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## Cause Marketing Meets Social Media

**BYLINE:** Brian Morrissey**SECTION:** NEWS; DIGITAL**LENGTH:** 969 words**HIGHLIGHT:** Brands tap do-gooder impulse to encourage consumers to pass along marketing messages

NEW YORK Target is no stranger to cause marketing. The retailer is unusual in that it dedicates 5 percent of its income to charity. It's also no stranger to social marketing, having more than 260,000 fans on Facebook.

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Last week, it brought the two together by kicking off "Bullseye Gives," a campaign that invites users to choose from a list of 10 charities to which Target will donate \$3 million. The social twist: After voting for a charity, users are invited to broadcast their selection to their Facebook friends via their news feeds, the running summary of updates that is central to the Facebook experience. In less than a week, Target tallied 40,000 votes, which translated into tens of thousands of peer-to-peer impressions.

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The effort is one of several undertaken by companies recently that use charities to give people a reason to share brand messages. In the social world, the central front for brands is what's been called "the stream," the real-time feed of updates, links and bits of content that has become the defining characteristic of Facebook and Twitter. Entry to the stream is coveted by brands desperate for the word-of-mouth appeal that comes close to a personal recommendation to friends.

"What we've learned is it's not the cause but it's the idea of a brand truly doing good that has a significant impact through social media," said Joe Marchese, CEO of SocialVibe, a Los Angeles-based startup that runs cause-related social campaigns for brands like Kraft, Sprint and PowerBar. "When you do something good, it used to be that you had to buy a bunch of media and tell people or do PR. Now, the potential is for people to tell each other that you do good."

For brands, particularly those in low-consideration categories like consumer goods, charities can become a cheap way to get access to the megaphones everyone has in social media. Take Colgate. It created a Facebook application called Smiles that languished for months, with just a few hundred people sharing it. Then it hooked up with SocialVibe to recast the tool to tap into the do-good vibe. The brand offered charitable donations each time users shared Smiles. The result: The widget was shared 500,000 times in five weeks.

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Kraft is in the midst of a "Share a Little Comfort" campaign that offers to donate 1 million boxes of Kraft Macaroni & Cheese to needy families based on the number of messages people share via Facebook and Twitter. The added bonus of such programs, according to Marchese, is that brands can simply redirect some of their media budgets to cover the donations. It can turn out to be cheaper to offer donations in exchange for people-powered media than buying ad space for promotion. So far, more than 23,000 messages have been posted in response to Kraft's effort.

There is a downside, of course. Efforts can cross the line into social-media spam. Giving people an incentive to pass along messages from brands could come to be seen, reasonably, as an alternative way for brands to buy their way into conversations.

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"If it's viewed as a front and that you don't really care, then it can be a setback," said Steve Rubel, svp and director of insights at Edelman. "If it's viewed as a tactic to build buzz, not as a tactic to solve problems or effect change, then you're going to lose all credibility."

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This has caused Procter & Gamble, for instance, to shy away from incentivizing sharing with its Tide "Loads of Hope" program, which donates clothing to disaster-stricken areas. It dabbled in the tactic during its "Digital Hack Night," when social-media experts tapped their networks to sell "Loads of Hope" T-shirts. But P&G has not chosen to promote the program the same way with consumers. "There's always a balance of inspiring authentic conversation and being too promotional," said Kash Shaikh, a Tide rep. "We don't want to be too promotional."

To get over that, and to give the marketing programs legs, SocialVibe in some cases sends participants evidence of what their pass-along did. For instance, charity: water, a cause devoted to providing clean drinking water in impoverished areas, takes pictures of the wells dug and sends them to participants a few months later. "People think back to the brands supported over the months and connect it with a specific action," Marchese said. To date, SocialVibe has raised \$500,000 for three-dozen charities.

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Charities are also a handy way to ensure that "viral" efforts don't completely fail. Sun Products brand All Small & Mighty used the lure of charities to goose distribution of YouTube videos it created last month. It linked up with NBC's Celebrity Apprentice to drive viewers to an All Web site to see videos created by Joan and Melissa Rivers. Each time a video is forwarded, All donates 50 cents to charity. The gambit fits with the Apprentice construct of awarding a winning team with a donation to the charity of its choice.

"We wanted to test how big of a role this would play," said Shiv Singh, social-media lead at Razorfish, the agency that created the program. "You can only create so much passion around a detergent."

The charity game has even gone in an unusual direction. Unemployed copywriter Chris Kahle is trying the approach in the hopes of getting his dream job with Crispin Porter + Bogusky. Last week he posted an offer to donate \$1 to charity for the first 200 people who sent Twitter messages to Crispin co-chairman Alex Bogusky and interactive creative director Jeff Benjamin, urging them to hire him. That part of the gambit worked: Dozens of people sent messages to the execs. Bogusky was impressed, calling the idea "really smart," although he didn't commit to interviewing Kahle.

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