

10 Tips and Ideas for a Successful Company Anniversary

We asked the experts at History Factory to share their insights on how to honor your family business's legacy and milestones:

Whether your family business is commemorating 25 years, 75 years, 100 years or more, your future stands on the principles and innovations that made your company the great institution it is today. Your past reveals the soul of your company and fuels your vision for what's next. An anniversary can be a powerful catalyst to inspire transformation, impelling you to engage your entire organization, customers and partners in a bold plan to move forward.

We've had the honor of interviewing more than 80 executives who embraced the challenges and opportunities that come with leading an anniversary campaign. They have openly shared lessons learned about what worked, what didn't, and why.

Here are 10 things to consider when planning your company anniversary program:

1. Start planning early

What's the biggest lesson learned of leaders and managers who have gone through the process of planning and implementing an anniversary? Start early. Time is your greatest asset. In our experience, the companies that are the most successful are also the most proactive. Starting early gives ample time to research, share opinions, ask questions and analyze alternatives. If you wait, time may become a liability, limiting both the scope of what you can do and potentially the insights needed to drive a powerful program.

On the flip side, we've seen companies start too early, which can lead to lost momentum and inefficiency. After all, sometimes there's no better motivator than a deadline. Two years seems to be the happy medium. Of

course, the more complex the organization, the more time you should try to build in to avoid complications.

2. Get a clear mandate from executive management

Leaders intuitively understand that anniversaries are once-in-a-generation milestones. Understanding how they want to leverage this opportunity will help inform everything you do. Be sure to remind them that an anniversary isn't just a celebration—it's a strategic opportunity. The more the management team is energized by the anniversary and how it can help move the organization forward, the better.

3. Plan with strategic intent

Anniversaries really do work, and they act as a catalyst for corporate change. By all means, focus on the tangible deliverables—the events, the campaigns, the content, the publications and/or exhibits—but realize that it's not a case of celebrating an anniversary just because you happen to have one coming up. Look at your short- and mid-term strategic goals and plans, and ensure that your anniversary strategy and the resultant tactics work hard to help you achieve those goals. Some companies use their anniversary as a means to announce major changes: new initiatives, products, locations. Others use it to change business as usual and become more forward thinking and more agile.

4. Make your anniversary matter to those who matter most

As you develop your plan, prioritize your audiences. Based on your business and culture, where can the anniversary create the most impact? For family businesses for instance, there's often many long-tenured employees and deep ties to communities—especially where many family members, retirees and large employee bases call home. While it may sound

counter intuitive, employees with shorter tenures and communities in newer markets may be as or more important. Prioritizing your audiences in alignment with your goals will provide criteria for what you do and, as importantly, what you don't do (and where you focus your resources).

5. Leverage what you are already doing

Avoid the temptation to execute too many tactics and activities. What you choose to do should be deeply engineered into the common pattern of your business. If you have regular communications to customers, it's possible to "anniversarize" them so they include anniversary messaging while continuing business as usual. If you regularly stage an employee event, by all means keep it on the calendar, but think about how you can make your anniversary year's edition different, special, memorable. Try something new in your planning, but stick to what you know is also important.

6. Create a moment of great optimism

Understand that an anniversary is one of the rare events in an organization's life that is purely positive. It should inspire pride and extraordinary participation from every leader, employee and partner.

A successful corporate anniversary campaign leverages and extends to all target audiences whether internal or external. An optimistic workforce often acts as the best brand ambassadors.

7. Don't mistake the anniversary as the story

Yes, your organization is turning X years old, but that's not the story - it's the excuse to tell a story. We have a long-standing mantra when it comes to anniversaries: "You're not good because you're old. You're old because you're good." The anniversary is the opportunity to break out of the year-over-routine with a once-in-a-generation spotlight. Make sure that the spotlight is on the story you want to tell and not just how old you are.

8. Carefully craft your story

More than anything, an anniversary is an ideal time for an organization to tell its story—and update it to reflect where it's been and where it's going. Chances are your organization has become more diverse, decentralized

and complex. Carefully crafting your story provides a tremendous opportunity to update, modernize or wholly transform the narrative of your company. And keep on mind: If you don't craft your story, someone else will, and it may not be the story you want told.

9. Create a lasting legacy

Be a good host, not a hero. Focus on giving and not receiving. Ask yourself: What does our organization uniquely have that we can give to help solve pressing societal issues? Community and cause-related components of an anniversary program are important, as both a chance to give back, and as a reminder of what good the company does year in and year out for society at large. Make your anniversary-year community outreach special. Encourage the company's charitable efforts to be even bigger in an anniversary year. These sorts of initiatives often have a lasting positive impact for a much wider audience than most of your anniversary programs.

10. Focus on the future you desire

An anniversary allows you to tell stories from your company's heritage that demonstrate how you have continually been able to adapt to change and carve out success for today and tomorrow. As we say, Start with the Future and Work Back™—first, determine where your company would like to be before you start searching for examples to get you there. Your search for stories should be focused on reinforcing the direction your company intends to go, rather than simply looking at where you've been. This will help determine success metrics as well as provide much-needed focus for your research and the stories you tell about your company.

About History Factory: We Start With the Future and Work Back

We realized early on that corporations could employ their most underused asset — their heritage — to achieve future success. How? By focusing on long-term business goals and using historical assets to guide and support efforts to achieve them. Learn more at: www.historyfactory.com