



Cause Marketing Should Be Ongoing And The Right Fit

By Lisa A. Rozycki



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In the last several years, I have seen everyone from funeral home directors to bartenders offering discounts on products and services in exchange for donations for disaster victims. I can remember during the September 11th terrorist attacks, a printer offering a percentage of proceeds on the sale of promotional products going to September 11th causes.

“Cause marketing” is the name for trying to build profit through linking business to charity. Many businesses, large and small, engage in cause marketing and there is a good reason. Where there is money, business will follow. According to *Independent Sector*, the vast majority of Americans, about 70 percent, give to at least one charity per year averaging \$1,075 or 2.1 percent of the typical household income. This represents a significant sacrifice involving a significant amount of money. Numerous other studies show that a majority of Americans would like to do business with brands associated with reputable, responsible charitable causes they care about.

Businesses linking themselves to charitable causes and giving back to the communities in which they live are admired. However, where cause marketing is most successful is in ongoing philanthropic programs, rather than programs that result immediately following current events as we’ve seen, for example, with Hurricane Katrina and the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake that resulted in a tsunami.

Here are a few helpful tips for engaging in cause marketing:

- **Identify a cause that fits your business:** A cause is not something your marketing department dreams up. The cause should represent the principles and values of your organization, your leadership, and your employees, everyday. Pick an issue, *and then* pick your partner(s).
- **Make sure you have a plan.** Cause marketing should be treated like any other strategic business initiative. Develop a plan six months to a year in advance. Make sure you set clear business goals and social objectives, who the target market is that you want to influence, and the criteria on which decisions will be based.
- **Make your current assets work for you.** Whether it is a company spokesperson, newsletters, a web site, or a product, use all of the available resources at your exposure to support the cause.
- **Check legal requirements for location and situation.** Law enforcement officials are increasingly scrutinizing programs where marketing and charitable causes meet. Make sure you and the nonprofit satisfy all applicable laws including consumer protection laws on false advertising, deceptive trade practices, and consumer fraud.
- **Earn the praise.** Your number one priority should be to help a charity or to accomplish a real societal goal. Even though Americans want to support businesses that have a social conscious, critics are becoming increasingly vocal about cause marketing that is engaged in more so to gain favor from customers rather than supporting a charitable cause.

Increasingly, cynics think it is inherently wrong for businesses to be telling customers how great they are for gathering donations for disaster relief efforts, for example, when they have never supported a philanthropic cause before. They just happen to be jumping on the bandwagon with everyone else after a well-publicized disaster, offering a portion of the sale to a charity, when what they're most likely after is some additional public relations and the sale of more pens!

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