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From Blasé to Bling

How to make your holiday cards shine. BY DACIA RAY

THE HOLIDAY SEASON is a good time to show your clients how much you appreciate them. It's also a great opportunity to promote yourself and your company in the form of a holiday card. While Ecard.com may sound tempting, don't do it; an e-mail is impersonal, cheap and may be worse than doing nothing, says Bill Gage, the creative director of visual communications firm Gage Design. But how do you stand out among all the elves and Rudolphs? While you're checking things off your list, keep these card tips in mind:

BE CREATIVE. "Ninety-nine percent of holiday cards are in a standard format," says Chelsea Hixon, owner of Seattle's Suite 7 Creative graphic design firm. Make more of an impact by using unusual materials, such as **wood**. Try to enhance the "unwrapping" of your holiday message by adding a detail, such as a **ribbon** closure. To really stand out, make the card interactive: include a themed quiz, calendar, CD or a "Mad Lib"-type worksheet with blanks for New Year's resolutions.

PERSONALIZE. Too much spam already fills workers' in-boxes, so be sure your card avoids appearing like a mass-market mailing; don't use the postage meter. Instead, spring for holiday stamps. Include **photos** of yourself or your employees. Address the envelopes and sign each card by hand to deliver a truly personal touch. These ideas may take longer, but will have a more lasting effect—one that just may last well into the new year.

SEND THEM OUT EARLY. Some businesses may receive a bin full of holiday cards each day once Dec. 15th hits. If your card is the first of the season, it will leave a good impression. If you've already missed the boat, think about sending a card at another time of year, perhaps for Chinese New Year in February or a spring message for May Day. **SB**

