

Personal View

Charity starts at school

by Penny Hawk

After working for a relatively brief time at the Kids In Need Foundation, a charitable organisation that provides free schools supplies to kids who need them, I started thinking about an elementary classmate of mine who was the poorest kid in the school. As a first grader, there were a lot of things about David I couldn't figure out.

Why did being poor mean being dirty? Why did he have big holes in his socks? Why didn't his shoes fit him? And two really big questions at school: why didn't he ever have paper and a pencil in class, and why didn't he do his homework?

Of course, now I know that millions of children live in families so poor they do not have soap and water. They never get new socks, and they must wear their siblings' old shoes whether they fit them or not. I am very aware now that millions of children go to school every day without having done their homework because they have no electricity, no school supplies, and no answers - to their assignments or to their poverty.

Today more families than ever are in need, and more companies than ever need marketing that will draw to them those consumers who are in a position to purchase their products. One of the vicious aspects of a recession is that more people need help, but fewer people/companies are able to give it.

The most recent Cone Report confirms that consumers want to know how companies are helping to make the world better. Now is the time for companies to shout out that they are socially responsible citizens. Businesses can cope with the recession and remain philanthropic. Indeed, it should be part of a bold marketing plan.

Cone also reports that education is the number one cause supported by consumers, so the challenge for the Kids In Need Foundation is to create opportunities that will assist companies that are finding it difficult to contribute. Cause-related marketing projects are the answer.

Through partnering with a retailer, a manufacturer can contribute a portion of each consumer purchase to a charity. Such a cause-related marketing event allows the retailer, the manufacturer, and the consumer to participate in supporting the cause and to feel good about it.

Both the retailer and the manufacturer benefit by being favourably viewed by the consumer as good corporate citizens, and it's a way they can differentiate themselves from their competition. During the 2008 BTS season, Energizer conducted such a campaign at 800 Target stores and donated a portion of the sales of specially packaged batteries to the Kids In Need Foundation.

Target, sponsor of the Kids In Need national network of resource centres, was also the location of a similar event conducted by The Hershey Company and Mars during this year's Valentine's Day season. Acme United conducts an initiative that supports Kids In Need through sales on its website and wisely launched the programme at the National Art Education Association show in April.

Now is a time when consumers are expecting companies to step up, to take action to solve problems, and to cooperate with others to make things better. Big issues are involved. Bold marketing is one of the answers. Bold marketing that has meaningful results will earn you an A+.

The Kids In Need Foundation offers cause related marketing opportunities to retailers and manufacturers as a means of making a difference in the lives of less fortunate students. Visit our website: www.kidsinneed.net, to learn more about us. We welcome inquiries and are ready to work with companies to facilitate events. To find out more, you can reach us at: +1 937-296-1230 or at: info@kidsinneed.net