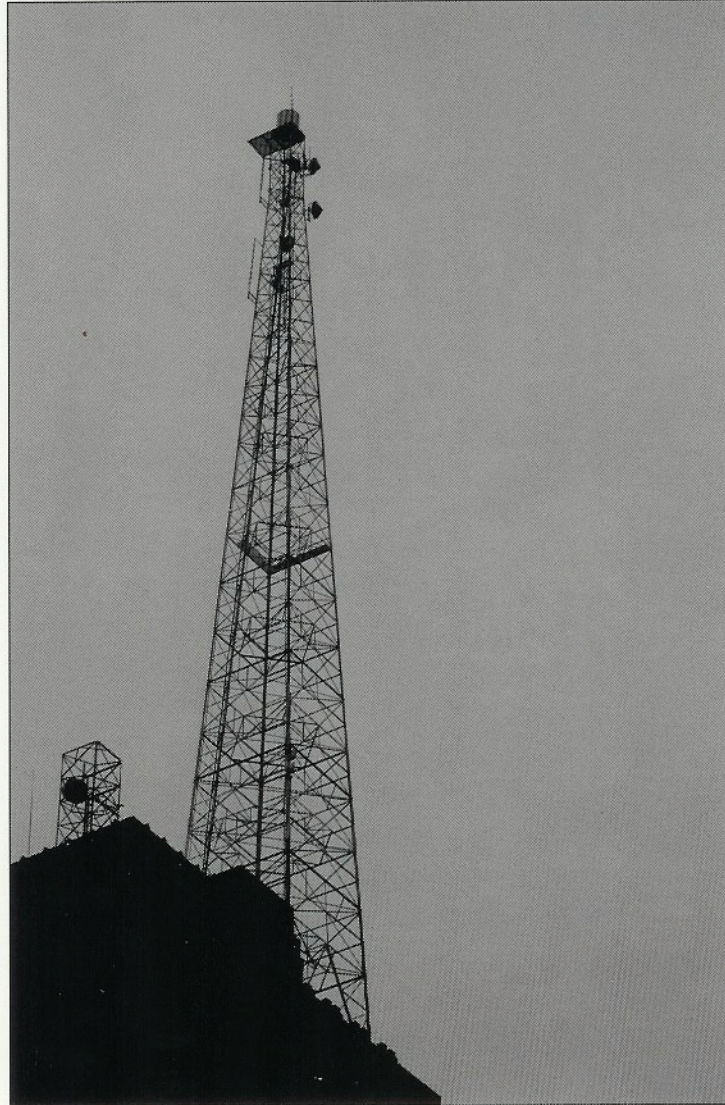


VOLUME XI/NUMBERS 3-4

FALL-WINTER 2005



SPECIAL ISSUE
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

SOCIAL MARKETING

QUARTERLY

HOW TO ENTER A CAUSE-RELATED PARTNERSHIP AND KEEP YOUR HALO ON STRAIGHT: SOME DOS AND DON'TS*

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By Richard Earle

Let's say you are a medium-size non-profit and have an important message to get out. You have a good staff, and they have come up with some themes and branding materials that you believe are certain to advance your cause.

Q2

You've checked the availability of PSA placements on your local media and have come up virtually dry. Perhaps your message requires precise targeting – it's aimed at retirees or pre-teens – but you simply don't have the financial depth for paid media.

Q3
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Your best solution: a cause-related partnership. Perhaps one of your directors has a strong business or social relationship with the CEO of a major corporation, who is very sympathetic to your cause. There's a good possibility that he can provide you with access to their corporate deep pockets. They've got the money, and you've got the halo. Surely something can be worked out to the benefit of both.

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And it can. That's what a perfect cause-related partnership is all about. The benefits to you are obvious. They bring you the resources, both financial and professional, to get your message out. The benefits to the corporate partner have been well documented.

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A recent Cone/Roper report issued by PR and strategy firm Cone Inc., states that employees in cause-concerned companies score 30–50% higher on categories like "I feel a strong sense of pride toward my company's values" and "I feel a strong sense of loyalty to my company."

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Another surprising finding is that upscale Americans are more likely to switch brands (79% vs. 65% national average), and 68% would pay *more* when a product is associated with a good cause.

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*This list of recommendations has been compiled from *The Art of Cause Marketing: How to Use Advertising to Change Personal Behavior and Public Policy*, 2nd edition, by Richard Earle.

Q1

Company founder Carol Cone specializes in something she calls Cause Branding[®]. Carol defines Cause Branding[®] as: “a business strategy that
 40 integrates a social issue or cause into brand equity and organizational identity to gain significant bottom-line and community impacts.”

A client program which uses this approach is one that Cone designed for
 45 ConAgra (the second largest food-producer in the U.S.), whose partnership with hunger relief organization Second Harvest has resulted in their Feeding
 50 Children Better campaign, which has impacted over 12 million children.

Whether you find your corporate partner through an agency or find them on
 your own, there are some important *dos*
 55 and *don'ts* you should keep in mind.

THE DOS

COMMITMENT

Do find a company that is sincerely committed to your cause. The ideal
 60 situation is one in which the CEO or corporate chairperson has a personal or emotional link to your cause: say, a family member with breast cancer, or a brother-in-law who's a pathological gambler.

This is not to deny the fact that the company will also have a business reason to join the partnership. However,
 65 assessing the sincerity of their choice of your organization will help you avoid any of the overt co-opting of your organization's goodwill that we will illustrate in the *don'ts* section. Usually a meeting with the key corporate decision-maker can reveal the depths of their commitment.

“FIT”

Do try to find a corporate partner that is a logical “fit” with your cause. I was asked
 70 several years ago to contribute to an article in the now-closed magazine *Working Woman* by judging the effectiveness of
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several cause-related efforts on behalf of breast cancer research.

Two of them were, in my view, a perfect “fit”. Avon, the cosmetic and
 jewelry manufacturer, had women as a
 85 primary customer base. Avon was the sponsor of the annual Breast Cancer 3-Day races throughout the country. They also marketed “Pink Ribbon products,” such as
 90 jewelry, cosmetic cases, etc., with a specified portion of the purchase price earmarked for breast cancer research. They were an obvious choice.

The second, perhaps less obvious, example of “fit” was a program by the
 95 California Prune Board. It made a monetary donation to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation for each pack of prunes sold during a six-month period. But it also created a companion program promoting a
 100 high-fiber, low-fat diet (into which prunes fit perfectly) as part of a cancer-prevention program. They used their corporate clout to produce celebrity-narrated TV ads promoting breast cancer awareness. In many
 105 ways, they were a perfect “fit.”

Not so perfect were efforts by the National Football League to promote awareness of the Komen Foundation events through sales of NFL merchandise,
 110 and a promotion by a jeans manufacturer, which rewarded participants in “National Denim Day” by giving \$5 to the Komen Foundation for each employee of companies that permitted them to wear jeans to
 115 work that day. In fairness, over \$4 million a year has been raised by the jeans promotion (which is still an annual cause-related event for Komen).

These are both corporate promotions
 120 that could stand alone, without reference to the supported cause, but sought to become cause-related merely by donating a sum of money.

And the previously mentioned partnership between ConAgra and Second Harvest is an almost perfect example of “fit.”
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EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT

Do involve the employees of your corporate partner in the activities of your organization. The relationship then becomes integral to the corporate culture. Every employee that is involved with your cause will treat this program with a lot more personal commitment.

A recent example of a cause-related partnership that seems to have a perfect “fit” and that also has employee involvement is that between Whirlpool and Habitat for Humanity. As reported in *g-Think*, an online publication of the environmental ad agency Green Team, the relationship between Habitat and Whirlpool goes back over 16 years. Over \$12 million worth of donated appliances has been placed by Whirlpool in Habitat-built homes.

In addition, reports *g-Think*, more than 750 Whirlpool employees have contributed time, skills, and money to helping build Habitat homes. The “fit” between a major home appliance manufacturer and homes built to benefit the homeless is perfect. And the employee involvement factor was an easy one to arrange.

A Whirlpool study indicated that being socially responsible scored in the top five out of fifty possible “drivers” for brand loyalty among a key consumer cohort for Whirlpool, so-called active balancers: consumers, mainly women, who lead busy, active lives; who are open to new technologies; and who value brand quality.

Whirlpool estimates that its indicators of brand loyalty are up substantially: 28 points from a baseline of 15. According to company calculations, a 1% increase in loyalty translates into a healthy 5% increase in sales. Sales were up 39%, while brand loyalty almost doubled. At the same time, Whirlpool’s “Likeability Index” rose an amazing 154%.

ADVERTISING AND PR

Do take advantage of your partner’s expertise. It is likely that your corporate partner will have an advertising and PR staff that exceeds your own in numbers and experience. They will undoubtedly have at least one large advertising agency servicing their commercial business. By all means, use them. They will have media clout that can get the best rates for placement of your messages, and they will probably have casting connections that can lead to pro-bono or scale-rate involvement by mainstream talent and possibly celebrities.

FINAL APPROVAL

Do however be very clear that you must have final approval of all advertising and PR that relates to your cause. The creative team on your partner’s account will have the primary objective of increasing the sales of your partner’s goods or services. You must make sure that the company’s benefit from your relationship comes in goodwill and brand loyalty, and not simply in using your name to promote the company’s product.

That having been said, it has been my experience that most advertising agency creative teams are anxious to turn their considerable skills, which are used most of the time to simply move merchandise, to the task of improving the planet and the lot of its inhabitants. They will probably do some very good work for your cause.

THE DON’TS**PROTECT YOUR HALO**

Don’t let yourself be used by a cynical company hoping to do damage control to a badly tarnished reputation.

The Komen Foundation, which has many corporate partners, has posted the following questions on their web site for *consumers* to ask when considering supporting a cause-related campaign:

1. **Is this company committed?** Read the product packaging and promotional materials or display and visit the company website to make sure the company is credible and committed to the cause.
2. **How is the program structured?** Transparency is key. Is the company clearly stating how the money is raised and how much will be going to charity? If there is a minimum contribution guaranteed by the company, what is the amount?
3. **Whom does the program benefit?** Does it support a well-managed, reputable nonprofit or fund? Again, we recommend that consumers read websites. The Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance is one resource for information on nonprofit organizations (visit www.give.org).
4. **How will the organization that benefits use my money?** It should be abundantly clear where the monies go. What organization will they support? Will the dollars generated go to research, education, community programs, or all of the above?
5. **Is the program meaningful to me?** Is the program supporting a cause you believe in or have been touched by? Selecting the right program is a personal choice based on your interests, your passions, and a cause that is important to you.

If the consumer or donor can't get satisfactory answers to these questions, then your partnership is in trouble.

Again, caution must be exercised to be sure that a company with a reputation for anti-social practices or products is not trying to "buy respectability" by embracing your cause for its "halo effect." Some very worthwhile arts organizations in New York

City discovered this the hard way when, as reported in the *New York Times*, Philip Morris, their generous benefactor over the years, leaned on them to use their influence to lobby against stricter City Council anti-smoking regulations.

To add insult to injury, Philip Morris, characterized by the November 29, 1999 Business Week as the "most reviled company in America," began cynically trading upon several cause-related associations. Their support for battered womens' safe houses and food programs for the elderly were dramatized in a series of beautifully produced commercials signed, "The People of Philip Morris. Working to make things better."

It may be interesting to note that the ads usually run at the heaviest weight during anti-tobacco trials and class action lawsuits. Do these commercials resonate positively with the jurors and the public? My supposition has always been that they may backfire. When you make an altruistic claim, you better be sure it is in sync with your image. This is certainly not the case with these warm and fuzzy portrayals of what many Americans consider an evil empire!

However, in a poll done by Roper Starch, Philip Morris was rated *number 2* on a list of "companies that come to mind as supporters of good causes." It is obvious that well-produced emotional advertising can affect the image of a corporation, even one as damaged as the tobacco giant.

LOOKING FOR SECRETS

Don't fail to be diligent in checking out all aspects of your prospective partner's operation. It is a sad fact that corporate ethics aren't what they used to be. Executive malfeasance, stock scandals, and employee abuse seem to be rampant. The last thing you want is for your lovingly worded cause-related ad to appear in

the paper next to the “perp walk” photo of your partner’s CEO.

Check out the employment practices of your prospective partner. A partnership between a child welfare foundation and a well-known clothing manufacturer went terribly sour a few years ago. Together they created a high-impact campaign about child abuse. Six months later, human rights organizations in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka derisively held up posters from the campaign as they exposed the abuse of children as young as 10 in the sweatshops which manufactured the corporate partner’s line of clothing. It was an utter disaster for both partners in the alliance, which quickly dissolved.

Areas such as the preservation of the environment and humane treatment of animals are of great importance to many of the altruistic people you may wish to reach with your message. It goes without saying that your partner’s record in these areas must be spotless. The damage of a misstep in this area can exceed all the benefits from the partnership.

PROTECTING YOUR BRAND

Don’t develop branding materials (logos, theme line, etc.) that can be co-opted by other groups with less scruples than yours.

The success of the Avon breast cancer campaign, and a similar one initiated by Estée Lauder, has now apparently sparked a “pink ribbon blitz” during Breast Cancer Awareness month. The *New York Times* recently dubbed this trend “Causemetics” and reported that there is unfortunately something of a backlash against pink ribbon items produced by less-committed companies who have been revealed to donate only a modest amount of the sale price to the cause. It may well be that the pink ribbon existed before Avon made it a centerpiece of their campaign, but in hindsight, they might have developed and

protected some unique branding materials whose impact could not be diminished by others.

IF IT SEEMS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE...

Don’t rush into it. If a corporate partner seems too eager to throw money at you, examine what their motivation might be. This may be very difficult to do if your need for financing is urgent, and the potential partner is offering a generous solution. Imagine the dilemma of all those struggling arts organizations in New York City who were offered a way out of their financial dilemmas by the tobacco merchants. But they probably should have said “no.”

You have spent years burnishing a halo of goodwill for your cause. A misstep in this area could severely dislodge it.

Despite these cautions, if all concerns are met, and the “marriage” is truly compatible, this can be a win-win arrangement. Your nonprofit or non-governmental organization (NGO) gets well-funded exposure, which may include paid advertising smartly placed by your corporate partner’s media buyers, and the corporation gets favorable PR for their embrace of your worthy cause, and hopefully stronger sales and brand loyalty for their products.

Employee morale is boosted, and the company’s status within the community as a good corporate citizen is ensured. A corporation that professes to support, for example, the environment or education, has much more consumer credibility if they have a recognized nonprofit partner.

You can be that partner, and you can both benefit. And if you carefully consider some of these “dos and don’ts,” you can also keep your precious halo well-polished and solidly in place!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Earle’s advertising career spanned 30 years at several U.S. agencies,

including Saatchi & Saatchi, where he was an Executive Vice President. He wrote major campaigns for Procter & Gamble and Johnson & Johnson, and supervised many award-winning public service campaigns, including the Keep America Beautiful "Crying Indian" series, and the first national anti-drug campaign for NIMH. He currently teaches at the Harvard School of Public Health and consults for social marketing clients. His book *The Art of Cause Marketing: How to Use Advertising to Change Personal Behavior and public Policy* is in its second printing (paperback edition). He may be contacted through his website at <http://www.causemarketer.com>

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