



# PASSION PAYS OFF

BY KATE BEDNARSKI

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**O**NE DAY LAST YEAR OUR OFFICE MANAGER CAME IN SPORTING A BRIGHT YELLOW WRISTBAND. Curious, I asked her what the band meant and quickly learned how out of touch I was to the hottest, new marketing phenomenon. Launched last May, the “Wear Yellow, LiveStrong” campaign partnered Nike and the Lance Armstrong Foundation in an effort to raise funds for foundation programs that help people living with cancer. Nike created the bright yellow wristband as a tribute to Lance Armstrong and in support of people living with the disease. They blew away their goal of raising \$5 million by selling the bracelets for \$1 each. As of May 2005, 47.5 million wristbands have been sold and strong demand continues. The foundation currently sells an average of 100,000 wristbands every day. “Doing good” for those living with cancer has had tremendous positive effect on the Nike and Lance brands, and increased respect, goodwill, and customer loyalty and support.

These days there are so many very similar products being sold that it’s now become less about features and benefits to make a sale as it is about the experience you offer your customers and what your company or store stands for. People are less interested in buying stuff—even if the price is lower—than being part of a company that supports something they also believe in—even if the price is higher. Case in point: Nike running shoes vs. an off-brand.

Studies and consumer research have shown that a significant change has recently occurred in how people want to be perceived by others as it relates to their beliefs, values and morals. Since the late 1990s, people have placed an increased value on personal integrity. In the past year or two, however, an increase in consumers’ desire to be seen by others as loyal, community-oriented and passionate about the things they care about has moved to the forefront, according to 2004 research reported in the Yankelovich Monitor. People possess an increased desire to be seen by others in a positive, ethical and caring light, particularly true of the 20-somethings and 30-somethings—the younger buyers you and the fitness industry seek. This is about creating brand and store loyalty, doing better business and, simply, doing good to do better.

## WHAT IS PASSION MARKETING?

Values-led marketing...cause marketing...passion marketing—all terms for the same idea. Central to its definition is the idea of a marketing partnership between a business and non-profit entity or cause for mutual benefit. Passion marketing creates an outlet for utilizing the power of your company to do good while also profiting. That occurs because it demonstrates your business’ commitment to addressing cur-

rent social issues by making available resources and funding while addressing your sales objectives. This makes good sense because your customers are looking for more meaning in the products they’re buying and are truly buying into the idea of corporate giving.

## IT’S A CHANGING WORLD

According to the 2004 Multi-year Cone Corporate Citizenship Study, 85 percent of consumers in the United States are more likely to switch brands to support a cause (when price and quality are equal). After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, this figure rose 27 percentage points from the 54 percent similarly polled before 9/11, and the figure continued to rise through 2004. In addition, respondents following 9/11 reported they felt that “a company’s commitment to causes is important when I decide which business I want to see in my community,” compared with only 58 percent before 9/11. What’s more, people notice companies that sponsor good causes and believe that they have higher quality service and products.

Your good efforts will build employee morale and, finally, you will make an especially significant impact with younger customers. Today’s young adults have learned to recognize the importance of a company standing for something it believes in. The same Cone/Roper research project showed that cause-related activities will influence not only the buying habits of Gen X and Y, but also gain their loyalty and trust—not a bad thing to have as they mature and develop more buying power. Aligning with a cause is a significant strategy for companies to attract consumers (and to attract future employees) at an early age and gain a long-term, sustainable, competitive advantage.

Some companies in the sporting goods in-



## A COMPANY'S COMMITMENT TO CAUSES IS IMPORTANT WHEN I DECIDE WHICH BUSINESS I WANT TO SEE IN MY COMMUNITY. —Cone/Roper consumer research results after 9/11

dustry, particularly athletic companies, have dedicated a significant portion of their marketing efforts to causes, and it's paid off. In early spring of 2004, Reebok partnered with the American Heart Association to launch the "Wear Your Heart on Your Feet" program in support of America's fight against heart disease. Reebok gave away \$1 million of walking shoes in this incredibly successful program to consumers making a donation of \$25 or more to the AHA. The impact of your program can be large or small, the point is to do something that aligns with the values of your company and stick to it.

Other causes are setup to allow many companies, even small ones, to easily participate. For example, "One Percent for the Planet" alliance ([www.onepercentfortheplanet.org](http://www.onepercentfortheplanet.org)) allows businesses to join and then donate at least 1 percent of their annual net revenues to support environmental causes worldwide.

### HOW TO DO IT

Passion marketing is not merely about throwing money at a good cause. You have to be organized about it. You need to start by defining your set of fundamental values and aligning your marketing to them. If you just slap a cause on to your efforts, it's not real and it will be noticed. Next, find a cause in your community that you and your customers care about supporting. One of the hardest parts of passion marketing can be finding a partnership opportunity that fits your organization's values and personality. Begin by thinking about local community health and fitness-related programs your organization can help. Here are four areas to consider:

» **Youth and children:** The incidence of childhood obesity, heart disease and diabetes is on the rise, but the amount of time given for school PE has declined. Research has shown that if kids learn to be active when they are young, they often grow up to be active, exercising adults—not only healthier, but also your consumers. You can partner with already successful programs to make a difference. For one list of organizations, go to [www.justgive.org](http://www.justgive.org). Or you can part-

ner with an existing program or help establish a new program in your community school system. Also, the American Council on Exercise ([www.acefitness.org](http://www.acefitness.org)) has a program it calls Operation FitKids that donates funds and exercise equipment to schools. And PE4Life ([www.PE4Life.org](http://www.PE4Life.org)) helps disseminate government grants for fitness and training programs.

» **Senior citizens:** The aging population needs fitness help too. Many senior citizen centers offer programs to provide friendship and community activities to senior citizens. Perhaps your company or store could lead fitness activities, give talks, or offer instruction and exercise motivation at a senior center.

» **Local programs:** Most cities offer a wide range of support opportunities. Call around to see what might be available in your community. Portions of your sales could go to support specific health and fitness programs or equipment needs. Or you could just volunteer time in an annual work project, for example painting poles and swing sets in bright colors at a playground, fixing and securing swings and slides, or repairing bikes and jump ropes at a local school.

» **National programs:** Nothing wrong with tapping into national causes such as ones that raise money for breast cancer or leukemia research. There are walks, runs and events all the time that look for funds, as well as promotional and organizational help.


If you want your passion marketing program to work, you need to make sure you have people working for you that believe in the company's principles. Gain their involvement by allowing your team to participate in creating the program. You also want to make sure you listen to your customers. Commit to the program for the long haul—

be consistent in your support.

Nearly nine in 10 Americans want companies to talk about their passion marketing efforts, but only four in 10 say companies do it well. Take that to heart: Once you have launched your program, don't hide it! Make it part of ads, fliers, websites or in-store signage. As a result, you can expect more of your customers to name you as a good corporate citizen, increasing the likelihood that they will loyally do business with you.

### COMMITMENT CAN REAP REWARDS

Virtue is not its own reward to the extent it once was. A real marketing opportunity now exists around providing consumers with products and services that allow them to overtly and publicly express their belief in and support for the causes that are most important to them. Be attentive to your customer's most important beliefs and issues, align with at least one of them, publicize it, and then enjoy the success your business experiences. You will appeal to your customers' hearts and pocketbooks by providing products and services they want while allowing them to purchase and act in accord with their values. You will enjoy increased sales and feel good about the good you are doing.

Oh, and about that yellow wristband our office manager had? I purchased mine the next week. 

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