

# BULOVA

## Time for a Return to Authenticity

Few companies have served the incentive and recognition marketplace longer than Bulova. Despite the challenges to the corporate sales channel created by the Internet, the Great Recession and the emergence of retail gift cards, Adrienne Forrest, Vice President of Bulova's Corporate Sales division, sees signs of change: The influence of Millennials on business practices, a greater appreciation for the reward experience (and not just the reward) and a growing body of research supporting the creative and scientific use of rewards and recognition clearly distinguished from compensation or pricing.

"When you look at the Millennials today, you see an appreciation for authenticity. It's not my generation that has brought back the vinyl record, it is their generation," Forrest explains. "In the culture of the Millennials, experience and meaning are very important and I think this is rubbing off on all generations." More companies, she says, recognize this. "You look at what high tech, engineering and other companies are offering talented people in terms of perks, rewards and benefits. Why? Because talented people think nothing of leaving a job after 18 months, so organizations that need to retain them have to do more to make them feel special and fulfilled."



She says the idea of a traditional five-year award, a stalwart in the marketplace when Forrest first arrived, is now almost irrelevant. "The challenge in many areas of business is how to keep talent for even a few years."

Forrest believes that a lack of appreciation and understanding by purchasing departments for the scientific benefits of the reward experience, as well as the focus on speed, low cost and logistics in redemptions, have led to a loss of respect for what makes rewards and recognition important to businesses – the knowledge of how to construct an effective program, creatively select rewards, and ignite excitement through well-merchandised catalogs.

"Today it's all about having tens of thousands of products at the lowest price delivered the fastest," Forrest notes, "when common sense and research proves that the reason to use merchandise is precisely to distinguish it from cash, to make people feel special when the reward is received and to make sure that everyone around them are aware of how they earned the reward." While Bulova's retail customers pay considerable attention to how products are selected and merchandised to enhance the customer experience, she says she only occasionally sees such thought put into reward program selection and design.

Forrest is pleased with industry research demonstrating the importance of how rewards are presented, customized and delivered in terms of impact on recipients, and she believes Bulova's unique portfolio of time pieces, connecting its 142 years of tradition and innovation with cutting-edge design and its ability to customize both the time pieces and gift boxes to maximize the impact, provide Bulova with a competitive advantage in a time when authenticity carries more weight. "We hear that more young people are wearing watches, not only because it's not proper to pull out a smart phone in a classroom or in meetings to check the time, but because watches make a statement."

Forrest believes the industry probably could do a better job of sharing the research demonstrating the value of program design expertise and creative selection and fulfillment, but she admits that "everybody is afraid of losing business. It's easy to give in to the forces around us to take the personal part out of the business, even though that's our great strength as an industry."

As for Bulova's positioning, Forrest says it "continues to stay true to its heritage and hasn't entered the smart watch business. The desire for real, quality timepieces not for disposal, that have high perceived styling and offer value for the money, is a strong trend. Bulova is in a great position to continue its leadership position in our segment. The key to our appeal is that Bulova continues to be a recognized and trusted brand name."

Forrest says that Bulova is also committed to innovation, noting that last year the company launched the Curv collection, featuring the world's first curved chronograph movement. In keeping with its vision of combining tradition with today's fashions, Bulova has brought back Rubaiyat, the name for its first-ever woman's timepiece in 1917. Continuing its tradition of updating classic designs, Bulova says the Rubaiyat heritage has been reinvented, "fusing modern design aesthetics with deep roots of regal craftsmanship...to celebrate each pillar of empowered femininity...seductive beauty, quiet strength, delicate fluidity and freedom of self-expression."

Forrest says that what's most different today from her earlier years in the market is the proliferation of competition and distribution outlets. She notes that to differentiate corporate rewards from retail, Bulova has a line of corporate exclusive styles that are only distributed through this channel and aren't sold via retailers, adding that "these styles feature duets and dials which can be easily customized if need be."

Bulova offers various forms of customization. For watches, it offers custom imprinted and etched dials, and custom engraved case backs. For clocks, it offers custom dials and engraved logos. It also offers custom packaging and gift bags. And the company has also created an experiential program for events. "Bulova has focused on the meeting planner market for several years," says Forrest. "Bulova is the perfect choice for this growing business segment in that its various brands and price points work with any budget or style requirement. Bulova offers various options to planners. We can also offer sizing of the watches onsite for added excitement."

