

The Strategic Bonus Report 2026



How Irish Companies Use Tax-Free Rewards to Drive Retention, Performance and Culture



Discover how leading Irish employers are using tax-free rewards as a strategic lever, not just a benefit.

Why Gifting Has Become a Strategic Lever

Leading companies are shifting from one-off rewards to structured, year-round recognition strategies.

Employee Expectations Have Changed

- Employees expect recognition that is timely, flexible and meaningful
- Generic or delayed rewards have little impact

74% of employees say they would work harder if they felt better appreciated

Tax-Free Rewards Deliver More Value

- Up to €1,500 can be delivered tax-free under the Small Benefit Exemption
- No PAYE, USC or PRSI
- Employees receive the full value

More impact than a cash bonus at the same cost

Timing Drives Impact

- Recognition is most effective when delivered in the moment
- Year-end remains a key opportunity to reinforce culture and loyalty
- Increasingly used across the year, not just in December

Why Gifting Works and When It Fails



Gifting works when it is timely, relevant and easy to use. When it isn't, it can have the opposite effect.

Why Gifting Works

1. Reciprocity

When we receive a gift, we feel naturally inclined to return the gesture in the form of goodwill, loyalty, or continued business. This is a fundamental social rule hardwired into our behavior.

2. Recognition & Belonging

Gifts signal appreciation. For employees, it validates effort and reinforces their sense of belonging.

For clients, it strengthens the relationship and shows they're not just a number on a spreadsheet.

3. Emotional Anchoring

When a gift is timed well such as after a milestone, renewal, or strong performance it creates a memorable emotional "anchor".

4. Autonomy & Empowerment

This is where Swirl Gift Cards shine.

Because they're accepted anywhere Mastercard is, recipients get something far more valuable than a branded hamper: choice. Unlike store-specific gift cards or fixed gift boxes, Swirl cards give recipients the power to decide what matters to them.

When Gifting Fails

Done wrong, gifting can do more harm than good, making the recipient feel misunderstood, underappreciated, or even burdened.

Common pitfalls:

- Overly branded gifts that feel like advertising
- Assumptions about preferences
- Inconvenient delivery or redemption methods
- Delayed or impersonal gifts that feel like an afterthought

What Makes Swirl Different?

Open loop Mastercard

Spend anywhere

Simple ordering

No systems or onboarding required

Scalable

Works for 10 or 10,000 recipients

Real Results from Real Businesses

Who Uses Swirl: Customer Profiles



Service Provider | Customer Cashback Campaigns

A nationwide service provider uses Swirl Gift Cards to reward loyal customers with cashback-style bonuses.

Retail Group | 1,000+ Employees Across Ireland

One of Ireland's leading retail chains turns to Swirl for staff gifting at scale. Cards are distributed across stores nationwide, without the hassle of central distribution logistics.

Pharmaceutical Company | Long-Term Service Awards

This pharma firm uses Swirl Gift Cards as part of its employee milestone programme, offering a flexible, appreciated reward without guessing individual preferences.

Corporate Gifting Myths: Busted



Myth vs. Truth

“Gift cards are impersonal”

Swirl cards provide recipients with the freedom to select what they truly desire, making the gesture more personal, not less.

“We don’t have time to organise gifting”

With Swirl’s bulk ordering and quick turnaround, you can efficiently gift to hundreds in just minutes.

“Gifting is only for Christmas”

Gifting is appropriate throughout the year, celebrating occasions like onboarding, achieving KPIs, anniversaries, referrals, and team victories.

“Only large budgets make an impact”

A well-timed €25-€50 Swirl Gift Card can leave a more lasting impression than costly, generic gifts.

“Branded gifts show more thought”

Most branded merchandise tends to be forgotten. A Swirl card, on the other hand, is practical, appreciated, and frequently used.

How Leading Companies Approach Gifting



Prioritise Flexibility Over Fixed Rewards

High-performing companies avoid one-size-fits-all gifts. Flexible rewards increase perceived value and ensure relevance.

Move Beyond Year-End Gifting

Leading organisations reward throughout the year, aligning with real moments like performance, onboarding and milestones.

Design for Scale and Simplicity

Programmes that are easy to run are the ones that scale effectively across teams and locations.

Align Rewards with Performance and Behaviour

Link rewards to outcomes to reinforce the behaviours that drive business performance.

Deliver a Consistent, High-Quality Experience

Presentation, timing and ease of use all contribute to a stronger, more memorable impact.

Making the Business Case for Swirl



Why Companies Choose Swirl Over Alternatives

Option	Common Issues	Why Swirl Wins
Gym Memberships	Limited participation, difficult to manage	Universal and inclusive, usable anywhere
One-Store Gift Vouchers	Limited choice, low perceived value	Open-loop Mastercard, full flexibility
Branded Merch	Low usage, storage and waste issues	Practical, used and appreciated
Spot Bonuses (Cash)	Taxed, complex, sets expectations	Tax-free under SBE, no payroll involvement

How to Position Swirl Internally

Finance

Tax-efficient
Lower cost than bonuses
No payroll complexity

Leadership

Drives engagement
Reinforces culture
Easy to communicate

Board

Fair and scalable
Compliant with SBE
Fits within budget

Swirl delivers the impact of a bonus without the cost or complexity



Start Planning Your 2026 Reward Strategy

Leading Irish employers are already using tax-free rewards to drive engagement, retention and performance throughout the year.

Swirl makes this simple, scalable and compliant.

Deliver the impact of a bonus without the cost or complexity.

Join 10,000+ Irish businesses already using Swirl

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Contact: sales@swirlcard.com

Call: +353 1 687 7985

Visit: www.swirlcard.com