

BK, Culver's add eGifting

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In July, Cold Stone Creamery launched a social media application that allows customers to send a gift to their friends via Facebook or email. The eGift program is part of First Data Corporation's Social Marketplace, and helps drive in-store annual unit volumes and franchisee profitability.

Now, two other quick-service players — Burger King and Culver's — have joined the eGift Social Marketplace through First Data or Bank of America Merchant Services, the largest U.S. merchant acquirer.

Through the program, Burger King is offering an item-level Whopper sandwich with a choice of 18 different holiday e-cards. Culver's is offering item-level gifts such as ButterBurgers, Wisconsin cheese curds and fresh frozen custard.

Cold Stone Creamery continues to offer item-level gifts such as ice cream Creations and shakes.

In the restaurant industry, Boston Market and Joe's Crab Shack have also jumped on board, as have retail locations Kmart, Sears, Sephora, Dots and f.y.e.

"These are household-name merchants who recognize the scale and power of social platforms like Facebook and the potential for gift-giving in that virtual world," said Dom Morea, First Data division manager of Mobile Commerce Solutions. "Just in time for the holidays, consumers will now have the opportunity to give a wide variety of eGifts to friends and family using our eGift Social technology."

How the program works

Customers access the eGift Social application through merchants' Facebook page or website and select friends to send gifts to either by adding them from Facebook or entering their e-mail address. Consumers can also access the service directly [online](#).

The sender selects which product or virtual gift card they would like their friend to receive, adds a personal message and proceeds through a secure checkout process.

The recipient then receives an alert via Facebook or e-mail saying they have received a gift, the account number and redemption instructions. The recipient can then redeem the eGift item by using the account number at the point of sale at the participating merchant location. The transaction process is done through First Data's proprietary technology.

Benefits

According to research firm Inside Network Inc., the U.S. market for virtual goods is currently estimated at \$1.6 billion. Social networking sites account for approximately half the total market for virtual goods — twice as much as one year ago.

Inside Facebook has estimated that consumers spent \$10 million on virtual goods through applications on the Facebook platform in 2009. The eGift Social solution takes this trend to the next level by moving purchased virtual gifts into the physical world.