

5 steps to enhancing your brand with cause marketing

by LuAnne Speeter

Businesses choose to exercise their social responsibility through cause marketing for a number of reasons. Hopefully, topping the list in every case is a real desire to help those in need and to improve our world. In addition to such altruistic motives, businesses can also strive to increase sales and build their brand.

The [2008 Cone Cause Evolution Study](#), among other studies, validates that cause marketing can encourage consumers to view a company's brand more favorably. In fact, according to the Cone study, 85% of Americans say they have a more positive image of a product or company when it supports a cause that they care about. And, 79% would be likely to switch from one brand to another that supports a good cause.

Before selecting a cause, consider first which causes align best with your brand and target audience. Here are some suggestions for creating a campaign that's a win-win:

1. **Understand your brand.** Do you have a mission statement that clearly defines your company's goals? Do you know how your brand is perceived by employees, customers, prospects and competitors?
2. **Select a cause focus area that aligns with your goals.** Consider the key areas that Americans want companies to address in their cause programs, also from the Cone study:

- Education – 80%;
- Economic development – 80%
- Health and disease – 79%
- Access to clean water – 79%
- Environment – 77%
- Disaster relief – 77%
- Hunger – 77%

3. **Ensure you have buy-in from senior-level executives.** If key employees and other stakeholders don't believe in your cause, neither will your audience.
4. **Select a clearly identifiable name for your cause.** One that is graphic and unites your goal to your organization will be most effective; e.g., [American Heart Association's Go Red for Women](#) and [Target Take Charge of Education](#).

5. **Cement your branded cause marketing with an integrated strategy.** Begin at the grassroots level and engage both community members and volunteers through local fundraising events. Communicate through a variety of channels including e-mail marketing, point of sale promotions, a dedicated “micro” website, public service announcements and local celebrity endorsements. Experiment with social media, too, by creating a Facebook page or inviting followers on Twitter.

Perhaps your greatest asset as a business is your reputation. By aligning your brand with socially significant values, you'll help ensure your corporate viability far into the future.

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