

GOOD DEEDS, GOOD BRANDS

by Paul Narula

Saving the world isn't easy. While superheroes and action movie stars can do it on a daily basis, your average man or woman on the street is less likely to have the opportunity to pull off such a dramatic stunt. But there are numerous ways in which everyone can do a small part of the job, and a number of non-profit organizations and charities exist to shoulder that burden. Donations are always welcome, but many companies need more than just handouts, especially when the need to get their message out to more people arises. That is where the concept of cause-related licensing steps in.

Licensing for Good

A licensing program can bring a great many advantages to a non-profit organization or a cause. Naturally, the increased revenue is a boon to the cause and helps further the organization. "One or two licensing deals can make a huge difference in dealing with top priority threats," says Randi Goodman, principle of Synergy Licensing, which represents the Save The Earth brand. Synergy has signed Save The Earth to a new deal with Signorelli for fashion tops to bring attention to the rising problem of ocean acidification. Revenue generated from licensing programs is occasionally very useful when compared to revenue generated by fund-raising and donation drives, as it can be considered "undesignated revenue" which can be put to use for any reason needed within the organization immediately, rather than being funneled directly to a particular project.

In addition, today's economy has made peo-

ple extra-careful about spending their money. Where there might have been generous donations previously, consumers simply don't have as much money to give as they once did. Buying a licensed product allows consumers to donate when they could not.

Beyond the revenue boosts, a licensing program grants a cause or organization a boost in visibility in the public eye. Sometimes, the average consumer might be unaware of an organization, or even if they are aware of it, don't know a great deal about it or how to go about aiding that specific cause. A strong licensing program gets the cause-related brand out there to the consumer, informing them about it through the licensed product. The ASPCA, for example, is launching a new line of products aimed towards children, called ASPCA Kids, that will bring the organization's message to a younger generation.

The Metis Group has brought Smokey Bear back into the public's eye with deals with apparel companies such as Lucky Brand Jeans and a licensed museum exhibit with the Betty Brinn Children's Museum.

"A licensing program can put a non-profit into a sphere where you might not normally see them," says Nicole Desir, associate vice-president of brand management at The

Beanstalk Group, which represents the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Licensing contracts like the WWF's with apparel retailer Forever 21, for apparel featuring animal imagery, can draw more support to a charitable organization, even if it is already well-known.

Doing Good Is Good for You

For a licensee, the benefits of working with a cause-related brand are numerous. As with any type of licensing, it allows the licensee to expand the market for its products to a new consumer base, as supporters of the cause are likely to purchase cause-branded goods. This is especially true of large organi-

zations or well-known causes, such as the Susan G. Komen for the Cure, which supports breast cancer research. The organization states that the disease can affect one-in-eight women in the U.S., and that there are over 2.5 million breast cancer survivors in the U.S. alone. These are grim

facts to look at, but they do mean that a brand such as Susan G. Komen will resonate very strongly with a large consumer base. "It goes beyond rational brand loyalty," says Karen White, director, corporate relations at Susan G. Komen for the Cure. "It grants emotional brand loyalty for many of our consumers." This can create strong licensing partnerships, such as Yoplait's yogurt lid program, which has been supporting Susan G. Komen for the Cure for



The ASPCA Kids branding program will expose a new audience to the ASPCA's message

more than 10 years. The foundation is continuing to build on its core licensing relationships and hopes to create a drive for its programs on levels beyond just licensing and create integrated corporate relationships. An example would be the PinkTogether program with General Mills, which not only features pink cereal boxes, but an extensive website at PinkTogether.com for survivors to share their stories and learn more.

In addition, a licensee can gain a significant boost in its own image with a strong and well-supported licensing program for a cause. A licensee can establish themselves in a positive light if a licensing program with a cause-related brand is successful and receives a great deal of public attention. "Our licensees know that Smokey Bear is hip and timely, but also that their program is helping fund education," says Libby Kavouloukis, owner and managing member of the Metis Group, which represents the Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl brands for the U.S. Forest Service. A new crop of Smokey Bear PSAs, telling kids to "Get Their Smokey On," combined with a presence on Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube, has kept the brand up-to-date, without changing its message.

The Consumer Draw

As of late, many cause-related brands have experienced an upswing. Those interviewed for this article noted that they had seen new organizations entering the licensing marketplace and that licensing opened up many new opportunities for them. "The number of entries of non-profit organizations to the retail space in recent years has been an enormous sea-change," says

Sharon Summer, senior vice-president at MODA International. MODA has a new non-profit brand of its own in America's VetDogs, for which it is actively developing a licensing program, as well as continuing the expansion of its National Trust for Historic Preservation and The Henry Ford brands.

There is always the "feel good" factor of making a cause-related purchase, but there are other attractions to these licenses. Many brands can lend credibility to the licensed product. "Consumers aren't looking just for value, but for values," says Phoebe Campbell, president of Campbell Associates, which represents the American Red Cross and the ASPCA. This type of credibility and trust from a consumer, similar to what is often seen in corporate brand licensing, can spell the difference between the decision to purchase a licensed or non-licensed product. For example, the Red Cross has a large licensing program devoted to emergency and survival products, such as emergency radios from Eton and the first aid kits available at Wal-Mart, which it will continue to develop. The organization is also expanding its licensing pro-

gram to include senior care products, still in development, where it feels the Red Cross brand name can be trusted.

In 2008, Cone LLC, a strategy and communications agency and part of the Omnicom Group, conducted a study at the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University that further illustrates how strong an affect cause-related licensing can have on a consumer's decisions. The first phase of the study, which simulated shopping in a convenience store, exposed a random sample of 182 participants from 18-62 years old to two different types of advertising. One group saw a cause-related message for a brand, while the other saw a generic corporate advertisement. Consumers were tested with four different types of products—shampoo, toothpaste, chips, and light bulbs. In the shampoo test, Cone saw that 47 percent of the participants who saw the cause-related advertisement chose the intended product out of a shelf of options, as opposed to 27 percent of those who saw an ad for the same product without a cause-related message incorporated, with a similar increase shown for toothpaste.

Cone's study and the experiences of those interviewed for this article show that a cause-related brand can be a powerful force in the hands of the right licensee. There will always be causes to support and non-profit organizations seeking to get their message out there, and licensing can provide an excellent avenue to both. Cause-related brands have the potential to inspire consumer confidence and loyalty. And as a bonus, they help a licensor, a licensee, and a consumer get together and make the world a bit of a better place.



MODA International will be expanding the America's VetDogs brand through licensing.