

BUSINESS GIVING: Do well by doing good



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Q. I see a lot of different businesses hooking up with charities around the holidays. Does it improve sales? Should I do it?

A. It's once again that time of year for peace on earth, goodwill to men — and commercialism. Pardon my cynicism. But, I think you're asking the wrong question. Consider switching your focus from making sales to giving back. If you can make a donation to a cause you care about, consider yourself blessed. Any sales increase should be a side effect, not the focus of your giving. Now, off my soapbox and back to business.

People are swayed by business giving. When choosing between two comparable products, more than three-quarters of consumers surveyed say they'd be swayed to buy an item that supports a charity, 76 percent would switch brands, and 54 percent would pay more to support a worthy cause, says a study by Cone Communications and Roper Starch Worldwide.

For peace of mind, consider looking into the charity before you contribute. The Better Business Bureau has a Wise Giving Alliance (www.give.org) that can be a good starting point. They rate organizations based on "20 Standards for Charity Accountability" and list charities that are most responsible with their funds.

Remember, many charities count on holiday giving for the lion's share of their year-long operating budgets. So, a donation to the cause or charity of your choice can have a meaningful impact.

If that's not enough to encourage you to give, remember most charitable donations are also tax deductible!

Q. My flag does a cause marketing thing. Should I make a big deal of it for the holidays?

A. There is nothing wrong with making a big deal about your flag's charitable tie-in all year

long. Again, giving is its own reward. If you can give back, there's no need to restrict your giving to December. Charities always have needs.

"It's so important for companies to do their part in giving back to their communities," said Gina Zimmerman, marketing communications specialist at Matco Tools. In 2012, Matco launched a year-round "Tools for the Cause" program (www.matco.com/toolsforcause). The program donates 15 percent of sales of special-edition pink products to the Susan G. Komen campaign to fight breast cancer. To date, Matco has donated over \$250,000 to the cause, Zimmerman said.

At the local level, Matco Tools distributor Dean Ulsh of Hazleton, Pa. spearheaded a raffle for a pink Matco tool cart. Independent of corporate, Ulsh and other dealers in his district printed tickets, purchased extra prizes and sold raffle chances. Together, those dealers sold 2,700 raffle tickets and raised over \$8,100 for the Susan G. Komen Northeastern Pennsylvania Affiliate.

"We tried to keep the money local," Ulsh said. "And we kept the tickets cheap. We kept it at \$3 a ticket. Nobody griped about the price and a lot of people bought more than one. That helped move tickets."

The cause hits home for Ulsh: his wife's mom and step-mom both died of breast cancer. "I have a five-year-old daughter," he said, "I don't want to see her have to go through it (someday)."

In addition to supporting the cause, it let dealers show off the new tool cart model and drive more traffic to their truck, he said. The cart rotated from truck to truck each week so dealers could use it to sell raffle chances and sell carts.

"I sold over 500 tickets and I didn't ever have the cart on my truck," Ulsh said, laughing. "Ninety percent of the guys on my route bought tickets."



Matco Tools dragster Antron Brown signs the pink Matco Toolbox that was a raffle prize in a fundraiser for breast cancer awareness.

Q.

There's a tech on my route whose son is seriously ill. I'd like to do something to help.

I can only do so much myself, but I feel like I could do much more by putting out a jar and asking my customers for donations, too. Is this tacky? Does it make customers uncomfortable?

A.

Helping someone in need is never tacky. But a jar stuffed with cash does look suspicious.

To calm the suspicions of cynics like me, I'd do everything to look on the up and up. For example, ask the family if you can put the child's name and photo on the donation jar.

Better yet, involve your customers in the process. Ask them to join you when you bring the gift to the family and get pictures to post in your truck so everyone who gave can share the sense of accomplishment.

And don't just ask for money; ask for money with a purpose. Does the child need a wheelchair? Help paying for chemo? Can you send him to Disney or a home team game? The more specific the goal, the more likely people are to give.

Consider holding a raffle like Ulsh did. Unlike cash in a jar, it seems more legit and can bring in more cash. Here are some thoughts on putting a quick raffle together:

Pick prizes customers want. You can obviously buy them at wholesale — or better yet, ask your flag or WD for donations.

Promote locally. Make it obvious the money isn't for some faceless charity; it's for a real person right in your community.

Ask shops to participate. Tell shop owners you're helping a local child. Ask if they'd be willing to pitch in a prize or buy or sell raffle tickets.

Ask for help. Don't go it alone. Ask customers for help. People give more to a cause they feel connected to. Some may even help you sell tickets.

Set a goal. We all like to achieve goals. Set an amount you need to raise and let everyone know how close you are to the goal each week.

Keep it affordable. Ulsh felt that it was easier to sell \$3 chances than it

would have been if the price was higher.

Whether you support your flag's national charity, give to a local cause, or help just one person in your community, you don't have to choose between making money and making a difference. ■



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