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To Give or Not To Give...

by Carolyn West Price



Is it charity? Is it marketing? Or, is it both? With the new year upon us, here's another resolution I would suggest to each and every business. Give and ye shall receive.

To that end, "cause-related marketing" simply makes good business sense, because we, as individuals or business owners, like to do business with businesses that care and give back, rather than those which just take, take, take.

Specifically, cause-related marketing is simply what it sounds like, a for-profit entity teams up with usually a non-profit for mutual benefit. Another way to describe it is something similar to a public-private partnership--an area of cooperative marketing also growing in popularity.

Here's an example of how easy it can be. MinuteMaid donates a percentage of proceeds from its orange juice sales to the US Olympic Team, in exchange for the opportunity to include, "Proud Sponsor of the US Olympic Team" in all of the marketing for an agreed-upon period of time.

On a more local level, Chesapeake Knife & Tool commissioned an artist to create a commemorative poster to benefit the C&O Canal Restoration program through the National Park Foundation; the posters were available in their area stores and through the Foundation for a donation with all proceeds being donated. In exchange, Chesapeake undoubtedly got some good public relations exposure, and simply felt their investment was a way to give back.

You may be thinking, gee, I

can't do something that large, and that's okay. Look at giving in terms of what you can do. Volunteer yourself or some of your staff members to serve on a local board of directors or committee. Donate a product or service to a non-profit's fund raising auction so everyone who attends is aware that you support the cause--giving you more name recognition and goodwill that can't be bought with traditional advertising.

Regardless of your choice of causes or the level of support or partnership you provide, here are a few considerations: don't overextend yourself, volunteering for everything (the classic "I don't know how to say no" syndrome); choose your causes strategically so you are not only giving, but in a position to receive as well (either through general public relations or networking/personal visibility); don't select a cause you're really not passionate about because it will be hard to get enthused about giving your time away if it is not something near and dear to your heart and a bad impression (someone who makes commitments and doesn't come through) is worse than no impression.

And, last but not least, a lesson from a friend that I pass along to you: knowing that cause-related marketing is growing in popularity, non-profits are becoming better at soliciting businesses for their creative marketing assistance.

Given that, we, as business people, are facing an epidemic of requests, so here's what my friend does in January each year. He contact-

ed all non-profits that called him during the previous year and said that within the next 30 days he would be making his non-profit commitments for the entire year (In other words, he said, "get your request in now or don't call me later in the year.")

With that, he could strategically pick what he wanted to do or not to do, gave them all a fair chance (rather than one calling just after the other got a commitment from him, only to find the well dry). In turn, he was able to plan his entire marketing and public relations program, with appropriate peaks and valleys, around the events and/or donations he elected to make. Sounds awfully organized to me! Maybe we should all learn from this now happily retired friend...but even if we don't, let us learn that giving is great, but a win-win business is even better.

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