



Editorial Perspective:  
*5 Reasons to Make Santa Claus  
Your Credit Union's Role Model*



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## 5 Reasons to Make Santa Claus Your Credit Union's Role Model

by Arnie Goldberg

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We may hate Black Friday and Cyber Monday (or hate ourselves for loving them) but they've become such established beachheads on the holiday calendar these days that we've added Gray Thursday, Small Business Saturday and Giving Tuesday just to round out the week. Can Wiped-Out Wallet Wednesday be far behind?

But visit any shopping center in America, and you'll quickly see who's really packing in the crowds. Spoiler alert: It isn't newspaper inserts, doorbuster deals or 40% off coupons—it's the Man in Red. That's right; visits and photo ops with Santa are so powerful that they lure grown adults off the sofa and out into traffic to brave crowds, parking garages and food courts with children and pets in hand.

### Ho-Ho-How to Bring Santa's Magic to Your Credit Union

That's when it occurred to me that Santa—that homespun, humble man of the people—just may have some gifts in his bag for credit unions about ways they can inspire the same fanatical loyalty and lifelong relationships that he does. I've made my list and checked it twice so here are five lessons from Santa for your credit union during the holidays and for the year ahead.

#### 1. Santa Lives and Breathes His Brand

According to *Bloomberg Businessweek*, over 90% of mall Santas working today are BYOB—Bring Your Own (Natural) Beard. Many work during the rest of the year in white collar professions such as accountant, stockbroker or realtor but take time off every holiday season to assume their Santa alter egos. Virtually all Santas working today are graduates of one of the nation's six professional Santa schools, the oldest of which was established in 1937.

That mix of mission and training serves to prepare mall Santas well for working continuous 10- to 12-hour days during the holiday season without a single day off. Yet job turnover is virtually unheard of because age, experience and the right mindset are such strong plusses in the Santa profession.

#### *What lessons can your credit union learn from Santa's iconic branding?*

- Find passionate employees and train and compensate them to represent your brand with pride and professionalism.
- Update their skill sets and equipment to reflect modern demands (for today's Santas that can mean everything from posing with pets to maintaining an impeccable image on social media to herding live reindeer).

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- Above all, commit to rewarding your veteran staff for getting better in their jobs as they log in years of age and experience.

### 2. Santa Welcomes Everyone Equally and Enthusiastically

Whether you're two or 92; whether you're an infant or grandparent, cat or dog, elf or reindeer, Santa has good cheer and a ready smile to share with you. Oh sure, that "ho, ho, ho" routine can get a little corny at times, but that's part of its charm. Santa doesn't do "trendy" and he doesn't put on airs. There's predictability to his iconic presence and a chain of continuity from one's own childhood that is very reassuring. Plus, Santa never worries about being politically correct or keeping up with the neighbors: He lives on milk and cookies, isn't the snappiest dresser, doesn't get out much, and never gives a thought to materialism when it comes to upgrading his own lifestyle.

#### *What lessons can your credit union learn from Santa's V.I.P. treatment?*

- There's never a second chance to make a first impression, so make your credit union a destination where the encounters are always upbeat and positive. Who doesn't want to visit a place, whether brick and mortar or online, where they feel welcomed and valued?
- People like to know where they stand. Delivering a constant, consistent experience is endearing and rare in this day and age. Using a signature greeting to all branch visitors, dressing your client-facing personnel in neat uniforms or making your contact center and website a pleasure to visit go a long way.
- It's never too early to build loyalty with the next generation. Being the place with the children's play area or the free lollipops can give mom and dad just the incentive they need to sit down and discuss a car loan or a mortgage. And seriously, what's not to like about free coin counting or a free pen?

### 3. Santa Is a Great Listener and a Creative Problem Solver

The average Santa will listen to more than 30,000 wishes during a typical holiday season according to the *Reader's Digest*. So chances are, this isn't the first time he has heard your kindergartner's wish for a puppy or a pony or a new iPhone 6. But you'd never know it from the careful consideration and respect that Santa gives each whispered request.

Yet Santa never grants wishes on the spot or overpromises. He doesn't prime kids for disappointment and leave their parents with the Christmas morning tears and tantrums. Instead, Santa empowers his young visitors by giving them a supportive place to voice their hopes and dreams while also giving family members the perfect opening to discuss finances and priorities.

#### *What lessons can your credit union learn from Santa's listening and problem solving skills?*

- It's important to give your members and prospects an avenue for feeling listened to and heard. Creating an appealing and non-intimidating framework for them to think about and articulate their financial goals is empowering in and of itself.

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- Providing access to financial counseling, whether in-person or online, gives financial neophytes a sense of control by giving them "big picture" structure.
- Once developed, a member's financial roadmap can help put everyone at your credit union on the same page to coordinate onboarding and cross-selling activities according to a master plan.

### 4. Santa Is the Ultimate Team Player

It takes a village to create delightful member product and service experiences, and Santa's village at the North Pole provides a great role model. Santa knows that his December 24<sup>th</sup> deadline is cast in stone so he creates a passionate sense of mission among his elves and reindeer to get the job done on time and on budget. He motivates his team with a generous attitude, a flat organization structure and lots of treats from Mrs. Claus's kitchen. His trust, in turn, inspires his team to go the extra mile every year to achieve success against impossible odds.

#### *What lessons can your credit union learn from Santa's team player attitude?*

- Setting ambitious but attainable goals inspires a sense of common mission and purpose.
- Building project teams and trusting them to deliver brings out the best in your staff.
- Many hands make light work, so find ways to involve everyone in your desired outcome(s) and recognize them for their hard work.

### 5. Santa Is a Master of Logistics and Omni-Channel Delivery

Santa may not look it but he is one seriously disciplined dude when it comes to time management and outcome thinking. To paraphrase the old FedEx ad slogan, Santa knows that his gifts "absolutely, positively have to be there overnight" and that mandate dictates his entire approach. If there isn't a chimney, he uses the door. He recruits and coordinates legions of onsite parent helpers to assemble the bikes and hem the princess costumes. If he doesn't have time to eat the whole cookie, he takes a bite. And when you satellite track his progress through the new NORAD mobile app, you'll see that he uses old-school carrots to always, always keep those reindeer moving.

#### *What lessons can your credit union learn from Santa's omni-channel delivery system?*

- Start with a member focus and use whatever channels necessary to get the job done right.
- Retain the old-school methods that work but supplement them with new technology.
- Never, never, never give up until you cross the finish line. Then wake up and do it all again next year!



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### **For More Information**

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### **About Advisors Plus**

Advisors **Plus** was established in 2004 to provide consulting and marketing services to credit unions. Our range of services covers the key areas of strategy, credit cards, debit and checking, marketing, contact center, operations, and branch sales.

The experienced consultants at Advisors **Plus** work with a credit union's staff through the entire process from project analysis to implementation and management. Our goal is to ensure that each credit union client achieves sustainable business growth, exceptional member experiences and operational efficiencies.

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