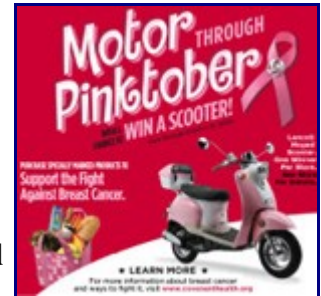


Guide to Cause Marketing: Partnerships for Fundraising, Marketing Success

by Sandra Sims

Anytime I've been out shopping the past few weeks, it's been tough to miss that that October is "breast cancer awareness month." Our local [grocery store](#) is even doing big displays and calling it "Pinktober."



Over the years cause marketing campaigns like these have grown steadily and with good reason. They can be a great source of **funding, brand building and cause awareness** for the charity. Benefits for corporations include increased sales of merchandise and public relations.

Nonprofits often seek corporate partnerships primarily for funding reasons. The most common program involves co-branded merchandise, such as food items, clothing or other retail goods sold to consumers. A portion of the proceeds then benefit the charity.

The definition of **cause marketing**, according to [Wikipedia](#), is:

a type of [marketing](#) involving the cooperative efforts of a "for profit" business and a [non-profit organization](#) for mutual benefit. The term is sometimes used more broadly and generally to refer to any type of marketing effort for social and other charitable causes, including in-house marketing efforts by non-profit organizations. Cause marketing differs from corporate giving ([philanthropy](#)) as the latter generally involves a specific donation that is [tax deductible](#), while cause marketing is a marketing relationship generally not based on a donation.

While these campaigns can be beneficial, a nonprofit-business partnerships should not be entered into lightly. They require time, effort and often upfront costs to be successful. So you can consider whether this may be a right for your nonprofit organization or business, this article offers a basic primer, including some examples and resources for further research. ([Click here for a printable version.](#))

Cause marketing partnerships must be win-win-win

You've probably heard of the biz jargon called "win-win" where both parties in a business transaction must benefit equally. In cause marketing this is certainly the case. I often hear from nonprofits who want corporations to "show them the money" and don't take the time to look at it from the business's point of view.

There **must** be financial, PR or some other advantage to the business in order for them to participate in any partnership, from the simplest [event sponsorship](#) to a national cause marketing campaign. There is often a third group that must be considered, consumers, and if this promotion benefits them.

The best cause marketing campaigns benefit all three groups. As [Gennifer Snowfield](#) says, cause marketing "must be a) transparent, b) authentic, and c) integrated. The belief is that if a cause marketing initiative upholds these tenets, it will be effective in connecting the consumer, company, and cause in ways that benefit all parties."

Benefits for nonprofit organizations

While the main factor for many charities is funding, other benefits may include improving name brand awareness or cause awareness. The nonprofit should have **one primary goal** for the campaign though. Is it short term fundraising, a long term funding partnership, public awareness or something else? Decide on this goal first and it will inform the rest of your decision making.

Here are a few questions to consider when evaluating potential partners:

- Who is our target market for the campaign?
- Does the company already reach that market?
- If a product is involved is it a good fit with the values our organization represents?
- Does the company itself line up with our values, mission and goals?
- What other nonprofit partners does the company have? Are we in good company? Or are there too many other partners so that we may get lost in the crowd?
- If the campaign is primarily targeted toward consumers, does the company have the distribution and customer base needed for the campaign to succeed?
- What is the time frame for implementation? Are we looking for a launch date within a few months? Or do both sides have the time and commitment level to invest in a campaign that requires a long term approach?



[Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation](#) (ALSF) provides a great example of cause marketing through product sales. This foundation supports efforts to find a cure for childhood cancer through simple, grassroots fundraising and advocacy. Support comes especially from children who are inspired by the founder Alexandra “Alex” Scott who simply wanted to help other kids like herself who were battling cancer.

I've been [following them for a few years](#) and am constantly amazed by the creativity used by this foundation to fund their mission.

This year they partnered with candy brand [Mike and Ike](#) for special edition flavors with ALSF branded packaging. The timing of the product release was intentional: September was Childhood cancer awareness month. Like most product based cause marketing campaigns, a portion of the proceeds from sales went to the nonprofit. One very smart move from ALSF was securing a **minimum donation of \$100,000 per year** to the foundation.

This campaign facilitated the goals of significant funds raised and publicity by using a product that tied in to the nonprofit's lemon themed branding. While I had seen Mike and Ike before I'd never purchased any until I heard about the ALSF promotion on [Twitter](#). Next time I was at Walgreen's I made a point to get my hands on a box. Judging from the number of other flavor varieties the company sells, this promotion also seems to align closely with Mike and Ike's strategy of having many different flavor boxes to choose from.

There's not much doubt that I enjoyed the candy, as the next time I was at the store another box landed in my grocery cart. Will I buy other flavors of this candy in the future? Quite possibly. Which leads us to our next important factor about a cause marketing campaign: benefits to the business.

Benefits for businesses

As I mentioned earlier, the business must have a reason for entering into this agreement or it will simply not work for them. After all, companies are in the business of making money, not giving it away. Just like nonprofits, the business should have a specific goal in mind for the partnership.

Here are some of the potential benefits to businesses for entering into a cause marketing campaign:

- Sell more of an existing product by giving it a new spin
- Create new products to generate consumer interest in the brand (improving sales in the process)
- Retailers may wish to see more foot traffic into their store
- Public relations, the “halo effect” of being associated with a good cause
- Improve employee morale; team building

[Cause Marketing Forum](#) reports that another reason companies are turning to cause marketing is because “research shows that many of today’s consumers demand more than just a quality product or an amusing commercial – they want to buy brands that resonate with their values.”

Republic of Tea has produced several nonprofit related products over the years including [Sip for the Cure](#) benefiting Komen, promoted during October for Breast Cancer Awareness Month. For this illustration though I’d like to highlight another of the company’s nonprofit partnerships, a line called Little Citizen’s Herb Teas.



Earlier this year Republic of Tea sent me a sample of the [Strawberry Vanilla](#) flavor. I don’t *do* coffee, but I love hot tea in winter and iced tea in the summer. This is a deliciously sweet flavor that I’d definitely recommend. \$1, or roughly 10%, from the sale of each tin supports [Room To Read](#) in their mission to educate children around the world by building schools, libraries and providing educational materials for developing countries.

I recently checked in with the company to find out how the campaign was going. Here’s what Marideth Post, “Minister of Enlightenment” at The Republic of Tea had to say:

The Little Citizens’ Herb Teas exceeded our expectations. First, we blended enough tea to last us six months - we sold through it in three months - quickly made more. Our commitment to Room to Read was to build two libraries in South Africa in 2009 - we’ve already raised the funds to do that and will likely put three more outside of South Africa. Most of all, our entire company is behind Room to Read - we attend and host their local chapter events, we’ve made presentations on behalf of Room to Read throughout the US and we had founder, John Wood as the guest speaker at our annual company meeting. It’s been a perfect partnership.

While company leaders must be pleased to see such impressive sales figures, it’s clear that this is much more than just another product line or sales tactic for them. The Republic of Tea has seen a positive impact on the company culture, building employee morale in ways than a “team building day” could not. While these types of benefits may not be easy to quantify on a sales chart, they have lasting implications nonetheless.

Benefits for Consumers

Whether your campaign involves a co-branded product or not, the viewpoint of the consumer must be taken into consideration. What level of involvement does the public play in this campaign? Are you asking them to buy something they wouldn't normally *just because* it has your logo on it or helps fund your group? Will the consumer perceive that participating is beneficial to them?

Also consider how easy it will be for people to participate in the campaign. While programs such as [Yoplait yogurt's pink lids](#) and have been successful, be careful about requiring additional action on the part of the consumer past the initial purchase.

[Box Tops for Education](#) is a similarly structured program where proof of purchase must be turned in. However, specific schools benefit and consumers see a direct benefit from participating. I'd be much more likely to cut out and mail labels when it benefits my child.

Campaigns that offer *tangible* benefits to the consumer may see greater results. Here's a great example:

While October may be "think pink" month for breast cancer awareness, for [Boston Medical Center](#) (BMC) it's all about [Halloween Town](#). This is a huge community wide carnival organized by BMC. There are multiple benefits for all involved — BMC as the nonprofit beneficiary, retailer [iParty](#) as the headline sponsor, other businesses who participate and the public who attend.

One of the ways that they publicize the event, and raise funds for BMC, ahead of time is through the pin-up campaign. You've likely seen many different types of point-of-sale card promotions at retail stores since many charities do them. Cashiers simply ask customers if they'd like make a small donation and write their name on a colorful, theme shaped card that's then placed on the wall.

For most programs that's where it ends. (If it begins at all. What incentive does the donor have other than giving to a "good cause" they may or may not know anything about?)

The campaign that BMC conducts has a **significant advantage** that I have never seen other groups use. They actually provide real benefits to the donor in exchange for their gift! Each pin-up has a tear off portion with valuable coupons including discount admission to the big Halloween Town event.



But wait, there's more. There are benefits for the businesses as well. First it's brand advertising and promotion right on the cards. Then when customers use these coupons at their store, they benefit from increased foot traffic and sales. Retailers can track how many coupons were used and the exact financial impact it has on their business. This can greatly encourage sponsors to get on board next year.

Joe Waters, marketing director at BMC describes the campaign in greater detail on his blog with [Countdown to Halloween Town: Pinups to the People](#).

Motive matters

It's important to consider how a cause marketing campaign will be received so you can head-off potential objections from all three of your stakeholder audiences.

Unfortunately some potential criticisms have grown out of legitimate concerns from actual marketing promotions. Especially with the pink for breast cancer type campaigns, there are manufacturers that have jumped on the bandwagon, producing pink themed merchandise. Wholesalers can sell [these items](#) to organizations or individuals who then use them to raise funds or as thank you gifts. On the other hand there are many items that end up in retail store shelves that provide no financial benefit to any charity at all.

Other times you will see labels on merchandise stating that the brand "supports breast cancer awareness." That's fine, but it's a rather vague statement isn't it. Many consumer will not think twice about it. Call me cynical, but when I see something like that I wonder, *how* do they support it? Are they donating money or simply *saying* they lend support as a marketing line?

These types of actions have even led to terms such as [pinkwashing](#) and [greenwashing](#) which refer to gray area or even unethical tactics on the part of corporations. In response, the [Think Before You Pink](#) campaign calls for "more transparency and accountability by companies that take part in breast cancer fundraising, and encourages consumers to ask critical questions about pink ribbon promotions." I'm sure watchdog organization exist for other causes as well.

Since this article is addressed to you, *good citizen with pure motives*, I bring up this negativity with the purpose that you are aware that criticisms, both well founded and not, are out there. With such knowledge you can be sure from the start that your campaign is sound *and* shows the best face to the world.

Here are some suggestions for proactive steps you can take to address concerns and prevent misconceptions:

- First of all, the planning team (both parties: the nonprofit and the business) needs to be clear on their respective goals and objectives right from the start. When goals are clear and all of the potential issues are considered, many pitfalls can be avoided in advance.
- Reach out to the nonprofit's most vocal supporters and ask them in advance their opinion of the campaign (focus groups, online surveys, board meetings, etc.) before committing.
- Be prepared to walk away from a deal that would not be in the best interest of your nonprofit. [Jocelyne Daw](#) author of the book *Cause Marketing for Nonprofits* says, "Be sure the company you work with really "walks the talk" in its support of your mission and the greater community."
- Demonstrate the results of your campaign:
 - In the first year prove in advance that the campaign is solid. As mentioned earlier, Alex's Lemonade did this by securing a minimum commitment from Mike and Ike. It says so right on the back of the box!



- In subsequent years tell consumers what the partnership has produced for the nonprofit in the past. Hit multiple communication channels including product packaging and press releases.
- Provide information and step-by-step instructions for partners. For example, if your promotion depends on retail sales people connect with them before, during and after the campaign. Make sure they have the information needed to support your efforts. Are they familiar with the cause? Can you show a video at staff meeting to familiarize them? Say thanks for their help in advance with something special like a t-shirt or a free sample. Remember, they are your ambassadors!
- Follow up after the campaign with business partners. Show appreciation to corporate partners at all levels and let them know how their participation matters in your cause.
- Monitor the web for mentions about the campaign using tools such as [Google Alerts](#) and [Twitter](#).
- Publicize results through the media: press releases, on your websites, social media. Public relations at every stage of the program will help boost public confidence and reduce the possibility of negative reactions.

Where to go from here

Cause marketing can be an effective strategy for nonprofits large and small. Alex's Lemonade is a relatively new foundation and yet has made great strides with fundraising and publicity not just with Mike and Ike but also [branded merchandise](#). I saw them with yellow and pink lemonade rhinestone jewelry on QVC a few weeks ago!

A point-of-sale card program is a great start for many local organizations. To see how a small organization implemented this strategy, see Joe Waters blog post about [Jake's Ride](#).

The [Cause Marketing Forum](#) has a yearly conference with awards for best in cause marketing. They also offer telesclasses and informative updates throughout the year. Here's a great list of links to more case studies, tips and tactics that they have compiled: [Cause Marketing 101](#).

Jocelyne Daw's book [Cause Marketing for Nonprofits](#) explores the values driven approach to cause marketing. She describes the different types of campaigns, with case studies, and how to plan and execute them effectively.