

9 things to consider when choosing a recognition and reward program

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Recognition should not be just a “nice-to-have.” It should fuel a company’s strategic imperatives. But not all recognition and reward programs are created equal. As organizations look to drive performance, engagement, and culture, the right partner can make all the difference. Here are nine critical considerations to help you choose a recognition and reward partner that delivers a real return on your investment.

1 Will they deliver the results your C-suite will care about?

Recognition should feel good, but it should also deliver results. Many programs focus on engagement and culture, which is important but also expected. The best ones? They go further, driving outcomes like cost savings, upselling, customer loyalty, and free cash flow.

Look for a partner that sparks behavior change through gamified missions, strategic nudges, skill-building, performance incentives, and crowdsourced innovation.

Ask vendors to show how their solution addresses your biggest business challenges. And ask yourself: Will this program generate value or just add cost?

The most expensive recognition program is the one that doesn't drive outcomes.

2 Are they financially stable?

This one is non-negotiable. Recognition programs often involve significant financial commitments, and you need to know your investment is secure. Unfortunately, not all vendors are built to last. Some have even gone out of business, taking client funds with them.

It's okay to ask tough questions; your investment deserves transparency. Ask your partner:

- What is your percentage of cash, cash equivalents, and short-term investments to deferred revenue liability?
- What is your current ratio?
- If funded by private equity, what's your ratio of dividends returned to profits?
- What is your equity (deficit) to assets ratio?

A trustworthy partner will welcome this level of scrutiny.

3 If you build it, will they come?

A recognition program is only as powerful as its participation. Launching a platform doesn't guarantee engagement, especially if employees don't know it exists or don't see the value in using it.



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Your partner should help you build awareness and excitement from day one. **That means:**

- **Strategic branding and launch planning** that captures attention and aligns with your culture
- **Ongoing communications** that keep the program top of mind across all employee groups
- **Training for employees, managers, and leaders** so everyone understands the “how” and “why” of recognition
- **Integration** into the flow of work, whether that’s Microsoft Teams, mobile apps, or physical workspaces for deskless employees

Recognition should feel like a natural part of the employee experience, not another tool to remember.

4 Is the experience tailored to each role?

Recognition should feel personal. That means tailoring the experience to different roles, goals, and motivations.

Your sales team isn’t your finance team. Your engineers aren’t your nurses.

Your program should reflect this with segmented communications, audience-smart technology, individualized goals, and experiences that uniquely resonate.

5 Will reporting and analytics drive action?

Data is only powerful if it leads to action. The best recognition programs don’t just track activity; they illuminate opportunities.

Look for a partner that delivers:

- Manager insights that guide recognition best practices and prompt timely, meaningful recognition
- Administrator dashboards that highlight program adoption, identify gaps, and showcase recognition champions
- Contextual analytics that complement other employee experience data, not replace it

Be cautious of vendors who promise that recognition data alone can tell the whole talent story. It’s a valuable signal, but it’s most effective when viewed alongside other performance and engagement metrics.

6 What level of service are you looking for?

Some vendors offer a platform and a catalog and leave the rest to you. But if you’re looking for strategic guidance, communications support, and day-to-day partnership to ensure your program achieves the desired results, make sure that’s part of the package.



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Recognition should be **easy to manage**, not another full-time job. Consider the internal resources required to run your program in the context of your overall investment.

7 Can they support all of your audiences?

Global reach

“Global” isn’t just about shipping rewards internationally. It’s about having people on the ground who understand local culture, language, and logistics. Does your partner have in-market teams to help you integrate recognition into platforms like WeChat in China, for example? Does your partner live there and know what works for that market?

Look for:

- In-country fulfillment (no third-party markups)
- Assistance in driving compliance with global best practices and regulatory factors
- Local invoicing (hello, tax savings!)
- Customer service in local languages and time zones

Deskless workers

Recognition shouldn’t stop at the office door. Retail, manufacturing, healthcare, and field teams are essential and often overlooked.

Your partner should offer:

- Mobile-first experiences
- Physical communications and recognition tools
- Ambassador networks
- Tech integrations for frontline teams
- Gamified engagement strategies

8 Will they increase or decrease your total number of vendors?

Vendor consolidation is top of mind for many organizations. The right recognition partner helps unify platforms, not multiply them.

Look for a platform that integrates and complements your current technology and can support multiple initiatives: communications, change management, incentives, and progress tracking. One tool, many outcomes.

9 Are their rewards inspiring?

Cash is easy, but it’s not always cost-effective. The most effective rewards tap into how people actually think and feel. That’s where behavioral economics comes in. Here are **three powerful principles that make rewards more meaningful and more memorable:**



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- **Reconsumption:**

When someone earns an experience, like a weekend getaway or a new pair of skis, they don't just enjoy it once. They relive it every time they talk about it, look at photos, or share the story. That's lasting impact.

- **Vividness:**

The more clearly someone can picture what they're working toward, the more motivated they'll be. A catalog full of exciting, tangible rewards sparks imagination and drives action.

- **Mental accounting:**

People often hesitate to spend money on themselves. But when they earn a reward, they give themselves permission to choose something special, something they wouldn't normally buy. That makes the reward feel even more valuable.

Ask your rewards partner:

- What research informs your reward strategy?
- How do you curate your catalog?
- How do your rewards complement compensation strategies?

It's more than adding a gift card to your wallet or submitting your weekly Amazon order. Experiential and symbolic rewards drive greater impact at a lower cost to your business.

Final thought:

Choosing a recognition and reward partner is more than a procurement decision. It's a strategic investment in your people and your business. It shouldn't be transactional; it should be transformational.

Ask the hard questions. Expect more than a platform. And partner with someone who's as committed to your success as you are.

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