

10 Tips for Socially Conscious Marketing

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Despite a tough economy, consumers are still willing to pay more for products and services that help a cause—whether that's green organizations, "pink ribbon" products for breast cancer research or coffee grown on fair-trade farms. How can your company benefit from socially conscious consumers? Try these 10 tips.

1. **Think local.** For many small businesses, social responsibility starts with your community. Local customers are more likely to buy from you if they see you "giving back." Look for ways to get involved that are close to home.
2. **Choose your cause.** The issue should be related to your business and something that you, your staff and your customers care about. For example, if you own a sporting goods store, you could support organizations that promote children's fitness, fight obesity or encourage families to get active.
3. **Do your homework.** Before selecting organizations to support, investigate each group's background to be sure it's legitimate. Find out what percentage of funds goes to programs and services compared to overhead.
4. **Decide what type of support you can give.** There are many ways to make a difference that don't require a big cash outlay. Consider contributing a percentage of sales, sponsoring an event, donating products or volunteering your time.
5. **Understand tax liability.** Are you contributing money, goods or a percentage of your profits to a cause? Be sure you're following the appropriate rules for tax deductions and tax liability so there are no unpleasant surprises.
6. **Motivate.** To promote excitement among your employees, kick off your involvement by spending a morning volunteering together. Give employees who volunteer recognition or rewards such as an afternoon off. Sponsor a "friends and family" day where employees get their loved ones to volunteer.
7. **Spread the word.** Promote your involvement in your chosen cause through all of your business's marketing materials, including product packaging, hang tags, store signage, newsletters and print or online advertising.
8. **Go virtual.** Get customers engaged in your cause by promoting it on your website, your business's Facebook page, your Twitter page and anywhere else your company has an online presence. Social media is a great way to build community around your cause.
9. **Publicize your involvement.** Reporters and bloggers love to write about socially responsible businesses. Reach out to them to publicize your social marketing efforts. This not only helps your business, but also helps promote the causes you're supporting.
10. **Network.** You never know whom you'll meet through your involvement in a cause. Get to know others who are working with the organizations you support, and you might just find your business's next big client, partnership or vendor relationship.

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