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## Build Your Future By Celebrating Your Past

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As HVAC markets have become more competitive, many of you have focused on ways to strengthen your customer relationships. One pretty simple method is to throw a party. And what better excuse than to celebrate your company's anniversary.

You'll notice I didn't specify which anniversary. That's because it doesn't matter. Once you recognize that you're really doing it to pat your customers on the back, not yourselves, there's no better anniversary than this one. Like anything else, you can make it as simple or ambitious as you'd like.

Don't get stuck thinking it has to be extraordinary. But do take some time to think about what you hope to accomplish. For Nella Mills Mahoney, service manager of Abbott and Mills in Newburgh, NY, that was pretty straightforward. "We could have had a 60 year anniversary and said 'we've been I business 60 years, aren't we great?' But what we really wanted to say was "We've been I business 60 years, thank you very much."

Their anniversary celebration provides some great lessons for those of you who'd like to show your customers some appreciation and get some marketing bang for your buck at the same time.

Ralph L. Mills, the company's general manger, is quick to single out the most important key to success. "From the beginning, our employees were very involved in planning and organizing the event. Some of them worked after hours on the party, doing tasks such as

selecting prizes, making food arrangements, and organizing the promotions. It not only spread out the work load, it got everyone excited."

Their creativity showed up in a number of ways. This was their diamond anniversary. Leading up to the celebration, they placed diamond stickers randomly on customers' bills and delivery tickets. Customers could come to the office and redeem them for premiums like coffee mugs, beach towels, piggy banks, etc. Not extravagant, but a nice surprise that generated lots of good will and face to face conversations.

They promoted their event via their newsletter, in ads on the radio, and with invitations and statement stuffers. They made arrangements with a local jeweler to donate a real diamond. That diamond was raffled off along with a number of cubic zirconium. The only way to determine if you had won the Real McCoy was by bringing the stone back to the jeweler for appraisal (they got the diamond; he got enormous traffic through his store). The jeweler agreed to place all stones in either a man's tie clasp or woman's pendant for free.

Abbott & Mills also invited heating equipment representatives from Energy Kinetics and Franco Belge to demonstrate their systems. Employees demonstrated a Weil-McLain boiler with a Heatway Snowmelting System. The company also increased incentives given to employees for bringing in new accounts during the months preceding the event.

### *The bottom line*

Did all of the hoopla pay off? You tell me. Over 600 people came to the celebration-almost 10% of their client base (along with some non-customer friends.) The company still gets cards and comments about how terrific the day was and how unusual for a company to do something like this.

- ❖ One employee was so charged up he actually recruited an EMT volunteer as a new customer, while he was being taken to the hospital for chest pains!
- ❖ They sold three new systems that day, and closed several other deals that had been pending.
- ❖ And most of all, according to Ralph Mills, it's been a great morale booster for the staff. The feelings of pride, uniqueness and accomplishment linger months after the event itself. Now that's something worth celebrating!