

Find us on Facebook: How Cause Marketing has Embraced Social Media

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It is no secret that integrated marketing communication has embraced social media; most notably this is true with organizations involved in cause marketing. Evidence shows that consumers, especially women and teens, are willing to pay more for products that have a social benefit. This is particularly true with “Millennials” born between 1985 through 2005. In light of the social awareness of this group, it would only make sense that social media has become a major component of current cause marketing campaigns. This paper examines three campaigns that have effectively reached their target audience through social media.

INTRODUCTION

Cause marketing, also known as cause-related marketing, is a promotional partnership of a nonprofit organization and a (for-profit) corporation that benefits both organizations. When done correctly, it is a win-win situation. The corporation gains social value and awareness for its brand; where as, the nonprofit gains greater awareness for the cause and, hopefully, greater funding.

American Express is often cited as the first corporation to effectively collaborate with a nonprofit in a manner that meets the cause marketing definition. In fact, the company trademarked the term in 1983 (Daw, 2006). In that year, the company embarked on a campaign with the Statue of Liberty Restoration Project. As part of the campaign, one cent was donated to the Statue of Liberty Fund every time existing cardholders used their card. And for every new card approved, American Express donated \$1. The company also made donations on travel cheque purchases and other travel-related sales. In total, the company donated over \$1.7 million to the fund over the three-month campaign, but generated an increase in use of AmEx cards by nearly 28 percent and new card applications rose a whopping 45 percent. Not a bad haul for a quarter-year campaign. It must be pointed out that American Express supported the cause campaign with a \$4 million advertising budget that included print, radio, and television spots. Since that first campaign, American Express has run over 90 programs in 17 different countries. Popular campaigns have included Charge Against Hunger, Save the Music, to their current Members Project Campaign.

Arguably, the most well-known cause marketing campaign today is the Susan G. Komen “For the Cure” campaign. Associated with the pink ribbon, the cause has been in existence over 30 years, and is still growing in popularity today. Launched in 1982, Komen began the craze of “running for a cure” with its first national Race for the Cure in 1990. Today there are more than 25 companies affiliated with the organization’s cause (Cone, 2010).

Additional popular cause campaigns include the Box Tops for Education, which was launched in 1996 and has generated over \$200 million to date. What began as a grassroots program has evolved into a successful product purchase and online project. The American Heart Association launched the “Go Red

for Women” campaign in 2003 and more than \$150 million has been raised to address the number one killer of women – heart disease. And finally, Product (RED) launched in 2006 and promoted by musician Bono to raise awareness of AIDS in Africa has attracted a variety of companies such as Gap, Starbucks, and American Express (Cone, 2010).

Millennial Generation

Cause marketing is a natural fit when young consumers are the target. Evidence shows that consumers, especially women and teens, are willing to pay more for products that have a social benefit. As the study by Youn and Kim (2008) discovered, even consumers who are skeptical of traditional advertising view “cause marketing” in a positive light. This is particularly true with today’s Generation Y, or “Millennials,” who are commonly defined as being born between 1985 through 2005. This generation is trustful, more tolerant, and better traveled than many of their parents. But what sets them apart from previous generations is that they are deeply concerned about social issues (Howe & Strauss, 2000). In fact, today’s young adults are described as being in tune with social issues and willing to show their support of socially responsible businesses while turning against companies that are not. According to a Cone (2006) survey of young consumers, Millennials are prepared to reward socially responsible companies. They are more likely to trust these companies, seek their employment, and buy or recommend their products to others. In fact, after learning that a company is socially responsible, the survey indicated that 83% of the respondents are likely to trust the company more, 79% indicated they are likely to purchase that company’s products, 44% are likely to actively pursue working at that company, and 74% are more likely to pay attention to the message of the company because it has a deep commitment to a cause.

The Cone (2006) study also indicated that Millennials are loyal to brands they trust and respect, but are skeptical of traditional advertising. Therein lies the beauty of cause marketing. These consumers are searching for an emotional connection to companies and brands, and what better way for a company to gain the trust of Millennials, but to partner up with a popular social cause. Seems like an obvious strategy. However, although the number of cause campaigns has grown in years, the Cone study found that consumers are not “getting it” and making the connection. In fact, 70% of respondents felt that companies are not supporting the causes that they are most concerned about. The partnerships are out there, but perhaps the strategies of the cause campaigns are not communicating effectively. Only a handful of companies, such as ALDO, Mudd, MAC, Cartoon Network and MTV were shown to be successfully and actively engaging Millennials.

These socially-engaged consumers are important to the success of cause marketing campaigns. Understanding and engaging these “Doers,” as defined by Cone, is an important step. This population was found to represent 20% of the Millennial generation, or an estimated 15.6 million people in the United States (Cone, 2006). These consumers are thought to be the most brand loyal. In order to retain that loyalty, developing a relationship with the brand is crucial. That’s where social media comes into play.

As expected, Millennials are active with social media, most notably Facebook and Twitter. The three following examples of cause marketing campaigns include a strong social media presence, if not completely relying on the power of “network marketing.”

CASE STUDIES

The three following case studies briefly examine some of the creative aspects of using social media to engage young consumers and align a brand with a social cause and hopefully developing brand loyalty with Millennials.

Dawn Saves Wildlife

For over 30 years, Procter & Gamble’s Dawn dish detergent has been involved in wildlife conservation and rescue. In a creative effort to establish a connection to their customers, Dawn launched an aggressive social media campaign to cultivate an online community of followers. In 2009, Dawn

actively engaged in a product sales promotion that included a limited-edition labeled bottle that advertised a \$1 donation for every bottle sold. The campaign was based on an agreement that P&G would donate \$1, or a total of up to \$500,000, to the Marine Mammal Center and the International Bird Rescue Research Center. The beauty of the campaign though, is that it requires purchasers to activate their donation online at www.dawnsaveswildlife.com by entering a special code located on the bottle – the purchase alone does not result in the donation. Once consumers go to the website, which encourages consumers to “Join the movement. Join the community. Become a champion.” But, the brilliance of the campaign is that once donors go online, they are directed to the brand’s Facebook page where they join the brand community.

The campaign was scheduled to run though a limited time period, but thanks in part to the BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, the campaign has been hugely successful and has been extended. But even once the campaign has reached its new target of \$1 million, the social media aspect will continue. The Facebook page, “Everyday Wildlife Champions” currently has more than 330,000 “Likes” and is still active promoting that the campaign easily reached the \$500,000 goal and has been extended to a \$1 million cap.

While the Facebook page is obviously popular, the alliance with Dawn is minimal and limited to photos and some of the messages, but consumers are driving the communication. Susan Baba, P&G representative, said in *Brandweek* that the level of minimal branding was intentional. “One of our top take-home lessons is to keep the line between branding and cause clear. While Dawn is the driving factor behind the program’s success, it is ultimately the passion for wildlife conservation that drives the consumer. It’s important for brands to view these programs as organic, with momentum built by consumer passion,” she said. Baba added that Dawn is looking to position its microsite as “the authoritative Facebook page for environmental cause, support and discussion forum” (Wong, 2009).

Target’s Super Love Sender

Without the support of a traditional media strategy, retail giant Target developed a short-lived social media campaign to take advantage of the timing of the Super Bowl and Valentine’s Day in 2010. While Target has an established history with philanthropy and successful marketing, this two-week campaign was low-key in comparison to the brand’s earlier efforts. The campaign ran from January 31 to February 14, 2010 and featured a Facebook app, “Super Love Sender,” which allowed users to send an interactive Valentine’s card and select which one of five preselected charities would receive a portion of the Target donation in the process. Visitors were not required to actually make the donation, just vote on which campaign they wanted to see supported. The campaign centered around the votes determining how the \$1 million donation by Target would be split across five different charities: Kids In Need Foundation, United Through Reading Military Program, St Jude Children’s Research Hospital, United Way and The Salvation Army.

“At Target, we continually look for unique ways to interact with our guests and provide them with the opportunity to participate in our charitable giving,” according to Laysha Ward, president, community relations, Target. “We designed Super Love Sender to be a fun, interactive and viral giving campaign that has the power to positively impact the educational programming of these five deserving charities” (Target, 2010).

When the campaign ended, 26,000 votes had been cast and the charities split the donation based on their percentage of votes. St. Jude’s received nearly half of the votes cast, resulting in a \$490,000 donation. The Kids In Need Foundation received \$120,000, The Salvation Army received \$80,000, United Through Reading Military Program received \$220,000 and United Way received \$90,000. But the big winner of the viral campaign was Target, which received 169,000 new Facebook fans as a result of the campaign (Target’s cause marketing, 2010).

Walmart’s Lend a Paw

Not to be outdone by its competition, Walmart also has successfully embraced social media to engage Millennials. On April 16, 2010, Walmart partnered with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, with a special “Lend a Paw” effort on Facebook. The cause marketing campaign

featured a Facebook page (facebook.com/lendapaw) to promote the cause partnership. For every “click,” \$1 was donated (up to \$100,000) from Walmart's pet suppliers to the ASPCA. This partnership was not completely new for Walmart, which already sells products from the ASPCA Collection in its stores, from toys and tethers to kennels and carriers (Mahoney, 2010).

The campaign has been mildly successful resulting in only a little over 13,000 “likes,” but it has attracted the attention of the consumers aligned to this cause and maintains an active conversation with fans.

CONCLUSION

There is indisputable evidence that Millennials claim to be socially conscious and brand loyal to companies that are aligned with causes that they support. In an effort to engage these consumers, a large number of brands are reaching out to these young consumers where they can most likely find them – on Facebook. A social media strategy enables the brand to be part of an active community and constantly connect with consumers at their convenience in a creative manner.

However, while the jump to social media seems like an obvious tactic, additional Cone research determined that the most generous Millennials (more than nine out of 10 respondents) actually prefer to receive information from organizations via email, with Facebook coming in a distant third, behind even print communications (Millennial Donor Study, 2010). There is concern that Millennials will become jaded by businesses that do not live up to their cause marketing claims, but cause marketers should also be cautioned that too many causes online may also spoil their efforts.

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