# Unexpected Gifts

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**Abstract**

Customer retention is critical, yet conventional loyalty tools usually rely on advertised, purchase-contingent incentives. This research examines a novel retention strategy, unexpected gifts, defined as unannounced and unconditional items included in online orders. Using data from a field experiment on a large online grocery platform and a laboratory study, we find that receiving an unexpected gift increases consumers' subsequent purchase likelihood, purchase frequency, and product variety. Effects vary by customer type, order context, and gift features. Lab evidence shows that the effect of unexpected gifts is amplified by surprise, which strengthens emotional connection to the firm. These findings reveal a non-transactional pathway through which gifts influence behavior and suggest that unexpected gifts offer a cost-effective retention strategy.



**Track:** Relationship Marketing