

Gift cards: impersonal cop-out or satisfying solution?

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Contributing Writer

Searching through store after store, trying to find the perfect gift for a whole list of friends can be exhausting. The gift card offers a solution for everyone, even those who usually are hard to please. With an easy gift that will delight anyone, why spend time looking for something that recipients might not like or use?

Sophomore Priya Shah says she buys gift cards because of the convenience and versatility.

"I buy gift cards because they are easy to buy and aren't too personal and can be given to anyone," Shah said.

Some students agree, but say that the flexibility can be personal or impersonal, depending on how and why they are given.

"It depends because if you know someone really likes a store, then it's a good gift, but sometimes it can be a lazy way to give a gift," freshman Anne O'Farrell said.

Junior Katie Cassara says gift cards are a

great gift for anyone, not a lazy cop-out.

"You're still thinking about them," said Cassara. "You give them the opportunity to get what they want."

According to a recent National Retail Federation survey, gift card sales are expected to continue to rise above 2006's record-breaking level and are likely to be the most popular gift this holiday season.

As gift card popularity rises, so do new options. Gift cards are becoming even more readily available.

"Now you can get gift cards from anywhere. It makes it a lot more accessible. It's kind of easier. You can just go to Walgreens," senior Brittany Lewin said.

In addition to local pharmacies, gift cards can be found just about anywhere, including many stores, malls and even banks. These more general gift cards can be used at a wider variety of stores and often online.

"I think that gift cards for malls or bank-issued are better so you can spend it wherever you want," Cassara said.

However, the broad array of options that come with these purchases may lack



Logue photo by John Beyer

SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP? Would you rather spend hours searching for the perfect gift or minutes picking up a gift card for that hard-to-please friend?

that personal touch.

"[Bank-issued gift cards] would make me feel like the buyer didn't really know me," Lewin said. "It's impersonal."

While gift cards can seem like the perfect gift for anyone, before buying a gift card, it is important to consider the cons to this seemingly straightforward gift,

like activation or inactivity fees.

For example, Woodfield Mall gift cards charge a \$2 fee per month starting 12 months after the purchase date.

"[The recipient] would be cheated out of their gift," Lewin said. "If someone says that they're giving you a \$20 gift card, you should get a \$20 gift card."



Photo courtesy of Autumn Spensieri

SMILE LIKE YOU MEAN IT. Seniors Alex Karambelas, Bridget Morton, Chelsea Insprucker, Jordan Gorrell and Autumn Spensieri pose in their Halloween costumes before a Dreams for Darfur fundraising event.

Dreams for Darfur fundraising events prove successful

Gloria Hong
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With 75 members, five officers and one sponsor, Dreams for Darfur lacks school sponsorship, but participants say they make up for it with determination, hard work and creativity.

The club, which spread through Facebook and posters promoting meetings, already has earned over \$3,000 to help the Sudanese crisis.

They hope to collect at least \$10,000 before sending it to World Vision, an organization that increases the donations eightfold to help relief efforts in Darfur.

"Half of our goal is to increase awareness, and the other half is to raise funds, but each half is just as important as the other," said senior Chelsea Insprucker, the president of the club.

For their first fundraising event, Dreams for Darfur went on a neighborhood campaign in a subdivision of the intersection of Ela and Algonquin, earning over \$600 in one afternoon.

The club then recruited four local bands to perform at its Oct. 26 benefit concert at senior Autumn Spensieri's house. With the help of 20 volunteers, charging admission helped collect over \$2,000 by the end of the night.

"We had a good turnout, and it was really moving to see local bands play for a cause," Insprucker said. "Some of the bands wrote songs about Darfur for the event."

One of the bands that performed at the concert, Washro, consists of four Fremd students and one New Trier student. Senior Ande Valde, a member of the band, created the rough draft of the lyrics for their Darfur songs.

"We wanted the lyrics to kind of hit people hard and leave them with a lasting impression of what's going on

over there," Valde said. "They might know of Darfur, but they may not know what exactly the problem is."

Although Dreams for Darfur has been successful in collecting donations through events like the neighborhood walk and concert, they face challenges in coming up with everyday fundraising ideas due to the fact that they are not a school-sponsored club.

"A lot of our members come up to us with suggestions such as selling suckers, but we aren't allowed to collect money on school property because we're not school sponsored," said Alex Karambelas, the vice-president of the club. "We feel like we are letting our members down by not taking their suggestions."

In addition to being unable to sell items on school property, they aren't allowed to post Darfur awareness posters around the school.

"There are just a lot of limitations, and it's so hard to have so many closed doors when we are trying to help people who are getting killed," Insprucker said.

Despite the club's disadvantages, Dreams for Darfur continues to find alternative ways to fundraise for their cause, like tomorrow's holiday caroling. Members will divide into groups and go to neighborhoods in Palatine and Hoffman Estates, encouraging residents to donate.

"We're very grateful to have the roots of our club centered around giving and not receiving. We aren't based on a point system, and members can't be kicked off," Karambelas said. "We encourage participation throughout the year, and anyone can join at any time."

Students interested in supporting Darfur victims should email dreamsfordarfur@gmail.com or attend their meetings, which are held every other Thursday at 7 a.m. in room 258. For additional information, visit dreamsfordarfur.googlepages.com.

Bollywood bonanza: East meets West

When I enter AMC on Saturday nights, I feel more like I'm in a crowded Bombay cinema hall than a popular suburban hotspot on the other side of the world.

Bollywood, the equivalent of Hollywood based in Bombay, has developed since the talkies of the 1930s to become a major staple in Indian culture. And with recent releases like *Om Shanti Om* grossing more on their opening weekends in the U.S. than Tom Cruise's own *Lions to the Lambs*, it's hard to deny that this phenomenon is dancing its way into the states as well.

I'll admit shamelessly that many times you can find me standing smack in the middle of the aforementioned crowd. And why not? Over the years, those classic Bollywood scenes—the incessant song in the street, dance atop the train and bellow from the mountaintop—have formed a permanent place in my heart.

I've grown up on Bollywood. This vibrant world of music and melodrama is, for me, a tie to the traditions of the homeland I left 14 years ago. My mother swears I learned to speak my native tongue while watching my favorite films, and I discovered (rather repeatedly) that there are many translations for the word "love" in Hindi.

Some films, notably duds like *Bride and Prejudice*, are not real Bollywood. Yet a common misconception of Bollywood is that it runs about as deep as the puddles left over from last week's snowfall.

And while some movies fit easily into this stereotype, films like Deepa Mehta's trilogy *Fire, Earth and Water* and the Oscar-nominated *Lagaan* present a country's culture, its unrelenting status quo and controversial social and political issues that still plague India today.

So go ahead. Take a chance. Instead of catching rotting repeats like *Saw IV*, try something new and sneak into one of the theaters featuring the latest blockbuster from the Asian subcontinent. No worries. No one will find out.

And even if they do, don't sweat it. At least you might spend a Saturday night laughing and crying (to subtitles) as have some of my other American friends I've initiated into this captivating world that is Bollywood.

Neha Awati

