

Cause Marketing Can be Powerful Tool

by **Michael Driehorst** January 19, 2009

If you read the news or the job boards like Talent Zoo, “the economy” is at the forefront of many discussions – both online and offline. While the impact of the challenging and often stressful economic times is evident, it also presents opportunities for marketers.

I’m not talking about exploiting the misfortune of others for your benefit. I’m talking about redirecting current efforts. I’m talking about cause marketing.

Cause marketing, according to a definition published at [Cause Marketing Forum](#) is:

“(A) strategic positioning and marketing tool that links a company or brand to a relevant social cause or issue, for mutual benefit.” From “Brand Spirit, How Cause Related Marketing Builds Brands” by Hamish Pringle and Marjorie Thompson, Wiley, 1999.

American Express’ 1983 campaign to help fund the restoration of the Statue of Liberty is typically regarded as the first cause marketing effort. According to the Cause Marketing Forum site, “after American Express pledged to donate a penny to the restoration of the Statue of Liberty for every transaction made by its cardholders, use of American Express cards increased by 28% and new users increased by 17%.”

Most companies already have annual budget allocated to charitable and community contributions. So, why not partner with their customers and prospects to help guide that giving and even spur an increased giving?

It could be as simple as picking a local or national charity or cause, and pledge to give a certain percent of or monetary contribution for each purchase of a particular product. The organization would, of course, join in the promotion of the purchase-for-donation campaign because it has a vested interest. Both you and the organization would benefit.

But, why not involve your market more in the effort?

That’s what Tyson did [in December](#) to raise awareness of those going hungry while contributing to the Greater Boston Food Bank. For every comment [left on its blog post](#), it donated 100 pounds of food (up to 35,000 pounds) to the food bank.

But, what about more? What about partnering with bloggers and even offline media and offer to make a contribution to *their* favorite charitable cause? Here’s a thought: Research and contact a certain number of bloggers in select markets or industries. After each person blogger selects his or her favorite charity or cause, develop a program whereby a portion of each online and offline purchase that is attributed to each blogger goes to his or her favorite charity.

The bloggers have a vested interest in the campaign succeeding and will benefit by the additional exposure you will give them in your related marketing activities.

You and your company will benefit from the sales – likely new sales – and from the additional online exposure.

That's just one example of what could be done. There are many other [examples](#) you can review and adapt for your own needs.

Anytime is a good time to help a worthy cause. With so many people seeking more help from charities and other aid organizations, what better time than now to unleash the power of marketing to do some good?

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