

3 ways your business can be generous without giving cash

by LuAnne Speeter

Each year as the fourth quarter approaches, your business is likely to begin receiving an onslaught of requests for charitable donations. But if you own a start-up business or your cash flow is suffering due to the ongoing recession, it may not be possible to write out big checks. Before you change the nameplate on your door to Ebenezer, consider these alternative ways of contributing to those in need.

In-kind product donations

Establish a partnership with a nonprofit whose needs fit the scope of your business. For example, a restaurant could donate nonperishables to neighborhood food shelves. Or, if you own a retail store, provide clothing or household items to shelters for the homeless or domestic violence victims. Build companywide support by inviting employees to join you in delivering the products. Be sure to develop a strategy just as you would with cash donations, determining in advance how much you want to donate for the season or year. Contact your tax advisor so you'll know what portion of the donation can be written off.

Employee volunteer programs

Many businesses are now incorporating more flexibility into the work week to encourage volunteerism. Some companies allow a number of hours annually of paid release per employee for donating time and skills to preapproved organizations. Nonprofits often seek out services donated by computer technicians, attorneys, marketers and graphic designers, in particular. If you embark on such a program, business owners and C-level executives should lead the way by volunteering time as well, either by rolling up your sleeves with a project or event, or by serving on the board of a nonprofit organization.

Purchasing cards and gifts from non-profits

Consider organizations such as the [Courage Center](#) when purchasing your holiday greeting cards. By doing so, you'll help support programs for adults and children with disabilities. Need gifts for clients or coworkers? Shop at Twice the Gift, a store operated by [Partnership Resources, Inc.](#), opening Oct. 15 in the IDS Crystal Court in Minneapolis. The store offers unique gifts and Share Cards, with proceeds benefiting 60 area nonprofits.

No matter which avenue you take in your charitable donation program, generate greater exposure for your causes by encouraging stakeholders – employees, customers, vendors, etc. – to offer their support, as well. Check with organizations about using their logos on your Web site and include a link or “Donate Now” button so customers can participate in the charitable partnership.

© 2009 Minnesota Cause Connection Inc.