

'Tis the season to be a good neighbor

How that translates into good business

BY DEBORAH PAGE MOONEY

In today's economy, small business owners must not only provide an excellent service or top-quality product, but must also stand out from the crowd. How does the consumer choose one widget-maker over another? Often they ask: Who is the 'best' neighbor?

Small business owners perceived as good neighbors through public support of local nonprofits have a competitive advantage. Such support can be as simple as the well-placed ad in the weekly church bulletin, the lead underwriting of a community event, or an established position on a community board of directors. Comparing this type of exposure to traditional advertising rates reveals a significant cost savings — and the opportunity to make a difference.

How do you strategically choose the charitable organization or nonprofit with which to align your business? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who is the target market for your product or service?
- Is there a reputable local nonprofit serving the same population and can

you make a presumed connection between your consumers and that entity?

- Is there a community organization for which you personally feel an affinity?
- Is there an organization whose mission complements the vision and goals of your business?
- Where do you see the names of your community's "movers and shakers" appear?

The questions will help you determine what nonprofit organization — whether it's a school, club, food pantry, shelter, elder care agency or any other worthy cause — your company can comfortably and ethically support, while gaining maximum, well-placed exposure for your efforts? You can't buy a good neighbor reputation, but you can earn one by carefully placed investments for the greater good.

Once you've determined a short list of nonprofits, how do you make this alliance?

- Place an ad in your community or religious publication

- Purchase a sponsorship in a charity or school golf tournament; often many levels are available
- Underwrite a special program
- Explore options to support local schools (some schools may not think of recognition options until you mention it)
- Sponsor a local Little League team. Those T-shirts with your company name on the back get worn everywhere!
- Sponsor a fundraising dinner for a worthy cause
- Participate in a capital campaign. A naming opportunity gift could put your company name in stone...literally!
- Provide products with your company name and logo for special event goodie bags or for the good of nonprofit clients

Consider the companies and business owners in your community that you perceive to be leaders. Chances are the names you've thought of are the same names on boards, committees and are associated with charitable events.



Consider the opportunity for personal involvement, either that of yourself or key employees. Older, more established nonprofit organizations may have built boards of directors that have a prestigious reputation. It isn't always easy to get an invitation to one of these boards, but there are ways.

Small business can benefit from supporting local nonprofits. The name recognition and positive exposure for your company are tremendous benefits, which can not only be tax deductible, but far less expensive than conventional advertising. As Winston Churchill once said, "We make a living by what we do; we make a life by what we give."

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