of clients from organisations of all sizes and in all industries put in place employer-driven reward and recognition programs that are customised to their values, and show their employees how much their efforts are appreciated. You may notice that sometimes I say 'reward' first, and sometimes I say 'recognition' first – that's because there's no right answer on what to focus on, it all comes down to what is right for your business.

In this eBook, I'll explore the fundamentals for building your own R&R culture through the use of technology, outlining how our clients have used our award-winning R&R platform to meet their strategic goals, including:

- Understanding the Recognition & Reward Pyramid framework to build a multi-tiered R&R program

- Real-life examples of R&R tech, such as peer-to-peer tools, nomination programs, milestones and more

- How to maximize tech features to save your teams valuable time when rolling out new programs

- How to drive consistent usage among new R&R technology features and programs with my 5 A's of Adoption model

Through our work more than 4,000 clients helping them build their own cultures of recognition and appreciation, I'm confident that this guide will be the partner you need to get your own programs up and running. Let's get started.

Alex Powell
Director of Client Cultural Insights

A Holiday Must-Have: Appreciation

After the last few years of upheaval, mustering up festive cheer can seem difficult. But in reality, the Christmas holidays are the perfect time to reflect, recognise and show appreciation for your people, which is especially important if building culture and community is a top priority for the year ahead.

According to the **2022 Edelman Trust Barometer**

69%

of employees surveyed believe that people they work with are a significant source of community in their life.

Building a culture of appreciation doesn't happen overnight, but the festive season is an especially important time to bring some light into your employees' day to day. Together, let's explore how you can build your own program for everyday recognition in time for the holidays (and beyond).

One way to spark a feeling of community is through mutual appreciation and respect, and according to our recent survey, a whopping **90% of employees say it's important to be recognised by their peers and managers** for their efforts.

Unwrapping the Key to Multi-Tiered Recognition:
The Recognition and Reward Pyramid
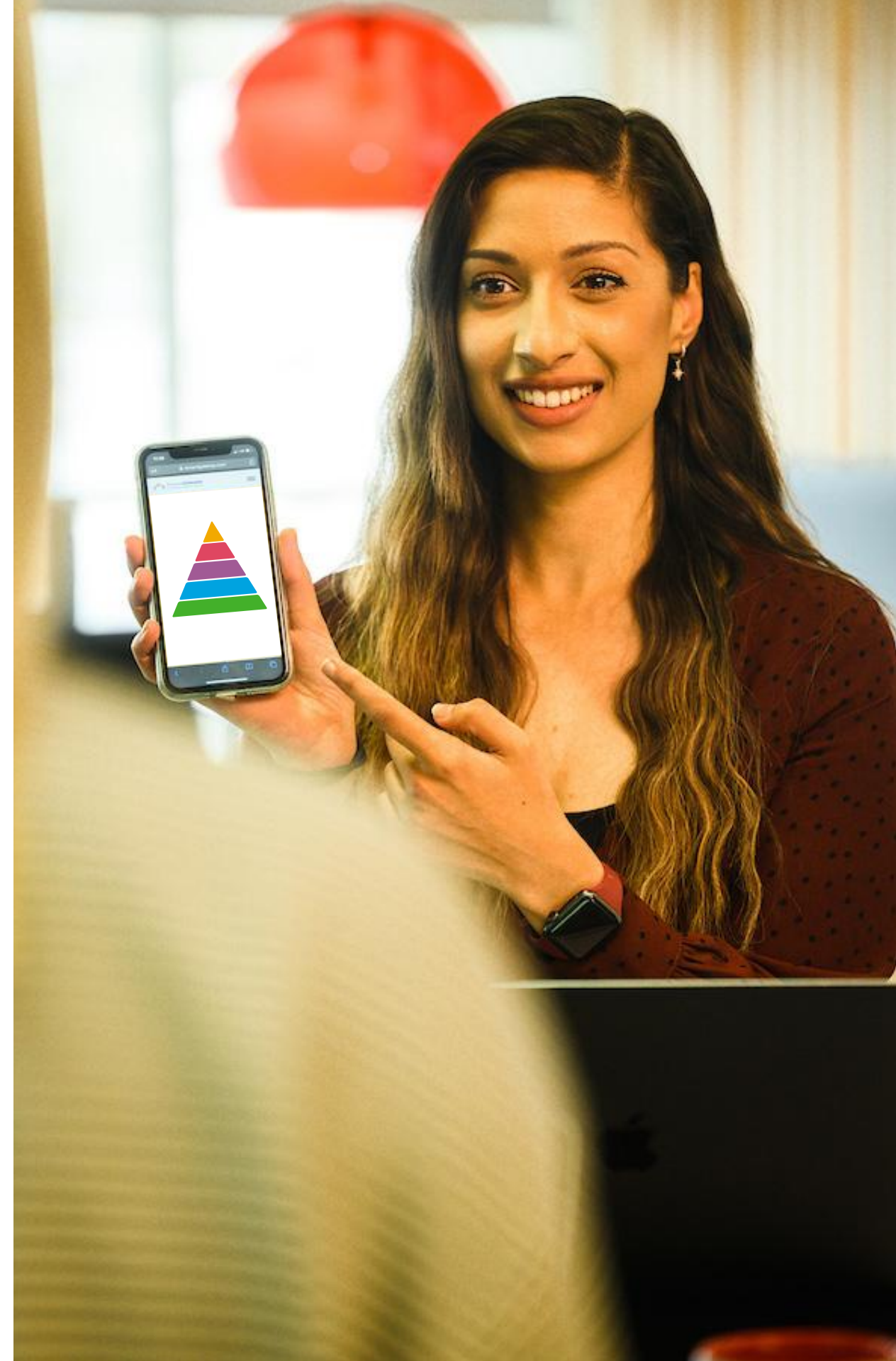
While the 'why' of recognition is widely understood, for each organisation it is crucial to find the right 'how.' Differences in organisational structure, job type, employee location, and access to technology can make a big difference in how recognition should be structured. To help companies build their own simple and effective recognition structure, we use a framework called the **Recognition and Reward Pyramid.**

The layers of the Recognition and Reward Pyramid illustrate different components of a strategic recognition program. It's an easy-to-follow and easy-to-remember framework that ensures all employees in your organisation have the opportunity to be seen, recognised and rewarded at least once throughout the year.

Game changers
Quarterly or annual, recognising and rewarding the best of the best

Monetary rewards for employees
Empowers managers to recognise and reward the great

Peer-to-peer nominations
Empowers employees to recognise and reward the great

Milestone awards
Length of service/birthdays/group recognition

Peer-to-peer eCards based on values and/or results
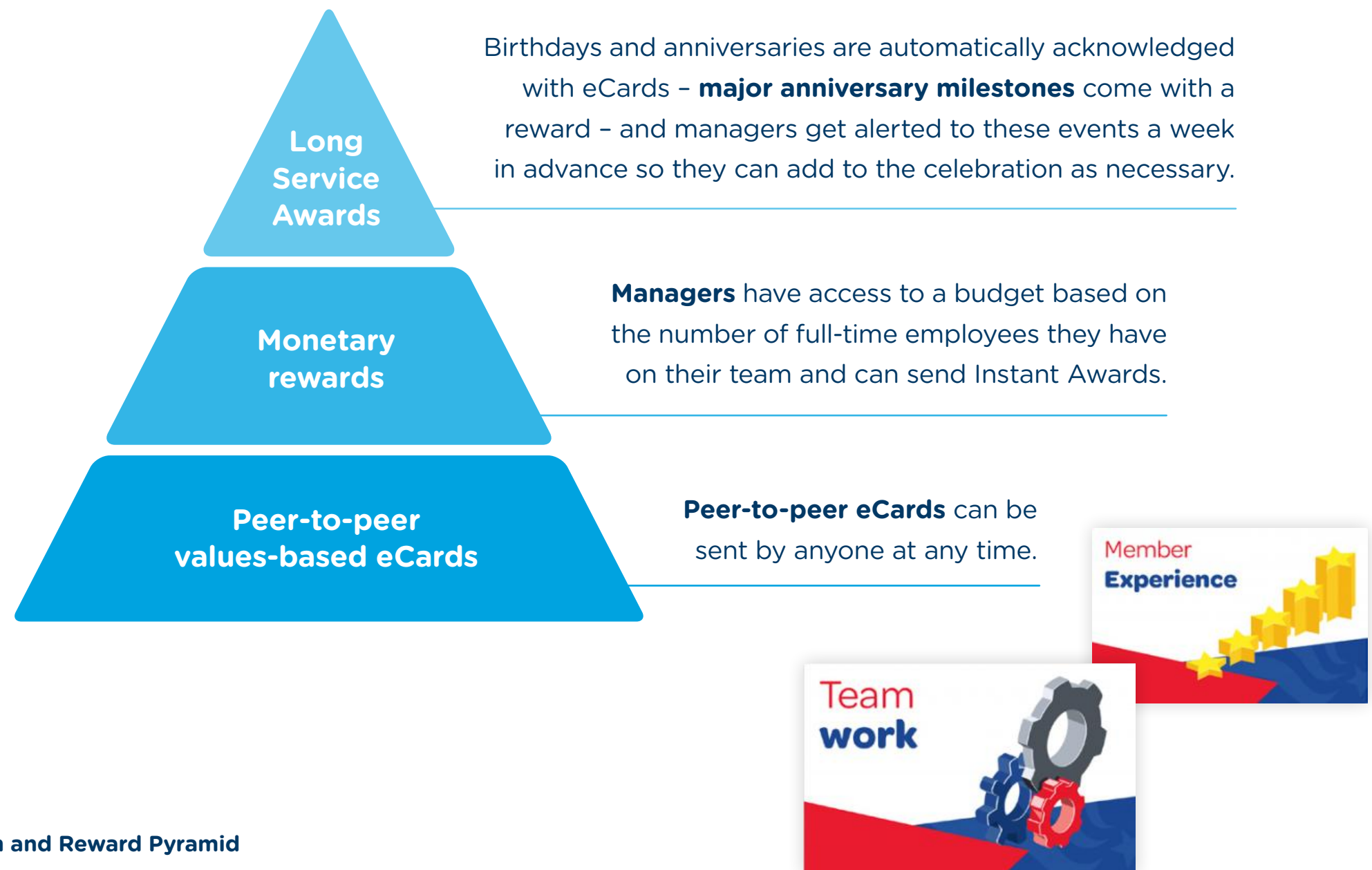Any time, anyone, connects the most people

Like any solid structure, we recommend building a program from the bottom up: the bottom of the pyramid is the widest, which means that element of your program is designed to reach and recognise the most number of employees. **This is where the majority of recognition frequency comes from, with peer-to-peer, values-based and results-based eCards and in-person recognition.** These have no monetary value attached, are fun and celebratory, continuous (that is, can be sent at any time throughout the year) and multi-directional.

As you move up the pyramid, it gets narrower, meaning the recognition happens less frequently – but when built well – it also means it increases in impact. Adding in additional layers of recognition allows for flexibility and variety in recognition as well as strategies for **recognising above and beyond, stand-out employee actions,** which is also where monetary reward often comes into play.

An all-in-one reward and recognition platform like the one Reward Gateway offers can help you quickly and easily introduce or refine the different levels of your own pyramid to reflect the changing needs of your business.

## Example of a Three-Level Recognition Pyramid

In this client's recognition pyramid, all three layers are run through its online employee engagement platform, The Hub.

Birthdays and anniversaries are automatically acknowledged with eCards – **major anniversary milestones** come with a reward – and managers get alerted to these events a week in advance so they can add to the celebration as necessary.

Managers have access to a budget based on the number of full-time employees they have on their team and can send Instant Awards.

Peer-to-peer eCards can be sent by anyone at any time.

WORKSHEET: Building Your Pyramid

Use this blank pyramid to add in the layers of recognition you'd like to strive for at your organisation. The lowest levels should be the more common recognition with higher impact, less frequent recognition methods as you move up the pyramid. While more variety can add interest to your program, you also don't want to create a program that is confusing, so there isn't one right number of layers.

Most of our clients have seen the greatest success with 3-5 layers, or ways to reward and recognise.
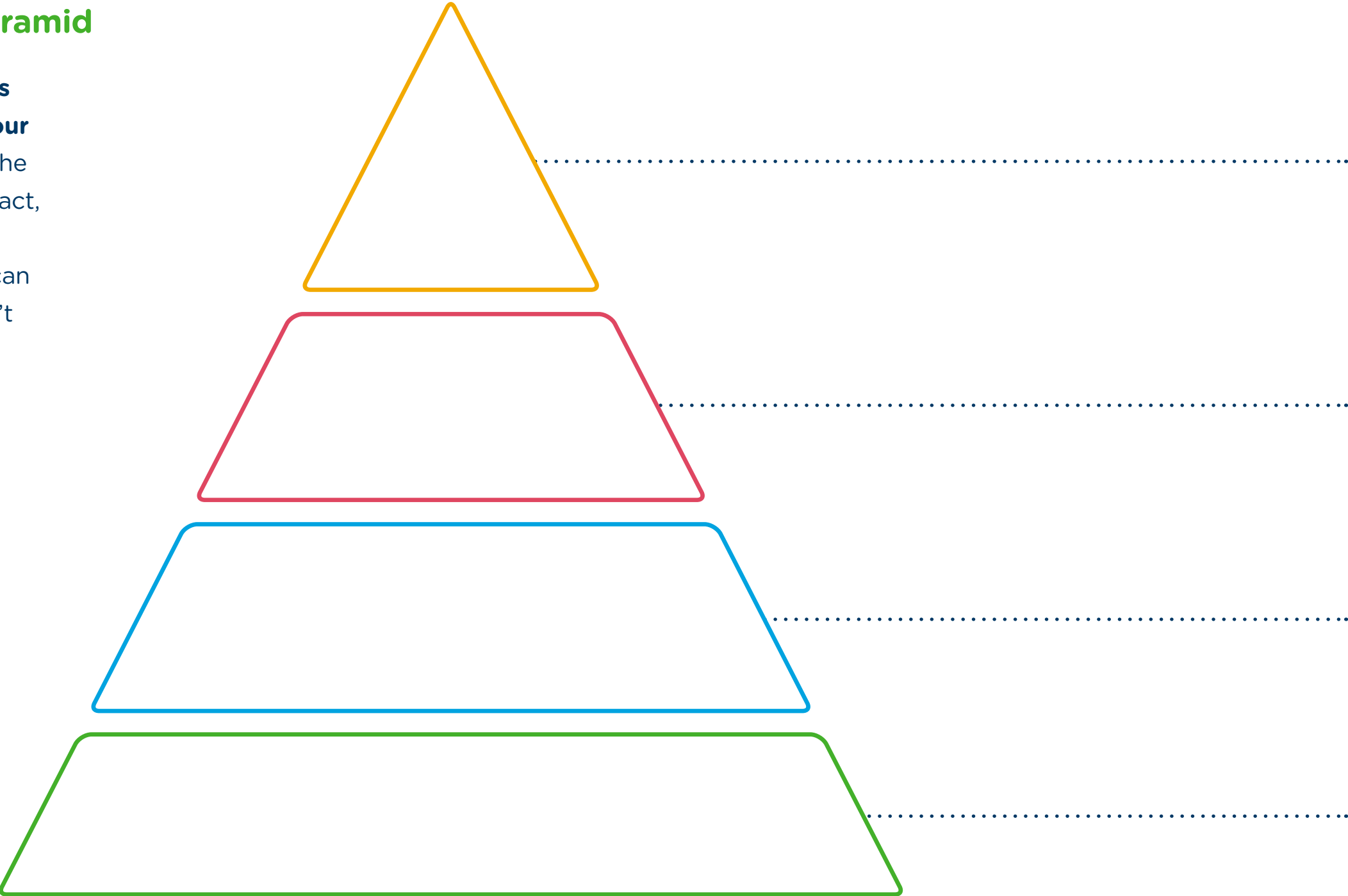
Speading Cheer for All to Hear:
Peer-to-Peer eCards

The bottom tier of your recognition and reward strategy is (almost always) everyday peer-to-peer recognition. Given that two-thirds of employees say their wellbeing would improve if they were recognised more, there is huge benefit to giving everyone recognition tools.

This is true regardless of whether the recognition involves a monetary reward or not.

And really, everyday recognition is the easiest thing you can do to get started in building your own culture of appreciation. Our clients most often build this foundational layer using eCards, especially during the holiday season when it can be especially memorable to deliver some festive cheer!

First, you'll want to decide on what types of eCards you want to create and what to call them. Here are a few ideas for how our clients have grouped their eCards:

Company Values

If you have company values, illustrating these on eCards and sending them to someone when they demonstrate a value in their day-to-day job is a powerful way to reinforce and embed values within your organisation.

Strategy

If your company strategy is documented, shining a spotlight on the ways that employees have contributed to the different parts of your strategy helps them feel motivated and involved in company milestones and goals.

Goals/Achievements

For one-off achievements, such as hitting quarterly targets for a sales team, or for non-monetary awards for moments like Employee or Team of the Month, these eCards can be a boost when employees need reassurance that they've achieved something memorable.

Greetings

Greetings could include anything from special milestones in employee lives at work (first day, promotion, tenure) and those outside of work (new baby, marriage, new home, congratulations, 'just to say'). Think of the other ways employees can stay connected when they're not side by side.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Enhance your DEI initiatives by creating a set of eCards for multicultural holidays, special eCards for months like Pride Month or on noted days like International Women's Day.

Looking for inspiration, this stage of designing a program is a great one to open up to employees themselves. Ask, 'what do you want to be recognised for?' and see what ideas arise.

Once you've identified those key peer-to-peer moments, you can start designing your eCards and using them to bring your culture to life:

The key to building a long-lasting recognition program is your people. By listening to employee feedback, introducing a tiered approach and involving employees in what to recognise and how your eCards make your culture come to life, you're on your way to creating a reward and recognition hub for your organisation.

Improving peer-to-peer recognition through technology:

- Recognition on **computers and mobile devices** makes it easier to include employees across locations and job types.

- **Suggested topics** (values, greetings, etc.) help employees consider more and different types of actions to recognise.

- The ability to filter for an employee's recognition means managers deliver more **meaningful evaluations,** including work from throughout the year.

- The **social wall** allows one recognition moment to make a difference across the company.

- As employees **react and comment** on a story, it enhances the impact of recognition.

- **Tracking online recognition** via reports increases visibility to program success and specific areas for improvement – leading to a longer term culture of recognition.
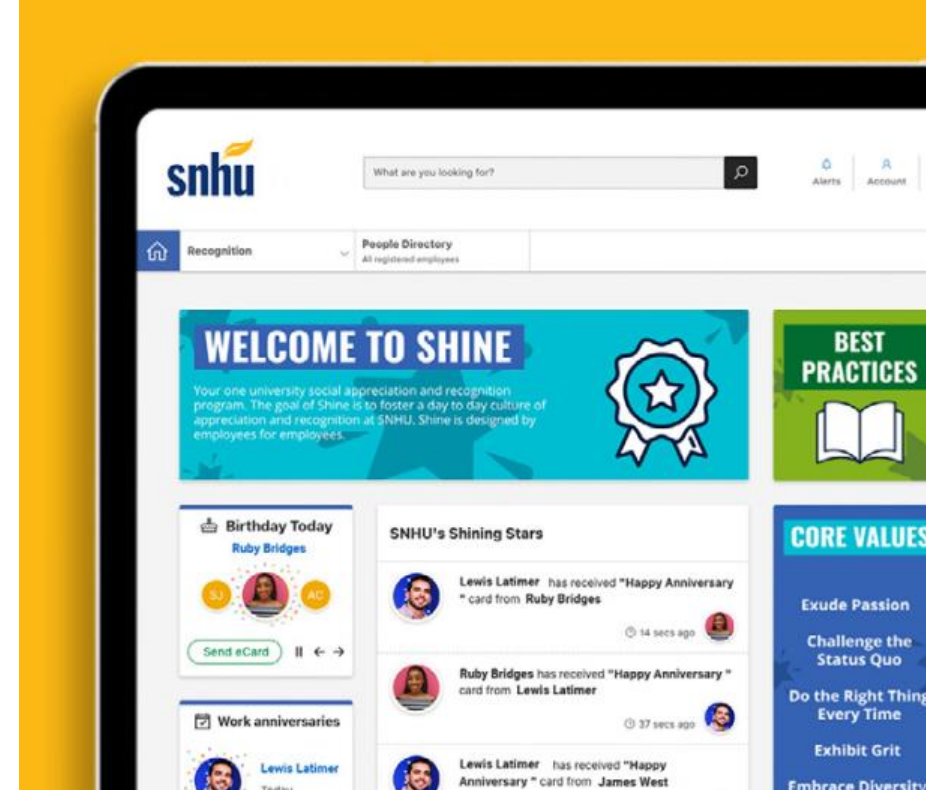
Client Showcase: Southern New Hampshire University's eCards

"It's not just about having these eCards, it's about the best practice that we roll out that helps demonstrate how you recognise someone who has exhibited one of these behaviours. We're now seeing that people are actually starting to utilise these value-based recognition eCards to help drive behaviours that drive results within their teams, especially leaders."

Jennifer LaFountain, Director of Employee Experience at SNHU

Greetings-based eCards: There are 11 everyday greeting cards that are meant for touch points of appreciation. These encompass everything from coming back into the office to happy birthday. The SNHU team is planning to do regular refreshes based upon usage data and employee feedback.

Values-based eCards: SNHU has five core values that are deeply embedded in everything that the organisation does, such as 'do the right thing every time' or 'exhibit grit.' These are reflected in the branded eCards and employees can send them at any time, from any device.

Results in the first year: More than 26,600 eCards sent with 87% of employees having received an eCard.

"One of the big surprises for me personally is that the eCards are being sent more by leaders than by individual contributors. This is a testimony to the fact that our leaders are using this platform and program to help drive behaviours and results on their team."

All I Want for Christmas is Rewards: Monetary Awards

$$$

If you already have forms of non-monetary recognition, you're off to a great start, but over 4 in 5 employees (84%) say it's important they receive rewards for their efforts. We know that providing rewards is not a new idea – but we also know it is often not done systemically – oftentimes leading to inconsistent practices or managers having to step in to spend (and then get reimbursed for) their own money.

Managers that are effectively managing their culture know about the power of celebration, and they find those day-to-day opportunities to cheer in between the big wins. Rewards can help these frequent recognisers to add impact and variety – especially in those times when someone goes above and beyond. Reward can be the missing piece to creating a more consistent culture of recognition.

Defining your reward and recognition budget for these instant awards can range, but our clients often use 1-2% of payroll or $100 a person as a starting point for their annual budget. Levels of reward can fall to increments from $10 a reward to something like $45, or clients may choose to have higher impact awards that take up more budget.

Sample Award Levels:

$7 Award Level — If the employee went above and beyond their daily actions, perhaps showing personal growth or going the extra mile on a project or task. **Think about it as buying the employee a cup of coffee.**

$25 Award Level — If the employee exceeded expectations, perhaps spearheading a project or taking actions that made a notable impression on a group. **Think of it as treating the employee to lunch.**

$45 Award Level — If the employee delivered a 'Wow' experience, perhaps leading to a positive customer testimonial, driving a referral, or having a positive impact on our business/financial goals. **Think of it as buying the employee dinner.**
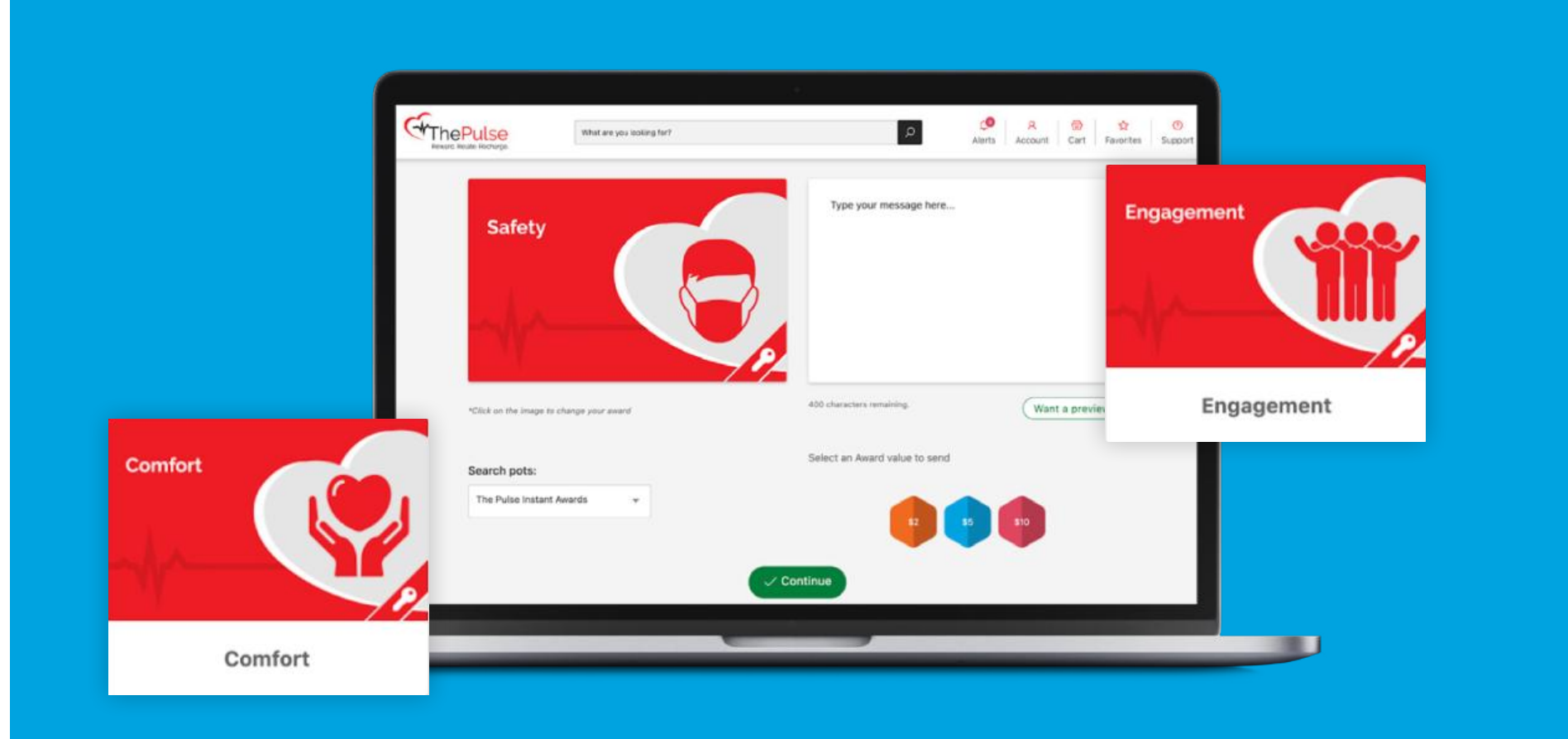
Industry:
Healthcare

Number of employees:
1,700

Platform features:
Employee reward and recognition, Employee communications, Employee wellbeing, Employee benefits

Client Showcase: Woods Services' Instant Awards

On 'The Pulse,' employees can send one another both performance-based eCards, including 'Ownership' and 'Teamwork,' along with greetings-based eCards to wish others a 'Happy Birthday' or 'Welcome to the Team.'

On top of non-monetary peer-to-peer recognition, Woods Services also put in place manager-led monetary rewards, 'The Pulse Instant Awards.' There are different levels that managers can nominate a colleague for, with different monetary values attached. Both the monetary and non-monetary recognitions live on a social recognition wall to improve visibility and employee relationships with public recognition.

Results in the first 6 months: 60% of users active in an offline population, more than 1,700 recognitions sent, half of recognitions sent by frontline, offline employees.
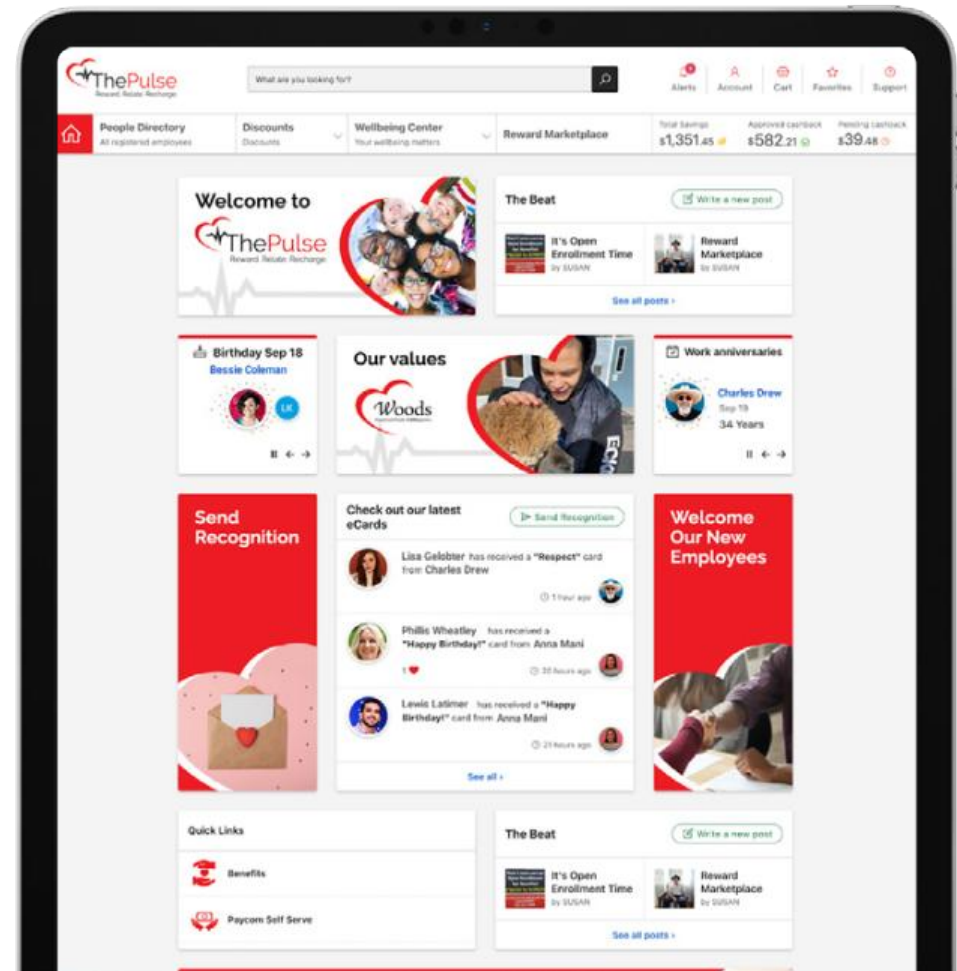
## Top off the year with a monetary bonus

Though you might be looking for alternatives to company-wise pay rises, a small monetary boost could be a simple way to bring a smile to your employees' faces. A recent survey showed that nearly 75% of employees would spend their reward on essentials versus luxuries, so why not give them the choice, rather than gifting a generic box of chocolates?

Our client Legal & General used our bulk reward tool to reward its people through their employee engagement platform, sending each employee a $45 festive greeting, resulting in 50% of employees redeeming their award right away, and engaged 92% of those registered on the platform.


Improving monetary rewards through technology:

- **Rewards can be sent easily and quickly** to employees regardless of where they work, eliminating the need for an inventory of gift cards or other reward types.

- Using **technology to instantly distribute rewards** is an easy win. The faster the rewards go out, the better chance they have to be redeemed.

- The **social wall of reward and recognition** shares examples of the behaviours that make the biggest difference to the business, creating a learning engine as well as a means for appreciation.

- **Tracking online budgets** allows administrators to quickly see who is and isn't using their recognition budget and make real-time adjustments.
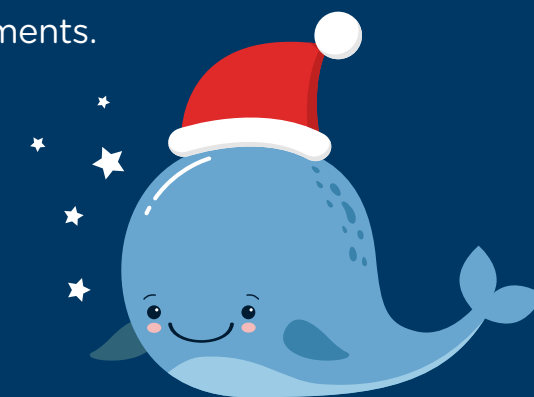
Put a Bow on a Job Well Done:
Employee Nominations
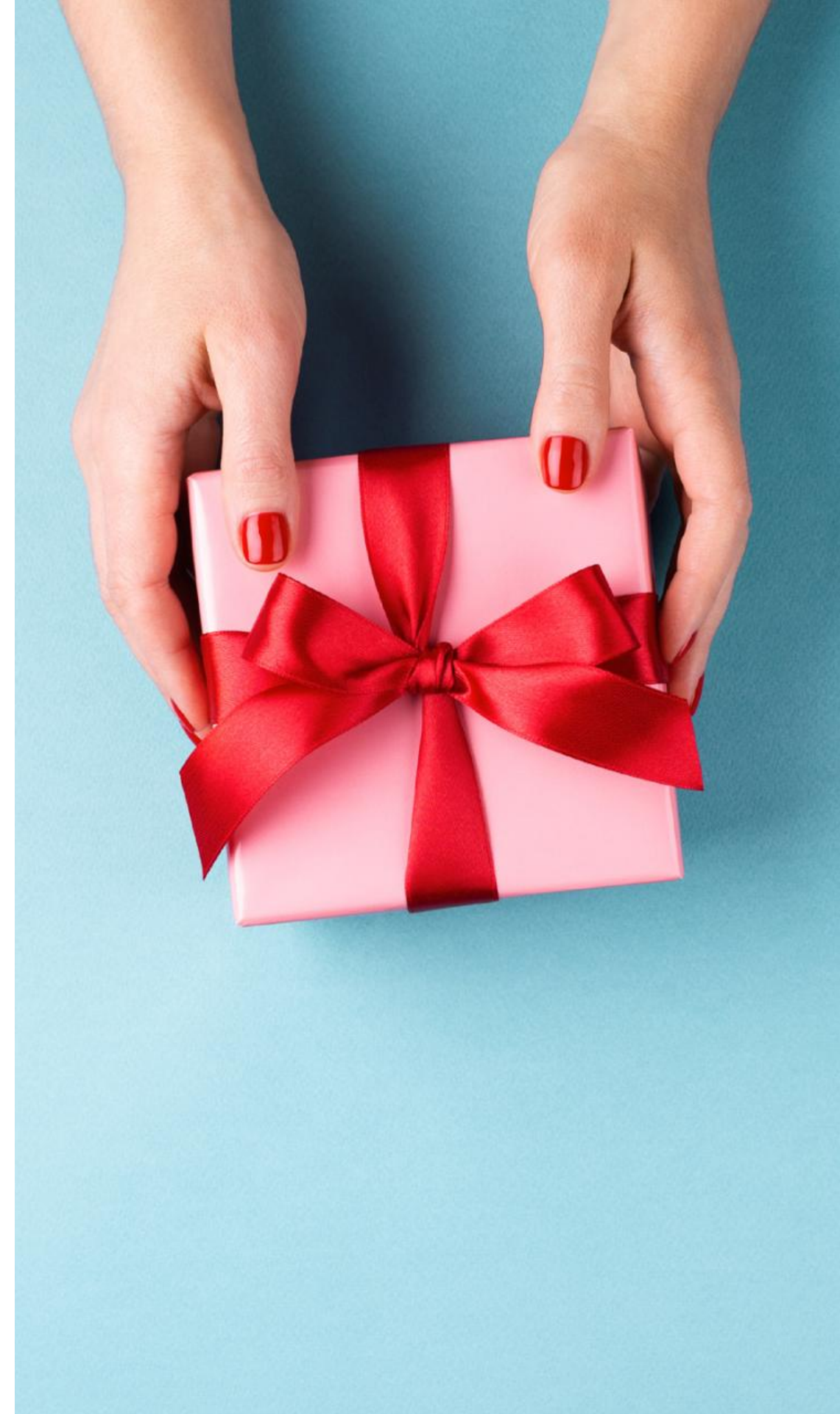
Employee nominations are another layer to add variety and long-term life into a reward and recognition program. It gives responsibility to everyone in your business to tell the stories of how their peers are going above and beyond. No matter where you sit in the organisation, nomination programs give employees an opportunity to identify with one of your values or core behaviours in action to tell the story around how that delivers something truly impactful and meaningful for the business.

Given that two-thirds of employees are looking for their employer to increase their investment in reward and recognition, nomination programs are a high-visibility, high-impact way of supporting employee appreciation.

Nomination programs offer extensive flexibility for businesses looking to drive various strategic objectives and are highly configurable, so there are many ways in which you can leverage them. You can control the evaluation process, you can control the reward and recognition budget, you can even control things like who is able to nominate for a specific program at a specific time and if there will be an approval process in place. Many clients will run a nomination campaign or program at certain times of year for a certain part of the organisation, including towards the end of the year for Christmas celebrations or beginning of the year anouncements and awards.

## Examples of how clients use nominations:

The Award	Who Nominates	What Happens Next
Monthly Safety Award	All employees, at any time.	Nominations are made public upon submission and on a monthly basis, the COO picks 1-2 examples to highlight via a company-wide communication, with those employees receiving an award.
Wellbeing-Focussed Manager	All employees are asked to highlight managers that are especially good at supporting the wellbeing of their teams.	The stories are shared to the company to reinforce Leadership's commitment to employee wellbeing and to inspire other managers to take action, too.
Customer Care Award	Everyone from the Customer Care department nominates a colleague against the company value 'Putting Customers First.'	Employees' managers review the nominations and then they are passed up to the CHRO for a final selection. The winner receives a $75 reward and a personal mentoring session with the CEO.

While you can see the possibilities are endless, one suggestion we do have is to have at least one nomination program that allows for anyone in the business to be nominated and so that all employees, no matter their role or location, can recognise great work the moment it happens.

Improving nominations through technology:

- **Time-based nominations** (monthly, quarterly, etc.) can be launched, closed and re-launched easily.
- **Flexible online features** allows for a new campaign or program to be set up quickly and and shared with employees immediately.
- **Rules and evaluation workflows** allow nominations to pass through approval processes as necessary.
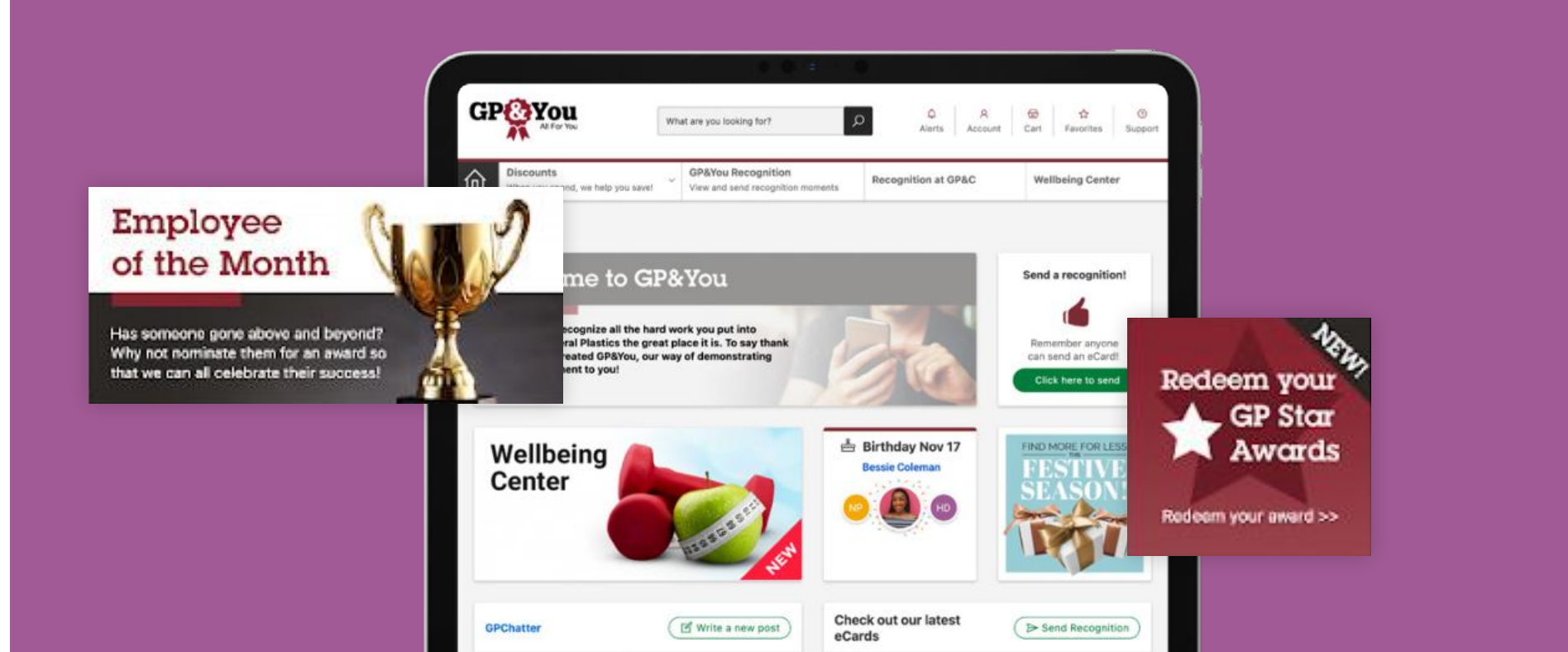
Industry:
Manufacturing

Number of employees:
700

Platform features:
Employee reward and recognition, Employee communications, Employee wellbeing, Employee benefits

Client Showcase: General Plastics & Composites Employee of the Month

General Plastics uses eCards and gives managers a regular budget for monetary awards for above and beyond actions. The team doesn't want to limit above and beyond recognition just to managers, however, so they have an Employee of the Month nomination program.

On its employee engagement platform, 'GP&You,' employees have access to the Employee of the Month nomination form at all times. At the end of each month, a team of four reviews and considers each submission. When they have selected one or more winners, they approve that story. The person is sent a notification via the site and via email and they are automatically awarded points they can spend on the Reward Marketplace. Finally, the story is shared on the social wall for all to read.

# Have Yourself a Merry Milestone: Recognising the Employee Experience

The employee experience is not just what happens during the hiring process or when the employee has their last day of work, but it includes everything in between. When you celebrate special days – like birthdays and anniversaries – together with employees, it boosts community and belonging, creating stronger teams, enhancing psychological safety at the workplace and improving inclusion.
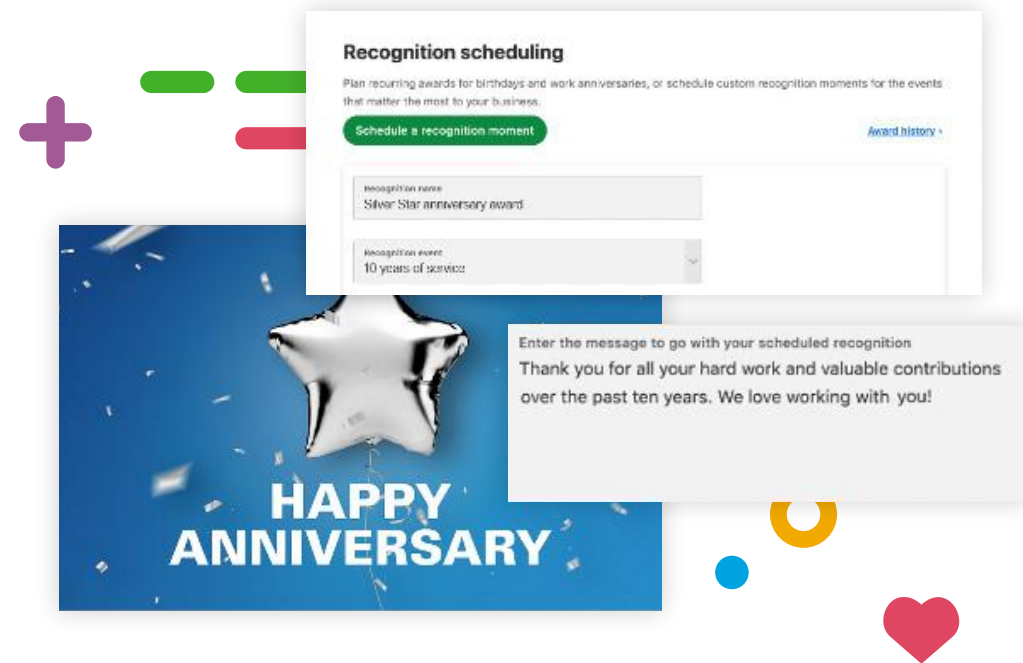
The great thing about recognising employee milestones is there are so many different occasions that can be celebrated. So limiting yourself to one or two is fine to start, but if you want to bring in more engagement moments, consider including as many as you can from the list of ideas below:

1 **Welcome recognition:** With celebrating the arrival and onboarding of a new employee, you immediately give them the feeling of being welcomed and included within the company, and start their engagement journey right away.
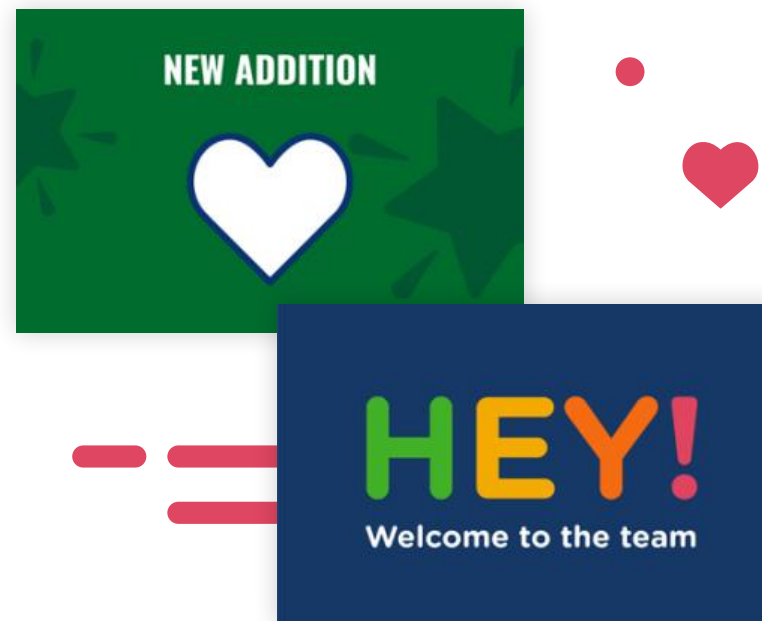
2 **Birthdays:** Let's face it, everyone wants to feel special on their birthday. Throwing a shout out, giving the day off or sending a gift lets employees feel seen and appreciated.

3 **Holidays:** Remember that your employees come from diverse backgrounds, and what is considered a holiday to celebrate may be as different and as diverse as your workforce. So, be sure to recognise all the holidays your employees view as important or sacred. What's more, you could even offer floating holidays and let employees choose which holiday they want to recognise.

4 **Company anniversary:** When employees are asked to join in the milestones the company has accomplished, it emphasises their connection to the company's mission, purpose and values. Some long-standing employees may have seen the company grow from a small startup and it's important to celebrate this journey.


Improving milestone recognition and reward through technology:

- **Increase the amount of celebration** that can be done without adding time to administrators' schedules.

- **Share employee milestones** in a central location so all employees are informed and can find new reasons to celebrate.

- **Schedule milestone recognition** to go out automatically on the right day for all employees with or without a monetary reward to prevent celebrations being missed.

- **Inform managers of upcoming milestones** through alerts related to their direct reports so they can plan additional celebrations and connect with their team.

Time to Open Presents: Enhancing the Reward Redemption Experience
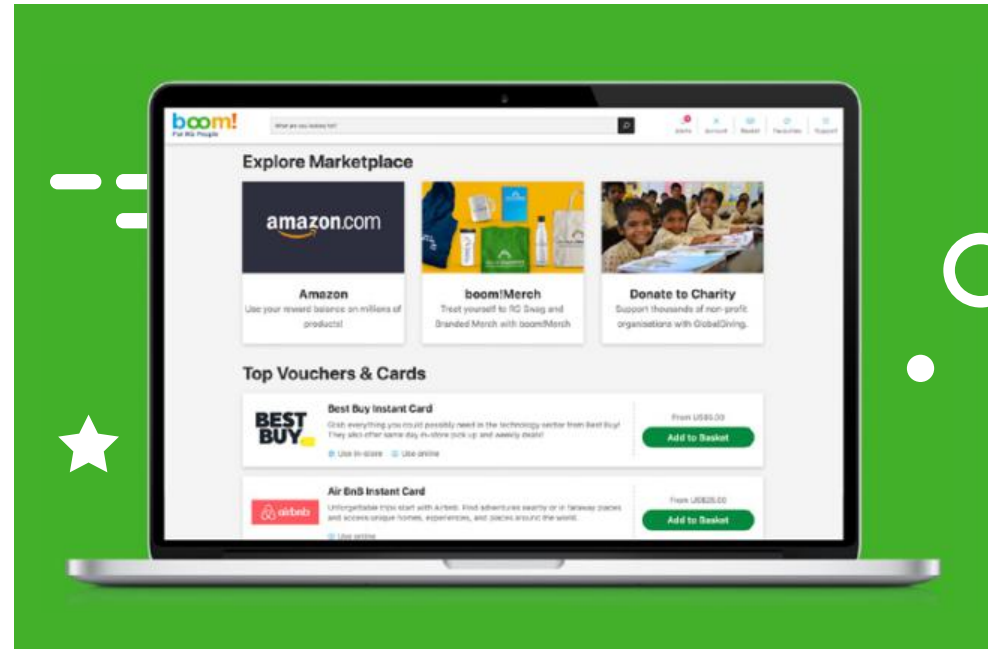
Remember, we often have both recognition and reward in top-performing programs. It can be easy for this part of the pyramid to fall flat, and that's why the redemption process for rewards needs to be just as engaging the moment your employee is recognised!

To deliver ultimate choice and immediacy in employee reward redemption, Reward Gateway offers a flexible redemption plan, including:

amazon

1m+ Products

e-Gift Cards

Company Experiences

Custom Rewards

Charitable Giving
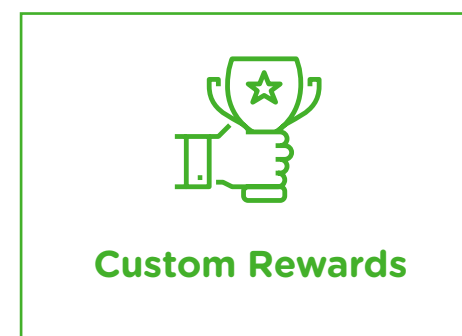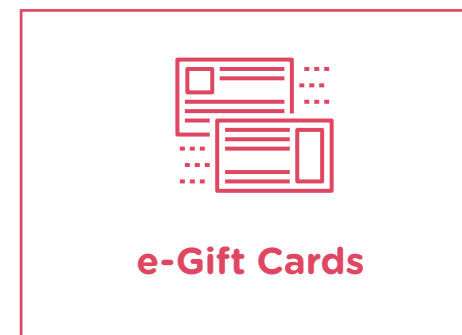
Improving the reward redemption experience through technology:

- **Online e-Gift cards and integration with Amazon.com** allow for instant reward redemption with the ultimate in selection and choice. (And yes, Prime member perks still apply!)

- **Print-on-demand swag store** means employees get exactly what they want without needing a storeroom of inventory.

- Employee's online accounts allow for **smaller, incremental awards** to be accumulated and redeemed on their own time.

- **Redeeming multiple types of rewards in one place** means employees can quickly choose a reward that fits what they most need at the moment.

The Gift That Keeps Giving: The 5 A's to Drive Consistent Usage and Adoption

While companies are increasingly dependent on a wide range of HR technology to save time and connect with people, there is one challenge in particular that continually comes up in this space – low usage.

> At Reward Gateway, we're proud to see that our clients that launched between 2020 and 2021 saw an average increase in usage of 20% from month one to month 12.

So, what are these clients doing to drive this success? We'll let you in on our secret: Our 5 A's to drive usage and adoption.

1 Awareness

People are more likely to use a platform if they know about it, and that's where your platform launch is so critical. **When first launching a platform, make sure to wow your employees and build excitement so that you're driving usage from the very first day.** Our clients talk up the program in meetings, but they also work with our design team to create communications so the platform reaches all of their workforce, whether they're hybrid workers, at a desk or working fully remotely.

> **If this is more of a 'relaunch' for you, you can always find new things to promote with your audiences, such as a seasonal campaign (we often see this in the lead up to the holidays) or, for example, new eCards that have launched alongside a values refresh. Find a theme or topic to promote and relaunch the platform with all the enthusiasm you can!**

2 Access

Is it easy for employees to participate and engage in your new programs? We often think of Access as, 'going where your people already are.' Using a mobile app or recognising and rewarding via an in-person postcard may allow the program to more quickly and consistently meet your goals, depending how your people like to be informed. We've found technology integrations as an extremely important measure to reach your people and remove any barriers to engagement, such as offering single-sign on to improve security and remove the need for multiple passwords, or integrating with MS Teams or Slack to streamline your tech stack to meet people where they already are.

3 Activity

Is the information that you're posting engaging and dynamic? Are you posting at the right frequency to engage but not overwhelm? Surveys can help you understand the needs of your employees. Additionally, our client-facing teams are there to guide clients on how to get the right people posting for the right value. Analytics on your activity can help you understand what posts get the most traction and how employees are connecting with your content to adjust and improve your communication frequency and topics to boost engagement.

4 Advocates

No one wants to be on their own island with technology, so how can you engage a larger group as spokespeople to drive usage across many departments and locations? **Many of our clients like having an employee group to generate great ideas or share program updates with employees at the smaller group level.** Additionally, you can use program leaderboards to find leadership advocates to become your partners to promote your platform from within.

5 Analytics

Finally, Analytics. **You can look at which groups are sending the most recognition and where it is going to decide where to celebrate success and where to provide reminders.** A sample metric is frequency of eCards sent. One common growing pain with our clients is employees that start with sending birthday cards with less focus on values-based recognition. While it's great to celebrate, this might mean that you need to put in some work to promote and showcase your company values so recognition is more performance-based.

A true difference maker when it comes to access is seamless use of mobile phones. **Reward Gateway's Connect+ App** allows users to view recognition, send recognition and rewards, and redeem those rewards on the spot.

Connect+
Great news travels fast

Conclusion

I hope this eBook has helped you unpack the different layers of reward and recognition you can offer to your employees. With the right technology by your side, it can be easy to put in place a successful recognition and reward (or reward and recognition!) program.

While a continuous flow of adjustments can seem like 'work,' what I often find is that our clients will roll out updates in waves to better manage their strategy to keep their employees excited, and their to-do lists short!

Remember, all of the changes you're making, whether they're simple or more comprehensive, are all in support of increasing the wellbeing, connection and engagement of your workforce to make your corner of the world a better place to work.

I hope this eBook has shown you how technology can truly help you increase the impact (and decrease the effort required!) to support a culture of consistent, continuous recognition. Our team of experts – from our Client Success Managers to our Implementation Specialists and Client Design – can be your partner on the journey to reward and recognition success.

With gratitude,

Alex Powell
Director of Client Cultural Insights
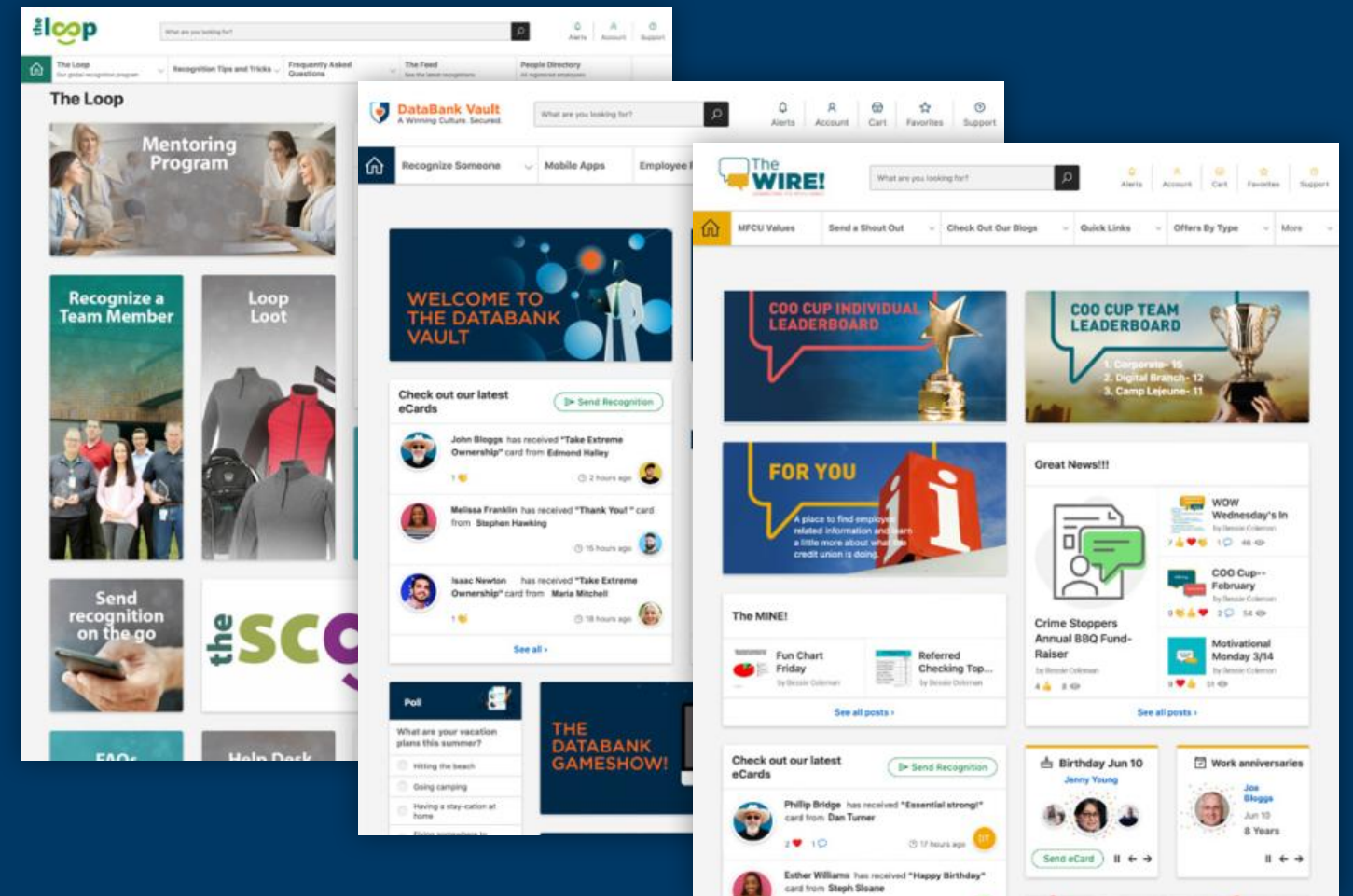
Interested in your own employee engagement solution?

Partnering with over 4,000 companies in 23 countries, we empower more than 6.5 million employees to connect, appreciate and support one another to make the world a better place to work. Our unified employee engagement hub provides the best of recognition, reward, surveys, benefits and discounts that support the overall wellbeing of our client's employees, enriching their talent acquisition, retention and values-driven growth.

Learn more at rewardgateway.com

Contact us: engage@rewardgateway.com