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Kim T. Gordon: Marketing

Cause Marketing Matters to Consumers

Social responsibility makes consumers take notice. Follow these 5 steps to create a successful cause-based marketing campaign.

By Kim T. Gordon | October 14, 2008

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In this new era of social responsibility, what you don't do can cost you. "Cause marketing" is now the norm, and customers who visit your website and see your advertising want to know that you share their desire to make the world a better place by supporting an important cause.

If your business or brand doesn't stand for a cause, consumers may turn to your competitors. The number of consumers who say they would switch from one brand to another if the other brand were associated with a good cause has climbed to 87 percent, a dramatic increase in recent years, according to a Cone Cause Evolution Survey.

Even niche markets, such as the nation's college students, now show a striking preference for brands they believe to be socially responsible. According to a newly released College Explorer study from Alloy Media, nearly 95 percent of students say they are less likely to ignore an ad that promotes a brand's partnership with a cause.

There's a strong connection between entrepreneurship and giving. The challenge is to make your socially responsible efforts a winning proposition for the nonprofit group you support, the community and your business. You can master this marketing challenge by following these five important steps:

Step 1. Give from the heart.

Cause marketing works best when you and your employees feel great about the help you're providing to a nonprofit group. So work with an organization you and your team believe in, whether that means supporting the fight on behalf of a national health issue or rescuing homeless pets. What matters most to you, your team and your customers? You'll work hard to make a difference when you give from the heart.

Step 2. Choose a related cause.

A solid cause-marketing campaign often starts with the right affiliation. So as you go through the nonprofit selection process, look for a cause that relates to your company or its products. For example, when Procter & Gamble's Olay brand skin-care line partnered with the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery, its campaign goal was to inspire women to protect their skin from the sun. PR support yielded widespread broadcast, print and online coverage, helping the program attract more than 9,000 individuals for free skin-cancer screenings.

<insert ad here>

Step 3. Contribute more than dollars.

For many types of businesses, cause marketing involves donating products or services and not simply writing a check. This can help form even stronger consumer associations between what you offer and the good work you do. My own firm, for instance, works hard to support two local groups--a shelter for homeless women and children, and an organization that helps cancer patients pay their rent and other bills while undergoing treatment. As a marketing expert, I contribute services that include producing an annual Woman's Hope benefit concert and direct-mail and public relations campaigns that in the past eight months have netted approximately \$250,000 for these nonprofits.

Step 4. Formalize your affiliation.

To make your affiliation a win-win for everyone, work with the nonprofit you choose to define how it will help your business increase its visibility, brand or company awareness. If the organization has a newsletter or other communications with its constituents, negotiate for opportunities to do joint promotions. Discuss how you will use the organization's logo and name in your marketing campaigns, and how it, in turn, will use your company logo and name in its press releases, on the organization's website and in other materials.

Step 5. Mount a marketing campaign.

Success in cause marketing often means motivating an audience to take action, such as making a donation or participating in an event.. Using a dedicated marketing campaign, you can reach and persuade the target group while also raising awareness for your business and its commitment to social responsibility. For example, to enhance its relationship with the black community, State Farm created the 50 Million Pound Challenge to educate blacks about the risks associated with being overweight. A special Challenge website was created to provide ongoing advice and support, and has helped hundreds of thousands of people lose weight.

Kim T. Gordon is the "Marketing" coach at Entrepreneur.com and a multifaceted marketing expert, speaker, author and media spokesperson. Over the past 26 years, she's helped millions of small-business owners increase their success through her company, [National Marketing Federation Inc.](#) Her latest book, [Maximum Marketing, Minimum Dollars](#), is now available.

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