

Charity as a Marketing Strategy

Many companies are looking for ways to boost their image in the eyes of their consumers and some of them have concluded that rather than improve service, lower prices, or enhance the customer experience in some other meaningful way, the proper path to consumer appreciation is demonstrating support for a charity – and in many cases giving consumers the chance to support the charity as well.

Perhaps the somewhat sarcastic phrasing of the paragraph above reveals Tudog's view of "cause marketing". While we acknowledge that in some situations and for some companies the support of a charity can be an effective marketing strategy, our experience has shown that in most circumstances cause marketing does very little for the company, the consumer, or, unfortunately, the charity.

There are a lot of cynical people who claim that cause marketing is really about the company and not the cause. They point to the charities selected, such as AIDS and Breast Cancer and submit that these are charities that allow for the backdoor discussion of sex. They ask why, when more women die annually of heart failure, no major company has created a pink ribbon campaign for heart disease.

They may be right, but it's beside the point. Cause marketing is all about doing good and doing well at the same time. If Breast Cancer is a bigger seller, then the marketers are right to support it. There is nothing that says that the charities we support need to be most urgent or worthy. And besides, who would make those determinations?

The problem Tudog has with cause marketing is that all too often it is so poorly implemented that it is ineffective for both the company and the charity. It is not important whether consumers want the chance to support a cause as they shop. It is not even that important whether they would prefer one company over another if one supports a charity and the other does not. These issues are insignificant against a backdrop of poor planning and execution.

One challenge with cause marketing is that the marketer thinks that the fundamentals can be compromised because the appeal of the charity will carry the weight. This is completely untrue. Cause marketing, like every other type of marketing, requires the proper planning and attention. If you want to engage in cause marketing, Tudog suggests you keep these 6 points in mind.

1. Pick the Right Charity – Keep in mind what your reasons behind selecting a cause marketing strategy are as you select the charity you are going to support. The idea behind the campaign is to raise awareness of your company as a civic minded and provide your customers with the opportunity to learn about a cause that needs attention. You may even sell select items that provide consumers with the chance to contribute through their purchase. With all of this in mind, you need to make sure that the charity you select is consistent with your brand. For this reason many companies select charities that are environmentally focused or aid a disease that touches their demographic. The goal is to find the charity that means something to your customers, something to you, and that wishes to gain exposure through a campaign with your company. If you make it a win-win-win between your company, your customers and the charity, then everyone will be happy and the campaign will be effective.

2. **Be Genuine** – Nothing turns consumers off more than the appearance of exploiting a just cause in the interest of profit. You cannot give the appearance that your sole objective is enhancing your image. You need to make people believe you truly care about the cause. How do you do that? Pick a charity you truly care about. It isn't so hard to show you're being genuine when you actually are.

3. **Don't be Falsely Modest** – Supporting a charity is a nice thing. For all you know you make actually be a good person. You may not want to let the whole world know, but it can't hurt to let your customers know. If you are falsely modest people will suspect that you are actually seeking praise. If you acknowledge your good deed, people will assume it was for the right reasons. There is nothing wrong with admitting that you are doing something nice for a cause that means something to you.

4. **Know Your Goals** – Cause marketing is, after all, marketing, and you need to treat it as you would any other aspect of your comprehensive, integrated marketing plan. You need to make sure that the goals for the cause campaign are clear and that the tactics to reach those goals are in place and able to be implemented. Keep in mind that charity campaigns are not typically launched as a means of increasing sales. Rather, the reasons you might opt for a cause campaign gave much more to do with brand and reputation than bottom line. If you're lucky you may earn some points with your employees who, perhaps, are proud to work for a conscientious company. Oh, and on some level at least, the good you are doing should also be a goal.

5. **Keep it a Business Relationship** – Your interest in working with a charity is noble. If you lose sight of the fact that this is a business deal you will find your goals compromised and in the end the campaign will fail. There is nothing wrong with having a business relationship with a charity. There are a number of interests that they have met by working with you,, such as increased awareness, credibility by being associated with your brand, and perhaps some funds your activities provide. Your desired advantages must also be realized or the relationship will not sustain itself. You need to be certain that you judge and operate the campaign as you would any other. Only then will you be able to justify its continued existence.

6. **Use Business Metrics** – Like every other marketing endeavor you need to make sure you put into place the metrics you will need to measure the results of your effort. You need to make certain that the positive image and appearance of goodwill is being effectively communicated to your market and, more importantly, that your market is receiving the message and accepting it.

It is Tudog's view that the only real reason to engage in charity marketing is if you want to support a charity. There are no advantages to charity marketing that cannot be achieved via other marketing strategies. Your customers engage your company for the benefits they derive. You either solve a problem they have or satisfy a need of theirs. They do not come to you to engage in a charitable endeavor. However, if your company wishes to do something good and demonstrate that you are giving back, you will find that your customers will be happy to see that you are more than just a great company – you are a generous member of the community.