

Beware: Cause Marketing Ahead

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There has been a great deal of attention around cause marketing campaigns over the last few years. So many products from food to appliances to Band-Aids® are being offered in pink to support Susan G. Komen for the Cure to end breast cancer. If you prefer the color red, you can purchase an iPod, a GAP t-shirt or now, a Dell computer in red from (PRODUCT) RED™ to eradicate AIDS in Africa.

It seems like hundreds of companies are offering products to support causes. It's all very exciting. These campaigns offer great visibility for both nonprofit and for-profit. If successful, it will offer funding for the nonprofit organization and increased sales for the for-profit. But nonprofit leaders must be realistic in the relationships they pursue with companies. They must be sure they understand the company needs, what their nonprofit can offer the company, and what value the company should expect to get out of the relationship. Cause marketing campaigns are a rarity. But corporate/nonprofit relationships are not. Make sure you spend your resources wisely pursuing relationships that make sense.

Cause marketing is traditionally a short term marketing campaign initiated by the company or the company's advertising agency to strengthen the company's brand and improve sales. The 1983 American Express cause marketing campaign *When Did You First Fall in Love With Her?* to support the renovation of the Statue of Liberty boosted the use of American Express cards by 28% and raised \$1.7 million for the Statue of Liberty renovation fund. Cause marketing programs now are more sophisticated. The basic performance metric of increased profitability is not always a success indicator. Other factors play a role in whether or not a company embarks on a cause marketing campaign.

But even with broader success metrics a company considers before deciding to initiate a cause marketing campaign, these campaigns are rare. The great news is that corporate interest in nonprofit relationships continues through other types of corporate relations programs. These programs don't usually offer visibility as high as a marketing campaign, (American Express spent \$6 million in 1983 on the marketing of the Statue of Liberty campaign alone); but they offer sustainable funding, visibility, products, services, advocacy support and other resources. In addition, nonprofit/corporate relationships are more reasonable to pursue, more sustainable and more likely to result in support. So be careful in throwing resources toward becoming part of the next big cause marketing campaign. Your resources will be better spent developing and nurturing your corporate relationships.

