



# Gift Certificates

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Innkeepers traditionally offer Gift Certificates as either a marketing or compensation tool. In those unexpected situations when a reservation must be cancelled and the room is left unfilled – a gift certificate is offered in lieu of returning a deposit and to ensure a returning (rather than unhappy) guest. To help drum up local business, gift certificates are offered to prominent businesses or maybe the chamber of commerce. Current guests often enjoy purchasing gift certificates to give away for birthday or anniversaries. Following are some helpful technology tools to assist you in managing and marketing gift certificate sales.

## Professional Presentation


For any property, their image is important to maintain from the moment a guest makes their reservation until they check-out of their room and say goodbye to the innkeeper! Several tools are available for you to produce the custom look you want to impress upon the gift certificate recipient. One program that quickly and easily creates a professional printed certificate is Microsoft Publisher, which many innkeepers may have loaded as part of their Microsoft Office software.

If you own Microsoft Publisher – here's the hint you need to get started:

Start Publisher. In the **New Publication** task pane, under **New from a design**, click **Publications for Print**, and then click **Gift Certificates** and the design you want.

## Selling Certificates from the Web

If you already accept online reservations, the next and most logical step is to offer Gift Certificate purchases from your web site. After receiving a purchase from your web site, you can mail out the actual printed certificate. Here are a few tips to keep in mind.

1. Be sure you have a secure order form. Some webmasters and online reservation vendors offer a ready-made secure option for selling gift certificates. If you have a webmaster build a form for you, be sure it uses secure technology. You can verify this by viewing whether or not the  symbol appears at the bottom of your web page screen. You should also see a message that verifies you are entering a secure connection.
2. If offering to print and mail certificates, don't forget to include a charge for postage and handling.
3. Be sure to include any restrictions that apply to redeeming the Gift Certificate, such as advance reservation or minimum stay requirements.

## Recording Gift Certificate Sales

If you issue a significant number of gift certificates for room rentals, it's very helpful to record the sale details. If you own reservation or point of sale software, this can be used to track gift certificate value, expiration date, purchase amount, certificate number and name of recipient.

## Gift Certificate Programs

Many bed and breakfast directories and association web sites offer gift certificate sales that can be redeemed at any participating property. This can be a great way to attract new business to your inn – be sure that the program's requirements work well with your existing policies. Usually the association or directory will process the sale. The guest then typically presents the Gift Certificate as partial or full payment depending on the value. The innkeeper then submits the certificate for reimbursement less a commission or processing fee.

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## Perfect Rewards and Incentives

Gift certificates can be used for much more than offering discounted stays or as a gift items for guests to purchase. What would entice your guests to upgrade their room? Or for reservations made mid-week? Instead of offering a gift certificate usable only towards your own room rentals, how about offering a gift certificate that would entice or reward your guests? You can provide Gift Certificates for local use, such as restaurants or event tickets. The award doesn't need to be in large dollar amounts to be effective. Just imagine that you offer a gift certificate towards a favorite-ticketed event in your area. Suddenly, your property becomes more attractive, because you are offering a "discount" towards an event your guest had already planned in their itinerary.

New web-based gift certificate programs are also available for your guest to *select their gift certificate of choice*. Hallmark company, known worldwide for cards and specialty gifts has launched a new program to help businesses reward their favorite customers! You can create a great referral program by rewarding every referral with a \$10 gift certificate. Following are a few ways you can offer gift certificates as incentives for repeat and increased business.

Offer a gift certificate...

- For each reservation over a pre-set dollar amount.
- For reservations during slow periods.
- To increase occupancy for a specific room
- As a "thank you" gift for a very loyal guest, or a guest who makes great referrals!

These popular "e-certificates" can be redeemed at a large variety of over 300 national stores. Certificates can even be combined for larger purchases. Visit <http://www.giftcertificates.com> for details about how to offer these incentives to your guests! They are easy to purchase, and just as easy for your guest to redeem at the store of their choice.

*GraceSoft provides desktop and web-based Easy InnKeeping software solutions to the bed and breakfast industry. For more information about technology for innkeepers, visit [www.easyinnkeeping.com](http://www.easyinnkeeping.com) or call 1-888-781-1086.*