

# CAUSE MARKETING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

5 Steps to Successful Online Campaigns

*Kate Olsen and Geoff Livingston*

A free eGuide  
for corporations  
from your friends at  
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# About this eGuide: Why you should keep reading

As thought leaders and corporate cause marketing partners, [Network for Good](#)<sup>i</sup> and [Zoetica](#)<sup>ii</sup> have been involved in corporate-sponsored social good campaigns of all types: from matching grant contests that ask participants to rally the most donations for their favorite causes; to crowdsourced voting contests that reward the most popular charities with corporate grants; to campaigns that ask people to pledge volunteer time, acts of kindness or donation dollars to achieve a common goal.

We understand the challenges and rewards of online social good campaigns and offer this eGuide to ensure that your company's foray into online cause marketing thoughtfully achieves both your marketing goals (a positive impact on the bottom line) and your social good goals (real help for the community). If you seek to avoid the controversies that arise from misguided campaign planning and execution that can severely undermine brands in the public eye, keep reading!

This eGuide identifies the key questions your company should ask before initiating a cause marketing campaign and outlines the five steps to success. Recent online social good case studies, in addition to general cause marketing examples, provide recommendations for best practices and lessons learned to inform your next campaign. Further, this guide is summarized in a handy checklist to direct your campaign development.

## What is a Social Good Campaign?

A Social Good Campaign is a form of cause marketing in which companies partner with causes and consumers to achieve social good. A campaign can take a wide variety of forms, with online and offline components, ranging from contests, giveaways, fundraising drives and events to benefit communities. With the rise of social media, most campaigns now include a Facebook, Twitter or other online community feature.

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# Introduction: Why companies are using their social media communities to do good

"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."

- Joe Marchese, President of [SocialVibe](#)<sup>iii</sup>, as quoted in [Adweek](#)<sup>iv</sup>

Mashable proclaimed that 2009 was the [year of social media](#)<sup>v</sup> in a post about the incredible growth of social media use across the web. It appears that 2010 is on track to be the year of social media for social good with the rise of online cause marketing campaigns. From [Target's Bullseye Gives](#)<sup>vi</sup> contest, to the [Chase Community Giving](#)<sup>vii</sup> program, to [USA Today's #AmericaWants](#)<sup>viii</sup> Twitter hashtag campaign, companies are engaging their audiences around charity in new and innovative ways online – especially on social media platforms – and boldly linking their brands to philanthropy and social responsibility.

According to a report published by [onPhilanthropy](#)<sup>ix</sup>, North American companies are dramatically stepping up their sponsorship of cause marketing initiatives. The report cites an [IEG, Inc. study](#)<sup>x</sup> to illustrate the growth in North American cause marketing spending over the last five years, with a slight slowdown in 2009 due to the recession. And 2010 is already showing a fast and furious increase with contests like the [Pepsi Refresh Project](#)<sup>xi</sup> grabbing national attention.



Companies are spending more on cause marketing, but are they spending smart?

With the rise of social media usage and decline of trust in Corporate America following a wave of recent scandals and financial missteps, companies increasingly turn to new online cause marketing initiatives – social good campaigns – to drive consumer interest, link their brands to charity and counterbalance negative PR about social harms that arise as a cost of doing business. Companies use social good campaigns to create a halo effect for the brand with their customers and thereby “do well by doing good,” as the old adage goes.

Melissa Carrier, Executive Director of the [Center for Social Value Creation](#)<sup>xii</sup> at the University of Maryland’s Robert H. Smith School of Business, remarks, "With unprecedented sophistication, companies are linking traditional business objectives to the tangible and intangible benefits of going beyond financial metrics to tie customers, suppliers, employees, and the community in which they operate to something of greater social value. The resulting "C" change is certainly playing itself out in social media and there is much room for creative design ahead."

Most cause marketing initiatives are conceived by marketers with good intentions about social good, but strong allegiances to brand power and buzz. Flashy new social media tools make these campaigns very enticing, but it’s important for initiatives to stick to what marketing expert [Katya Andresen](#)<sup>xiii</sup> terms the [four essentials of cause marketing](#)<sup>xiv</sup>:

1. **Suitability:** *Does the cause connection to your brand make sense in the mind of your consumer?*  
Consumers must see a legitimate connection between the product brand and the cause tie-in. For example, the outdoor living protection company, [Mosquito Squad](#)<sup>xv</sup>, hosts the [Swat Malaria with Mosquito Squad](#)<sup>xvi</sup> campaign to educate about the risks of mosquito bites and raise funds for cause partner [Malaria No More](#)<sup>xvii</sup> and its health programs in Africa. That makes a good fit.
  
2. **Authenticity:** *Does the cause fit with your corporate identity?*  
Like suitability, authenticity speaks to how your company demonstrates the values inherent in a cause or social responsibility program. Do you walk the walk or is cause marketing just talk? Luna provides a great example of a company aligning its cause programs with its core identity. As a provider of nutrition for active women, [Luna's Pure Prevention campaign](#)<sup>xviii</sup> supports the [Breast Cancer Fund](#)<sup>xix</sup> to find and eliminate environmental and preventable causes of breast cancer – a major health issue for women.
  
3. **Transparency:** *Is it clear how your company is supporting the cause? Show them the money!*  
Given the explosion of cause marketing product tie-ins in the last few years, it's no longer enough to merely state that a portion of proceeds will go to benefit a certain cause – you have to disclose how much, how it will be delivered and over what timeframe. Both your company and the cause partner need to be very upfront about the nature of your partnership. [The Pound for Pound Challenge](#)<sup>xx</sup> (a partnership among [NBC's The Biggest Loser](#)<sup>xxi</sup>, [Feeding America](#)<sup>xxii</sup>, [General Mills](#)<sup>xxiii</sup>, [Subway](#)<sup>xxiv</sup>, [24 Hour Fitness](#)<sup>xxv</sup> and [Kroger Co.](#)<sup>xxvi</sup>) is a great illustration of cause marketing transparency: for every pound a user pledges to lose, 14¢ is donated to Feeding America, enough to deliver one pound of groceries to a local food bank.
  
4. **Selling Point:** *What value can you add that extends and supplements the cause tie-in?*  
[Cone research](#)<sup>xxvii</sup> has demonstrated that price and quality being equal, most consumers (80%) will buy cause-related products over those that don't have a charitable tie-in. Even though the cause promotion is a key factor at time of purchase, alignment with a cause is no longer a unique selling point. Consumers still want product value for their money. So what value proposition can you offer them? How about color? During [New Balance's Lace up for the Cure](#)<sup>xxviii</sup> breast cancer awareness campaign, the company released limited edition, personalized pink sneakers in support of [Susan G. Komen for the Cure](#)<sup>xxix</sup>. How about funny? Actor [Will Farrell](#)<sup>xxx</sup> teamed up with [Cancer for College](#)<sup>xxxi</sup>, a scholarship program for cancer patients, to sell a new line of amusing sunscreens featuring wacky names (*Sexy Hot Tan, Sunstroke and Forbidden Fruit*) and funny pictures of Will. How you differentiate your cause tie-in through real product value will make all the difference.

Bottom line: Consumers in the age of social media can smell disingenuous cause marketing efforts a mile away and now have the tools to broadcast the bad (and the good) at Web 2.0 speed. The consequences of poorly constructed cause marketing efforts are played out in real-time online and in the media. Watchdog groups like Breast Cancer Action's [Think Before you Pink](#)<sup>xxxii</sup> project and BuyLessCrap.org's [\(RED\)ICU\(LESS\)](#)<sup>xxxiii</sup> campaign are quick to focus attention on companies that are perceived to put business goals ahead of social impact, especially as their campaigns relate to pink (or green or cause) washing – the act of making false or exaggerated claims that a product or company is socially or environmentally friendly. These groups have passionate and vocal followers who can fuel a swift backlash to any corporate cause campaign they deem inappropriate or questionable.

As [Ann Charles](#)<sup>xxxiv</sup>, Founder and CEO of [BRANDfog](#)<sup>xxxv</sup>, observes, “Thanks to a social media culture that reveres transparency and demands accountability, companies today are seen through the critical lens of the Triple Bottom Line: people, planet and profit.”<sup>xxxvi</sup>

**Is your campaign ready to be judged on all three fronts?**

## Step 1: Cover the basics

There are many valid reasons for developing an online cause marketing campaign, from improving a corporate image, to building a stronger online community, to increasing sales. But are they solid enough reasons for your company to jump on the cause bandwagon? Before you proceed to the fun part – designing the cause marketing program – you need to focus on a few key questions that address whether cause marketing is the right approach and if so, how the program will affect campaign stakeholders.

### Why develop a cause marketing campaign? What are your goals?

Essentially, your company needs to determine if a cause campaign is the best way to achieve your business and philanthropic goals. Cause marketing is not a one-size fits all solution. It requires deep commitment and forethought to attain real and lasting success. There are many ways for your company to achieve a positive social impact – from philanthropic donations, to reducing your environmental footprint, to staff volunteer days – so take time to reflect on whether a cause tie-in is the best option for you.

If everyone agrees that a cause marketing campaign is the way to go, then you need to define a set of goals and measurements that will guide your program design. What are you trying to accomplish by aligning your brand with charity? And how will you know the campaign was a success?

### How will the campaign affect charities and cause advocates?

Cause marketing is a powerful means by which to achieve bottom line results, but companies also have to understand how these campaigns will impact the charity sector. In most cases, companies try to influence consumers' perceptions about the brand through cause marketing efforts. Traditionally, offline cause marketing programs linked a brand with a specific cause (think [Yoplait's Save Lids to Save Lives](#)<sup>xxxvii</sup> benefiting breast cancer awareness through [Susan G. Komen for the Cure](#)<sup>xxxviii</sup>) to encourage consumers to make a difference through their purchases. More recently, increasingly online cause marketing campaigns leverage social media applications to invite consumers to vote for or donate to their favorite charities, thereby linking people's passion for their cause to the brand. Consumers now act as cause advocates, instead of the brand itself, and the charities they support must also be considered campaign participants.

After the popularity of online campaigns like [America's Giving Challenge](#)<sup>xxxix</sup>, the [Pepsi Refresh Project](#)<sup>xl</sup> and [Chase Community Giving](#)<sup>xli</sup>, charities now have a new category of fundraising to manage – online contest grants. The upside for charities is quite big (sometimes up to hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations), but the work involved to rally support throughout the campaign can be overwhelming, especially for smaller organizations with limited staff and resources. Charities must evaluate whether the time and energy spent educating their supporters about the opportunity and urging them to vote is worth the possible grant money they'll see if all efforts pay off.

Kjerstin Erickson, Executive Director of the refugee organization, [FORGE](#)<sup>xlii</sup>, illustrates the cost/benefit analysis charities must perform before allocating scarce resources to contest efforts in a posting on [Social Edge](#)<sup>xliii</sup>. “Each time, it takes a considerable amount of effort to notify, encourage, and thank our network for taking action on our behalf. More importantly, though, each time we ask our network to vote we use a valuable asset (the time and attention of our network) that we could have used for something else.”

The conversation about the real value of online charity contests, especially crowdsourced philanthropy campaigns, is gaining momentum in both traditional and social media. Many critics feel that such contests reward charities with the largest online presence or savvy, instead of those with the most thoughtful community programs or biggest need. The focus on social media forces charities to spend limited resources building an online following, rather than on what they do best – administrating social programs.

Time will tell what sustaining role crowdsourced philanthropy will play in the charity sector. In the meantime, it's important for companies to consider how their campaigns will impact the resources of participating charities and keep the barriers to participate as low as possible.

## Who is the campaign audience and what action do you want them to take?

Understanding who you are trying to reach and what action you want them to take through your cause marketing campaign is essential. Do you want people to buy a specific cause-branded product? Are you trying to get them to help you allocate a philanthropic contribution? Are you seeking generous donors or volunteers that can represent your brand? Are you looking to create a groundswell of support for an issue near and dear to your company?

[\*USA Today's #AmericaWants\*](#)<sup>xliv</sup> Twitter hashtag campaign had a very clear audience (charities and their advocates) and call to action (post Twitter updates). People were encouraged to tweet “#AmericaWants (name of charity) to get a full-page ad in USA TODAY,” with the recipient of the most tweets receiving a full-page color ad in the paper. The campaign allowed charities to get attention on Twitter (and one lucky charity to get attention in front of *USA Today* readers) and gave *USA Today* exposure for its “What America Wants” brand campaign that promotes the paper’s unique take on the “American Experience” through media. Because the call to action was concrete and clear, the four day campaign’s potential reach was over 67 million followers on Twitter through 60,000 tweets in support of over 500 organizations. While this campaign made a big splash, it’s unclear whether it achieved any long term benefit for the charities involved. As hashtag Twitter campaigns evolve, it will be important to include more of a community building approach as described in the next section.

No matter your campaign goal, you will need to define your target audience and the best way to reach them to compel the desired action online and off. Ideally, the desired action should be tied to sustainable impact for the business and the cause (building a community, focusing attention on a topic etc...).

## Have you cultivated an online community?

The time to build an online community of supporters and fans is before you need them. While your cause marketing campaign will provide a great opportunity to capture new community members and expand your online reach, if you don’t have a base established, your campaign will never get off the ground.

Many companies create flashy social media pages and invite everyone and anyone to become fans of the brand. One million fans does not a community make! It’s fantastic if people like your company and your products. But does liking translate into doing or buying? Cause marketing programs often involve a call to action – whether it’s donating to a worthy cause, volunteering time, fulfilling acts of kindness or spreading the word about an important issue. If you want your fans to take up that call to action, you need to engage them beyond clicking that social media “like” button.

Engaged community members have a sustained reason for coming back to your site or online outposts. They feel part of an ongoing conversation about issues that are relevant to them – and to your company. They are quick to abandon your community if they feel you are throwing product and sales pitches at them, instead of establishing a relationship with them.

Cultivating a community, rather than a fan base, takes time and effort. It requires the creation of content beyond the sales pitch that supports your brand mission and identity, but also leaves room for conversation. Find out what your fans care about and then create an online social media strategy that engages them around those topics. You’ll be amazed at how fast your fan base will evolve into a community with just a little care and feeding.

[Pedigree](#)<sup>xlv</sup>, a pet food brand within Mars, Inc., does a great job of community building around issues pet owners care about that also support the brand's core values that every pet deserves a good home and good nutrition. The [Pedigree Adoption Drive](#)<sup>xlvi</sup> on Facebook has recruited over 1 million fans that do much more than just sign up – they comment, post pictures, attend events and are evangelist brand advocates. The social media strategy also maintains close ties with the [Pedigree Foundation](#)<sup>xlvii</sup>, creating a reinforcing connection between the brand and its charitable activities.

## Can you sell the program inside your company?

At some point, all social good campaigns require approval. While most executives understand that cause marketing can benefit their organization, many companies still view it as experimental marketing. Using a pilot project is a great way to get your campaign through the door: reticence is often conquered by an early success. The best way to provide a win is via a pilot project. Here are some tips to ensure you choose the right pilot project and wow your boss into saying “OK!”

- Be in tune with your social web community and the causes they care about. Make sure the cause or campaign focus you choose ties back to the company's corporate mission.
- Determine an appropriate campaign approach (See Step 2 below).
- Define a measurable goal for the campaign. Look at your strategy, and it will tell you exactly what to measure for ROI and social impact. At the end of the day, the campaign should achieve something worthwhile: market intelligence, micro-donations, new product feedback, click-throughs to a store, registrants for a webinar, an email list, or some other result. **You must be able to declare victory.**
- Choose a simple and relatively low-cost campaign pilot. Rather than going for the gold with millions, try a targeted allocation. When fear is involved, an easy, affordable project often gets a green light.
- Set a short timeframe for the pilot: you want to make this a quick test.

### Common Objections to Cause Marketing Projects (and How to Handle Them)

Managers who are skittish often demonstrate their reticence by throwing out objections. Here are some of the more common ones and methods to handle them.

- ✓ If they reference past failures, show them successes in the form of case studies. Remember, you're asking for dollars to achieve best practices.
- ✓ If they believe you need to execute a contest, publish on Facebook or Twitter, and that's not what you're recommending, focus on the stakeholder (e.g. donor, customer, advocate), not the tool. It's all about where your community is. Find them before you meet with executives, and understand what they care about. Bring evidence with you.
- ✓ “Our community doesn't care” is a common objection, particularly for any stakeholder group over 30 years old. Show them real stakeholder conversations over a significant period of time – without the organization. Another method is to use market research countering those misconceptions.
- ✓ Control. Some managers still don't want to engage in negative comments with their customers. There may be little you can do about this, but show that people are already talking negatively about them and tangible evidence that direct engagement actually reduces negativity and builds relationships.
- ✓ Invented here syndrome. If an idea comes from an in-house department, executives are sometimes skeptical. That's when you hand them market research or eBooks or even experienced consultants. Let them tell your executives the facts and set them straight (so to speak).

## Step 2: Frame the campaign

Once your company is onboard with a cause marketing program, it's time to start planning the specifics of your campaign. If you truly have covered the basics outlined in Step 1, framing the campaign should be a straightforward process to align the program's content and format with your audience and goals. The following questions will guide your planning process. Just remember to keep your impact goals front and center – every campaign component should support the end results you seek for both the business and the cause.

### Can you communicate the social benefit?

The most compelling cause marketing campaigns are rooted in creating tangible impact. They clearly link to an outcome that makes the world better, even if the individual action involved is quite small and discrete. Your audience can tell when a campaign is primarily about the marketing opportunity with little deference to the cause component of cause marketing. Companies that cause wash (or green wash or pink wash) their brands under the guise of a charity campaign, without genuinely promoting social good, are often vilified in traditional and social media. If consumers don't see the connection, they won't buy into your cause marketing efforts and your campaign will be dead on arrival.

Demonstrating the social benefit also includes communicating the call to action in an appropriate way online. If your campaign asks participants to share an invitation to vote, donate or spread kindness to their social networks, make sure that invitation won't get lost online. Status updates about charity contests can flood social media channels and dilute the call to action. As people manage an ever increasing social media presence, they need to become more selective about what opportunities they promote to their friends and family. No one wants to be labeled a spammer!

Chicago Tribune Theater Columnist Chris Jones [wrote](#)<sup>xlviii</sup>, “...turning over that time-honored granting process – or even part of that time-honored process – to the popular vote can undermine that relationship. For one thing, it turns theaters into on-line hucksters, which lacks dignity and turns off many real artists.”

However your campaign broadcasts the social good it is inspiring, make sure the appeal is relevant, accurate and considerate of people's time online.

### Can you link the social benefit to your brand or business offering?

Communicating the social good your campaign will create is relatively straightforward. Linking that benefit to your brand can be more challenging. Consumers will quickly evaluate whether the cause you are promoting makes sense in the context of the brand. To take an offline example, KFC and Susan G. Komen for the Cure recently became media targets for their [Buckets for the Cure](#)<sup>xlix</sup> campaign to promote breast cancer awareness. While both parties had good intentions to raise funds and awareness for an important issue, consumers balked at tying fried food to women's health.

In contrast, Stonyfield Farm is a great example of a company that clearly links its social investment with its core business in a way that makes perfect sense to consumers. With the [Have a Cow](#)<sup>l</sup> campaign, the company invites customers to learn more about its organic farming practices, promoting transparency and dovetailing with its overall social responsibility platform and commitment to [give away 10% of profits](#)<sup>li</sup>. As [Amy Sample Ward](#)<sup>lii</sup> observes, the campaign also gives Stonyfield Farm a creative and engaging social media presence through blogs, farm cam video diaries, Twitter updates and the like.

## What campaign format will deliver the most social and business impact?

Program design has everything to do with your impact goals and very little to do with the hot, new social media application du jour. When thinking about how to format your campaign, it's vital to consider how you can connect your audience to those impact goals. What design will address the needs of your target stakeholders (consumers, causes, marketing team, corporate relations), win over more participants, incite better PR, and ultimately result in more social good? A crowdsourced voting platform à la [Pepsi Refresh Project](#)<sup>liii</sup> or [Target's Bullseye Gives](#)<sup>liv</sup> snags media attention and results in lots of dollars going to causes, but the format also sparks controversy about whether it creates lasting social impact. As consumers and causes become savvy participants in online cause marketing contests, they will demand more: more transparency, more measurement, more impact. A simple vote-a-thon for a purse is unlikely to create more than a marketing splash and could invoke serious criticism if not meticulously executed.

Not sure where to start? Here are a few popular campaign formats to contemplate.

- **Matching Grant Contests:** These types of contests provide a great way to tap into your audience's passion for different causes and align that fervor with your brand. Matching grants provide incentive so that regardless of overall performance, votes and activity from consumers create reward. Customers and employees feel that their actions mattered, causes get additional resources, and the campaign reinforces engagement and loyalty. A good example of a successful matching grant contest is [America's Giving Challenge](#)<sup>lv</sup> presented by [The Case Foundation](#),<sup>lvi</sup> [PARADE](#)<sup>lvii</sup> and [Causes on Facebook](#)<sup>lviii</sup>. This 30-day competition, held on Causes.com, rallied passionate individuals and their social networks in support of organizations competing to win daily and overall challenge grants based on the number of donations to their cause, not dollars raised. Or Consider [Intel's Involved Matching Grant Program](#)<sup>lix</sup> that seeks to motivate Intel employees globally to engage in outreach and volunteerism. In 2009, [38 percent of Intel employees](#)<sup>lx</sup> donated 989,681 hours of service, and the Intel Foundation provided \$6.8 million in matching grants to 4,500 schools and nonprofits.
- **Crowdsourced Voting Contests:** These types of contests are relatively new and receive much media scrutiny as people weigh the benefits of giving to the cause with the highest popularity, but not necessarily the best social impact. Two recent examples illustrate how voting contests can work. One is the [Bullseye Gives](#)<sup>lxi</sup> contest, where [Target](#)<sup>lxii</sup> allowed its Facebook community to vote on which ten charities should receive funding. The other is the [Members Project from American Express and Takepart](#)<sup>lxiii</sup>, where people can vote for a different set of 50 charities every three months, 5 of which will receive \$200,000 in funding available from [American Express](#)<sup>lxiv</sup>.

It is worth a moment to reflect on recent criticism several charity sector thought leaders have raised about the true social value of crowdsourced philanthropy programs and restate how important it is to consider your campaign's effect on participating nonprofits' staff and resources. Voting contests circumvent the traditional grant process that relies on expert opinion, theories of change and impact measurement instead of number of fans and social media savvy to determine grant worthiness. As mentioned above, these types of campaigns also require a big effort by participating charities to recruit an online network's support, resources that may be better spent on community programming – especially if the charity does not win a grant.

As Kelly Kleiman of [Nonprofiteer.net](#)<sup>lxv</sup> observed on the [Huffington Post](#)<sup>lxvi</sup>, crowdsourced philanthropy also “diverts the attention of nonprofits from real fundraising – which involves long-term relationships and commitment to mission – to point-and-click fundraising, which costs “donors” nothing and therefore gives them no stake in the institution.”

If you plan a voting campaign for charity, be sure to consider and address these issues and be ready to defend your methodology. Tom's of Maine proactively addressed this issue in the format for its [50 States for Good](#)<sup>lxvii</sup> campaign. While there is a public voting component to the contest, the finalist

charities selected to receive votes were chosen by a panel of independent judges with charity sector expertise. Judging was based on the charity project's use of community volunteers, achievability, and positive impact on the community. This hybrid approach ensures that several charities receive media attention just by being chosen as finalists, that numerous other charities won't spend valuable resources on a public contest they likely won't win and that the winning charities will put the grant funds to meaningful use.

- **Social Action Campaigns:** These types of campaigns motivate an audience to take action in support of a cause or in the spirit of doing good or paying “it” forward. Because the focus isn't on how much money is being channeled to a given cause, these types of programs can inspire a new category of participant who values getting involved and wants to recruit a social network of peers to take action, too. A great example of a social action program is [Yahoo!'s You In?](#) campaign, where the company asked people to share their random acts of kindness (good deeds) in online status updates and then ask others in their networks to do the same, creating a ripple of happiness in the world. (See Case Study on page 15)
- **Issue Awareness Campaigns:** These types of campaigns rally an audience around a cause or issue that is important to the company or brand. The call to action is not necessarily around donations – although that can be a component – but rather around creating a movement to affect change. The [Haagen Dazs Help the Honey Bees](#) project is a perfect example of an issue awareness campaign that unites brand supporters around a social cause that is directly linked to the brand. The project provides many opportunities to get involved from donating, to planting a garden, to buying special products and engages supporters through a micro site, viral videos, online games and contests and Facebook and Twitter messaging.

Another element of campaign format is how many charities to involve. In some cases, the format will dictate if one or many charities will be included. In other instances, you will have to evaluate if choice in charity is a key component of your campaign's strategy to achieve impact goals. Campaign participants often have very passionate ties to the causes they care about. [Cone research](#) indicates that over one-third of Americans would support a company that allows them to decide which charities benefit from cause marketing efforts. When it's an option, consumer choice in charity can be a powerful motivator for participation and will ultimately connect the individual's passion for a cause with your brand. Just look at the frenzy of activity during [America's Giving Challenge](#) as proof that participants will evangelize their support for a cause and inspire their personal networks to do the same. Don't you want that fervor connected to your brand?

## Is your audience primed?

Technology has definitely leveled the playing field for online social good campaigns. It's no longer about reaching just your community of supporters, but activating your supporters' networks to create a viral groundswell of actions. In this regard, cause advocates can easily champion smaller charities that will have just as much of a chance to benefit from votes, donations or matching grants as large ones with big brand recognition – especially if those small organizations have high-energy, evangelical followers.

Before you start spreading the word about your new campaign, make sure your target audience is appropriate for your campaign format. If you are targeting consumers and asking them to nominate or vote for causes, your audience is likely familiar with various social media tools like Facebook and Twitter. However, people may need some guidance on any applications that are created specifically for the campaign or training to use emerging social media tools like [Foursquare](#) or [Blippy](#).

If you plan to target causes and ask them to rally their supporters to compete for grants, you may need to invest more resources in training for smaller organizations that likely don't have deep social media expertise. For example, during the 2009 [America's Giving Challenge](#), the hosts proactively mentored nonprofit participants prior to the contest to provide technical assistance through the Case [Gear Up for](#)

[Giving](#)<sup>lxxxvi</sup> training series, a [PARADE video presentation](#)<sup>lxxxvii</sup> and the Causes [Q&A sessions](#)<sup>lxxxviii</sup>. Helping charities understand the rules and best prepare for success, promotes better, more involved, participation and happier participants.

[Dana Nelson](#)<sup>lxxxix</sup>, Executive Director of [GiveMN](#)<sup>lxxx</sup>, outlines several ways companies can help nonprofit partners improve participation rates among their networks:

- Create template materials (press releases, logos, branded emails, quotes etc...)
- Outline clear guidelines (simple and consistent)
- Set a realistic level of effort (or perspective on the return on effort for participating causes)
- Do a campaign sanity check (run your program by a nonprofit partner or community advisory board to make sure your guidelines and goals are appropriate for cause participants)

The key to priming your campaign audience: Help cause advocates and participating charities reach out early to their networks, get their buy-in and turn them loose to drum up support for the campaign. Evangelicals are [Wired Fundraisers](#)<sup>lxxxix</sup> – word-of-mouth pros who are highly effective at fundraising for a cause in an ever-widening personal sphere of influence online. Wired Fundraisers have a deep emotional connection to the causes they support and if they believe in your company’s cause marketing platform, they will embrace your brand and campaign with the same enthusiasm. They are very good at what they do for a simple reason: people are most likely to give when someone they know asks them ([2006 Cone Nonprofit Research](#)<sup>lxxxii</sup>), especially when the appeal is couched in a very personal and emotional context.

## Should you promote celebrity involvement?

Celebrity endorsement can help a cause marketing effort take off. If your target audience identifies with the celebrity, his or her involvement hastens credibility, increases PR, and will likely allow faster connectivity and participation. On the con side, the celebrity may lend his or her name to the cause, but do very little actual work on behalf of the campaign or reveal detrimental character flaws that leave the cause marketing program in a bit of a lurch. In fact, character fit should be first on the list of evaluation criteria.

Assuming the celebrity strikes a deal amenable to the company and cause, the next hurdle is guaranteeing positive impact. Obviously there are pluses and minuses to each celebrity: some bring great assets to play, while others just aren't the right match for the cause marketing program. Just because you have access to a celebrity doesn't mean you have a guaranteed win. The relationship between celebrity and cause needs to be genuine, relevant and mutually rewarding.

While everyone would love [Oprah](#)<sup>lxxxiii</sup> (or the like) to endorse a cause, campaign planners need to weigh the efforts and coordination involved in partnering with A-List celebrities. Beyond just getting on their radar screen, there are contract negotiations, publicity scheduling, appearance preparation and numerous other details to coordinate. Further, the size of the celebrity’s brand needs to be appropriate for the scope of the campaign. Does it make sense to ask [Julia Roberts](#)<sup>lxxxiv</sup> to endorse a local matching grant contest in Nebraska? Probably not. But it might be appropriate to ask former Huskers coach [Tom Osborne](#)<sup>lxxxv</sup> to participate. Bottom line: consider what it will take to have a meaningful celebrity on board before simply pursuing this route.

In some cases, you may want to consider partnering with an online celebrity, particularly one who champions a very powerful grassroots movement – the network they bring is even more valuable than their brand name. The use of celebrities during the Pepsi Refresh Project is a great example. While [Gary Vaynerchuk](#)<sup>lxxxvi</sup>, the bestselling author and entrepreneur, has become a minor celebrity by normal society's standards, his ability to move large audiences online is amazing. At the interactive portion of [SxSW](#)<sup>lxxxvii</sup>, Gary Vee lent his name to [Invisible People.TV](#)<sup>lxxxviii</sup>, which won the [SxSW Pepsi Refresh Challenge](#)<sup>lxxxix</sup> with

some very strong peer-to-peer grassroots activism at several parties. The charity received a grant of \$50,000, beating out [Mashable](#)<sup>xc</sup>, a top ten online media property.

## Kevin Bacon's Take on Social Good Campaigns



Actor and musician Kevin Bacon is a long-time supporter and partner of Network for Good through a joint charity project – [SixDegrees.org](#), a website that promotes social networking with a social conscience. To date, SixDegrees.org has attracted over 1 million visitors and 8,500 people have created Charity Badges (fundraising widgets). Those people have in turn recruited tens of thousands of additional people to support their causes totaling \$3.2 million in donations to 1,500 charities (many of them small) -- an impressive grassroots ripple effect of awareness.

**NFG:** *When SixDegrees.org debuted back in 2007, you hosted a matching grant campaign to encourage people to activate their personal networks in support of their favorite causes. Why was the contest element so integral to the success of the site?*

**KB:** Who doesn't like to be a winner – especially when winning benefits a good cause? And when there's an opportunity to multiply the impact with a matching grant for your favorite charity, it's easy to get your friends and family to help you fundraise. Plus, contests offer a clear and compelling reason to get involved, show your support, and ask others to join in.

**NFG:** *What are your thoughts on celebrity involvement in cause marketing campaigns?*

**KB:** There's no doubt that a celebrity can really focus attention on a campaign – in a good or bad way. That's why it's important for both the celebrity and campaign sponsor to make sure the fit is right and the endorsement is authentic. There's always a danger that a company may use a charity campaign to obtain an implied celebrity endorsement for a brand. Again, authenticity is the key. The focus should be on using star power to give back. In the end, it's not about the celebrity – it's about making a difference.

**NFG:** *How has the celebrity factor played out on SixDegrees.org?*

**KB:** When we started SixDegrees.org, I reached out to many celebrity friends and asked them to create Charity Badges for their favorite charities. We thought the celebrity factor would motivate people to donate to the causes their favorite stars care about. Boy, were we wrong! The magic of Six Degrees is that it allows everyday people to become 'celebrities' for the causes that inspire them. In a social media world, people get involved online because their friends asked them to – and this is true for fundraising, too. Just look at the popularity of birthday wishes on Facebook. Who cares what cause I – Kevin Bacon – lend my name to, when you can share a deep connection to a cause with your friends and family?

It's clear that contests will continue, whether in the form of a matching grant program, a crowdsourced voting contest, or some new hybrid. The key for companies and their cause partners is to ensure program design based on best practice and create a win-win across social good and marketing impact. Best practice includes going beyond marketing measurements to include transparency and smart reporting, clear benefits for a significant portion of participants (matching grants?), a measurable social outcome, and celebrity or subject matter experts when appropriate.

## Step 3: Get people to act

Now that you have planned a strong campaign, it's time to get people to join in the fun. Motivating your audience to participate is a critical step in your campaign strategy. You can have the flashiest new widget or most advanced giving site, but if no one comes to explore them, your campaign will be a bust. Not only do you need to give people a compelling reason to act, but you have to make it easy to do so the moment you have their online attention.

### Should you provide incentives?

The best way to get someone to do something – even something they will enjoy – is to give them an incentive. This strategy is fundamental to social good campaigns where the sum of many individual actions ultimately creates an impact. Incentives come in many flavors, but rewards that inspire action and lead to the most social good tend to be prizes for the participating charities, not the individual voters or donors. Matching grants, for example, are a great way to amplify the efforts of an individual or group of supporters working hard for a cause. Experience shows that the monetary value of the incentive doesn't really matter: it's the gesture that truly motivates.

When [Kevin Bacon](#)<sup>xci</sup> launched [SixDegrees.org](#) in partnership with Network for Good in 2007, he offered six \$10,000 matching grants for the fundraisers who raised the most unique number of donations through Charity Badges (fundraising widgets) on the site. The matching grant component was a huge driver of participation and viral spread. Also in 2007, [Hanes](#)<sup>xcii</sup> teamed up with Six Degrees to run a similar matching grant campaign and took the incentives a step further – rewarding people who got six people to donate to their cause with a Hanes Six Degrees t-shirt. The matching grant hooked the Wired Fundraisers and the t-shirt gave an extra incentive to spread the word.

Another incentive – a charity gift card – works on and offline to reward campaign participants with the gift of charity itself. For example, [Neiman Marcus](#)<sup>xciii</sup> hosted a [Cartier](#)<sup>xciv</sup> event which rewarded jewelry purchasers in the store with a [branded Good Card](#)<sup>xcv</sup> ([Network for Good's charity gift card](#)<sup>xcvi</sup>) to redeem online as a donation to their favorite U.S. charities. Taking a different spin, [Pepsi](#)<sup>xcvii</sup> recently launched its "[Discover Cherry Goodness](#)" summer sweepstakes, in which winners receive a \$5,000 Good Card<sup>®</sup> to spend on the charities of their choice. These examples demonstrate that an offline cause marketing program can be translated online by inviting consumers to have a follow-up giving experience on your company's website or other online outpost that further links their passion for a cause to your brand and encourages them to tell their social networks all about it.

### Is it easy to participate?

Once you have communicated the rationale and benefit exchange for the campaign to your audience, you have to make it easy for people to act on that information in the moment. Brand marketers are often enamored of flash technology with all the latest bells and whistles and seek those extras when envisioning an online cause marketing campaign. But you need to take a moment to consider your audience. While consumers may have facility with mainstream social media sites, most of the causes they support don't utilize sophisticated technology and will have a hard time communicating how to use your application to their constituents if it is too cutting edge. It's far more important to spend planning efforts on Step 2 above, than in getting the design team to create Web 3.0 functionality.

The [Pepsi Refresh Project Celebrity Challenge](#)<sup>xcviii</sup> on Facebook shows how new technology presents new challenges to engaging consumers. Pepsi made marketing history by diverting its Super Bowl advertising budget to fund a series of monthly grants to community projects created and voted on by the public each

month during 2010. To kick off the project, Pepsi hosted a Celebrity Challenge that pitted actors [Kevin Bacon](#)<sup>xcix</sup> and [Demi Moore](#)<sup>c</sup> against each other to win \$250,000 for their grant project. The Facebook page featured a spiffy application that played videos of the stars explaining their projects and allowed fans to vote once a day for their favorite. While the application was stunning, the functionality created a slight barrier to taking action and sharing that action with others.

People had to remember to go to the application every day to vote and when they shared their vote in their status update, the link for others to follow and vote didn't always work. This glitch forced voters to take extra efforts to share their participation with their networks and likely dampened the viral spread the celebrity factor was meant to inspire. This example speaks to the need to test new functionality extensively before unveiling it to millions of users, just as Pepsi likely did with the sleek voting technology it features on the Pepsi Refresh Project website [www.refresheverything.com](http://www.refresheverything.com), where the monthly grant competition takes place.

## Have you created a sense of urgency?

After you tell people why and how they can support your campaign, it's essential to incite them to do it now. An intention to give or vote will not help build momentum around your program – people have to follow through and actually participate. But the sense of urgency to act you create should be centered on the social good you are inspiring, not just on the need to take a campaign action. Highlighting the need for social change above the campaign will enhance the sincerity and authenticity of your cause marketing platform and appeal to your audience's emotional connection to the causes they care about.

One of the key lessons the partners behind [America's Giving Challenge](#)<sup>ci</sup> learned from the 2008 campaign, was that the timing and duration of a campaign are very important. In 2008, the Giving Challenge was a 50 day event that rewarded charities for recruiting the most unique donations on a daily and overall basis. As Beth Kanter and Allison H. Fine found in their [Assessment and Reflection Report](#)<sup>cii</sup>, most participants felt that 50 days was too long to sustain such an intense effort. In 2009, the Giving Challenge was consolidated to 30 days.

[The GiveMN "Give to the Max Day"](#)<sup>ciii</sup> created the ultimate sense of urgency by consolidating its campaign into a single day and motivating over \$14 million in donations for Minnesota charities.

However you frame the need to give now, it needs to make sense in the context of your campaign, resonate with your audience and be easily acted upon via your user interface.

## Are you inviting your audience to a conversation?

As explained in Step 1, it is useful to remind your campaign team that communications to your audience throughout the campaign should reinforce the tenets of community-building. Just as you carefully cultivated a community before engaging in specific cause marketing programs, you need to cultivate new supporters who are finding you through campaign outreach and keep established supporters engaged in a relationship based on mutually-generated content, not a one-way blast of information.

## Are you communicating with your audience where they are online?

As your campaign evolves, it is important to make sure your outreach follows your audience. For example, if your campaign is being hosted on Facebook, but your audience is having the conversation via comments on blog posts about the campaign, you need to show up on those blogs.

A great example of a campaign following the conversation that is happening, rather than the one it planned, is the [Pepsi Refresh Project](#)<sup>civ</sup>. The campaign received criticism for being perceived as a popularity contest

on several charity sector blogs. Pepsi's Bonin Bough countered those critics on [Allison H. Fine's blog](#)<sup>cv</sup> offering, "We're betting on the American people (never a bad bet) to submit and vote on ideas that will really make a difference in their communities. That's why we're working with [GOOD](#)<sup>cvi</sup> and [GlobalGiving](#),<sup>cvi</sup> and that's why we've conducted extensive outreach with the nonprofit community: we want to make sure that the grants that Pepsi Refresh gives will go to ideas that can truly make a difference." Pepsi proactively addressed negative feedback and changed the discussion.

## Case Study: Yahoo! You In? Campaign

**The Idea:** Inspired by a story that turned a small kind gesture into more than \$100,000 in donations to a local food bank, Yahoo! focused on how good grows, the notion that small acts can result in big changes, especially when you leverage your social network. The 2009 [You In?](#) campaign challenged Yahoo!'s 600 million users to create a ripple of happiness triggered by their single act of kindness. The call to action was to update their online status, on Yahoo! and beyond, to share what they were doing to spread joy and then inspire others to join them by asking "You In?". This simple question served as the campaign's mantra, a friendly challenge to its community to do good, and a compelling tie-in to Yahoo!'s "It's You!" brand marketing campaign.



**The Impact:** Yahoo! inspired over 320,000 people to do random acts of kindness and encourage their friends and family to do the same. Status messages ranged from something as simple as "I just paid for coffee for the person behind me in line. You In?" to "I just dropped off 3 warm coats from my closet to a homeless shelter. You in?" In addition to engaging people in online social tools, another goal was to generate positive press for Yahoo! that represented its brand values of fun, human, relevant, and personal. Further, the campaign drove one million brand impressions for nonprofit partners [Network for Good](#), [Global Giving](#) and [DonorsChoose](#) and resulted in more than \$20,000 in donations to nonprofit organizations in the form of large scale random acts of kindness inspired by its community.

### The Takeaways:

1. **Keep it simple.** Yahoo! kept the call to action for the You In? campaign very simple – update your status with a random act of kindness and encourage your friends and family to do the same.
2. **Go where your community already is.** Instead of driving traffic to a separate destination, Yahoo! found that the best strategy was going where people already were, for instance in Yahoo! Mail.
3. **Empower your influencers.** As part of the campaign, Yahoo! gave \$100 each to 300 internal and external influencers. Each of these influencers spread the word among their own social networks, acted as evangelists on Yahoo!'s behalf, and created a buzz around the campaign that Yahoo! couldn't have done on their own.

## Step 4: Build on Momentum

So you've activated your evangelicals and guaranteed a first wave of participation. Now how do you keep your audience engaged throughout the campaign? Ongoing support is vital for a strong and meaningful campaign finish. Beyond marketing and PR buzz, there are several components you can build into your campaign to hook your audience and keep people talking about your fabulous good deeds.

### Have you embedded a competitive element?

A leader board with a snapshot of which charities are garnering the most votes or which participants are rallying the most donations incites people to try harder to push their cause to the top. It also gives participants a tangible outcome to communicate to their social networks. For example, if a cause is currently in fourth place, but needs to finish in the top three to win a matching grant, the organization can send an appeal to its followers to help make up the difference.

A leader board also provides transparency about the campaign structure and rules. Campaign stakeholders can get an easy snapshot of who is participating, where the votes or grants are going and what participants need to do to win a grant or inspire more donations. With both corporate brands and nonprofit reputations on the line, the importance of transparency and clarity about the rules of competition cannot be overstated.

[Chase Community Giving](#)<sup>cvi</sup> learned a big lesson about transparency and clarity during its inaugural Facebook voting contest to distribute \$5 million to charities. Chase Community Giving faced [controversy](#)<sup>cix</sup> when the campaign neglected to post a public leaderboard and engaged in the late stage disqualifications of some charities. However, Chase Community Giving successfully completed its second contest in July 2010, which included many more elements of transparency, including an interactive leaderboard and prominently placed campaign rules. To date, the campaign has reached over 2.5 million fans voting for over 500,000 charities and has directed over \$10 million to U.S. charities, demonstrating the staying power of crowdsourced philanthropy.

### Have you lowered the participation hurdle?

Of course you want to funnel thousands and millions of dollars to deserving nonprofits through your social good campaign. But sometimes focusing on a huge dollar goal intimidates potential participants who may have limited resources. Offering people a compelling free (or low cost) and easy action to take will often foster more participation than asking them to donate a specific amount or encouraging higher value donations as proof of support.

Many giving campaigns focus on awarding charities that win the most unique number of donations or votes. This approach levels the playing field and allows more people to participate. For example, if Debbie Donor only has \$20 to donate and the donation hurdle for your competition is \$25, she can't join the fun. But if the campaign is focused on how many donations a charity receives, Debbie can now make two \$10 donations and feel doubly pleased with her contribution to the campaign.

### Will you give interim rewards?

Instead of saving all of the prizes or grants until the end of the campaign, offer interim awards to keep participants engaged and morale high. Spreading out the incentives across the campaign gives successful participants a reason to celebrate and engage with their social networks during the campaign and allows struggling participants to regroup and rally their networks around a fresh goal. In sum, it keeps the conversation alive and motivates people to stay tuned in to the campaign.

[America's Giving Challenge](#)<sup>cx</sup> created daily challenge grants to allow more nonprofits to share in the matching grant funds. An added benefit of these daily prizes was that they gave smaller nonprofits an opportunity to consolidate their smaller network's participation to amount to a big impact at a set time, rather than dribbles of support across the campaign. Thus, smaller nonprofits were encouraged to join the contest and got to see their names on the leader board. This type of exposure is invaluable to small charities with limited resources.

## Will you provide social proof?

According to the [Theory of Social Proof](#)<sup>cxii</sup>, people hesitate to act until they see public proof that others are acting with them or at least approve of their behavior. The goal of your campaign is to engage your community around social good, so you don't want people to feel as if they are participating in a vacuum. Show participants how their contribution helps the greater good through donation or vote tickers, leaderboards and other displays of collective action. Then encourage participants to share the wonderful good your campaign is accomplishing with others in their social networks.

A key finding of the [Convio Next Generation of American Giving](#)<sup>cxiii</sup> report illustrates the importance of personal networks in online giving. Most survey respondents (84%) reported that the most appropriate form of solicitation for charity is via a friend. It's vital for cause marketers to activate that powerful peer-to-peer network in support of a campaign. In fact, in [The Giving Challenge 2009: Assessment and Reflection Report](#)<sup>cxiii</sup>, Beth Kanter and Allison H. Fine point to the importance of personal appeals from peers through multiple channels in the success of winning causes during [America's Giving Challenge](#)<sup>cxiv</sup>.

Social proof will make or break your effort. Individuals want assurance that their peers are taking part and that their action is part of a collective effort. Your campaign needs to show how many people are involved (the number of voters, fans or donors) and encourage participants to spread the word to increase that number. Whether participants are sharing the good or the bad depends on the thoughtfulness of your campaign design, so don't hold back in planning Step 2! Transparency, authenticity and embedded social media tools are a must have trifecta for success.

## Can you tell your story?

In a web 2.0 world it is impossible to anticipate and suppress negative chatter about your brand and cause marketing endeavors. However, you can proactively shape the story that gets told about your campaign and manage comments to keep the conversation on track. If your company has invested time in developing Steps 1 and 2 above, a clear PR and social media plan will already be a part of your campaign strategy.

There are subtleties to telling your story that deserve special attention. As mentioned several times above, the success of your cause marketing program depends largely on how well you make the link between your brand and the social good you are trying to inspire. How you tell your story gets to the heart of making that connection – and that connection needs to be made in the minds of your campaign stakeholders, not your shareholders. Therefore, it is important first to have a sincere and authentic story to tell and then to tell it where your campaign audience is online. Become a guest blogger on sites your audience visits, publicize profiles of successful participants, write articles for leading social sector websites like the Impact page on [Huffington Post](#)<sup>cxv</sup> about your campaign and why it matters for the greater social good.

Given [Moore's Law](#)<sup>cxvi</sup> about the exponential expansion of digital capacity, the reality of online campaigns means that Internet functionality and behaviors are constantly changing. Your campaign strategy needs to be flexible enough to accommodate and respond to these changes and responsibly react to unanticipated uses of your technology or ways around your campaign guidelines.

## Case Study: Tyson Foods Hunger Relief

One of the more storied brands in cause marketing online has been Tyson Foods with its Hunger Relief program. For the past three years, the company has focused on adding value to the community of those engaged in the fight against hunger by utilizing in-kind donations and social media resources ([Hunger Relief site](#), Twitter account ([@TysonFoods](#)), [Facebook page](#), [Flickr group](#) and [YouTube channel](#)) to create awareness of hunger and those involved in the issue.



**Engagement:** Every year, Tyson donates 8-10 million pounds of protein to hunger and disaster relief. Tyson strives to use the donation events to educate and engage communities on hunger relief.

In 2008, the company joined the [Social Media Club of Austin](#) (TX), [501 Tech Club of Austin](#), and the [Capital Area Food Bank of Texas](#) and challenged Twitter users by offering to donate 100 pounds of food, up to a 35,000 pound truckload, for every comment on a blog post about hunger in the Austin, TX area. The 350 comments needed to fill the truck were received in less than four hours, with more than 650 comments coming in altogether (Tyson added another truckload after the first was filled). Similar efforts have occurred in Boston, New York and the San Francisco Bay Area.

In 2009, Tyson, [Scott Henderson](#), [Media Sauce](#) and others launched the [Pledge to End Hunger](#) at Austin's South by Southwest Interactive festival. This virtual food drive promised a truckload of donated food to each of five states that had the most people who went online to sign a Pledge to End Hunger. In 2010, the effort was expanded into [WeCanEndThis](#), a multi-faceted program that included the virtual food drive (expanded to include ten states) and cause lab at the SXSWi festival, which brought together innovative thinkers in a day-long session focused on applying new approaches to ending hunger. Tyson also encouraged its 107,000 domestic employees to get involved in hunger relief through the "Powering the Spirit" program, which promotes volunteerism and donations in support of hunger relief efforts in their own communities.

**The Impact:** Tyson continues to engage the hunger relief community, as well as recruit new supporters to the cause, through online connections and discussion.

- "Comment for Food" efforts generated more than 4,100 comments on Tyson's Hunger Relief site.
- The Tyson Twitter account now has more than 6,000 followers.
- The list of "Hunger Twitterers" first posted on the blog in 2009 has grown to over 150 members.
- Supporters have written more than 40 blog entries about the company's hunger efforts, including an "[Innovative Giving](#)" post in Fast Company Online and a piece in the [Huffington Post](#).
- To date, thousands of Tyson employees joined hunger relief efforts, from volunteering at local food banks, to conducting fundraising efforts on behalf of hunger relief in their own communities.
- Online efforts have also strengthened mainstream media efforts, all of which generated more than 168 million impressions in 2009.

**The Takeaways:** When asked about what he thought the biggest takeaways from Tyson Foods Hunger Relief effort were, Ed Nicholson, Director of Community and Public Relations, Tyson Foods, Inc. said "Shine the spotlight on the cause and what others are doing, rather than yourself. It will generally reflect favorably back on you. Pound-for-pound, authentic engagement trumps cash. And you probably have resources the cause needs desperately, even if it isn't money."

## Step 5: Be Prepared for Times of Disaster

The preceding sections outline best practice for creating a thoughtful online cause marketing campaign that carefully links your brand to charity. However, there are times when a charity campaign is not about mutual benefit for brand and cause, but rather about being a responsible corporate citizen. As recent events demonstrate, humanitarian disasters strike without warning and capture the public’s attention and desire to help. When your employees and consumers are inspired to action, your company is in a position to facilitate their response and help connect them to organizations on the frontlines of the relief effort.

In times of disaster, your company and the communications tools at its disposal can serve those in need by driving support. But make sure your campaign is motivated by a clear desire to resolve or provide relief to a devastating event. If your goal is to market or strengthen the social responsibility factor of your brand, the disaster campaign could easily achieve the opposite and tarnish your brand with an opportunistic hue.

In essence, communications during a disaster need to find their basis in altruism. It’s a time for corporate social responsibility in its most pure form.

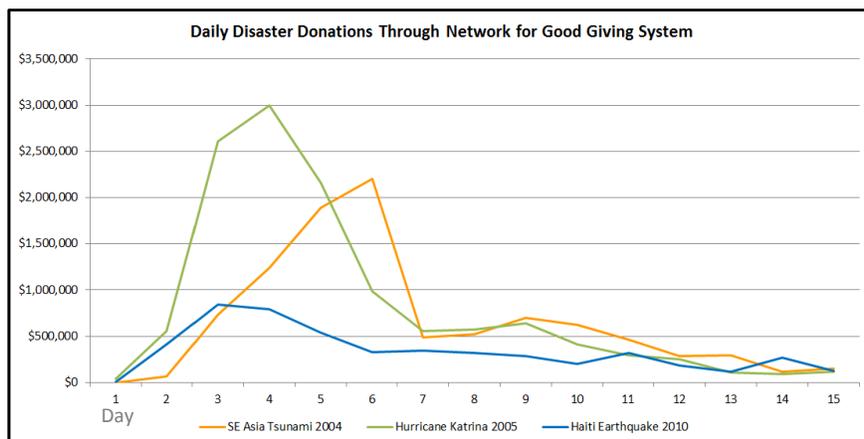
When the Gulf of Mexico oil spill occurred in April 2010, and companies began stepping up their response, there were two notable outcomes. [Dawn](#)<sup>cxvii</sup> soap products were donated as a means to clean birds, the effort was well received publicly. Dawn simply publicized it was donating the products.

Conversely, [Spirit Airlines](#)<sup>cxviii</sup> ran a campaign called “[Check Out the Oil on Our Beaches](#)<sup>cxix</sup>” that advertised deals to locations affected by the oil spill. The ad touted the deals as the BP (Best Protection) against the economic impact on tourism due to the oil spill, and used sunscreen as the visual. The airline was embroiled in a controversy for weeks about its opportunistic ads.

### Can you flip the switch quickly?

When a disaster emerges, the majority of public support pours in within the first few days and then tapers off quickly. In order to provide a meaningful way for your consumers or employees to act right when there is the most media attention and the urge to give is top of mind, your company needs to have a disaster giving plan it can activate on the spot.

The time to prepare for a disaster response was yesterday, so make sure you outline how your company will respond ahead of an event. This includes considerations such as: matching grant funds, organizations to feature, communication policies and others as discussed in the following sections.



In response to the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, [Capital One](#)<sup>cxx</sup> was quick to change its [No Hassle Giving Site](#)<sup>cxxi</sup> homepage to outline how its cardholders could support the relief efforts and to reach out to customers through email with instructions on how to help. Capital One also implemented an employee giving campaign, including matching contributions, in support of [GlobalGiving's relief fund](#)<sup>cxxii</sup>. Because of the company's swift, targeted action, the Giving Site drove over \$1.4 million in donations for Haiti relief. (See Case Study on page 22)

Being able to react quickly during a disaster response requires forethought and planning. Having a disaster plan and strategic partnerships in place will allow your company to respond responsibly and in a way that reassures customers and employees.

## Have you addressed the response needs of your customers and employees?

Understanding your customer and employee audiences will help you tailor your disaster response effort and promote a call to action that meets their needs. Most people look for a clear way to donate to first-responder charities in the immediate aftermath of a humanitarian disaster. However, there are times when your company may be able to facilitate other responses that are specific to your capabilities, location or constituents.

Are your employees specially trained, like the medical staff who volunteer with [Doctors Without Borders](#)<sup>cxxiii</sup>? Do you have a product that can help in the recovery effort, like [Dawn](#)<sup>cxxiv</sup>, a brand of Procter & Gamble, which sent thousands of bottles of detergent to support wildlife clean-up during the Gulf of Mexico oil spill? Does your company have expertise that will help relief organizations like [FedEx](#)<sup>cxxv</sup>, which uses its vast transportation and logistics resources to deliver emergency supplies and equipment to relief organizations like the [Red Cross](#)<sup>cxxvi</sup> that are responding to disasters on the ground?

There may be unique ways your company and your constituents can respond that go beyond opening wallets.

## Do you offer a clear way to help?

In the midst of a crisis, a multitude of causes, opinions and ways to give inundate the media and paralyze donors who just want to help. Being able to clear through the clutter and offer an easy and precise way to help will go a long way towards getting resources to the causes on the frontlines. In most cases, listing a handful of trusted nonprofits with proven track records in disaster response and a clear plan for the current crisis is the most efficient way for your company to support the response effort. The organizations you feature will depend on whether the disaster is domestic or international in scope. For example, during the Hurricane Katrina response, the top five organizations on [NetworkForGood.org](#) were:

1. [American Red Cross](#)<sup>cxxvii</sup>
2. [The Salvation Army](#)<sup>cxxviii</sup>
3. [Catholic Charities USA](#)<sup>cxxix</sup>
4. [The Human Society of the United States](#)<sup>cxxx</sup>
5. [Habitat for Humanity](#)<sup>cxxxi</sup>

Once you select the trusted charities to feature, it's time to spread the call to action. During the aftermath of the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, [Yahoo!](#)<sup>cxxxii</sup> and [AOL](#)<sup>cxxxiii</sup> were quick to feature "how to help" links both on their homepages and embedded within news coverage of the disaster throughout their sites. These links allowed their readers to make a secure donation through a trusted donation processing partner (in this case Network for Good) right when the call to action was the most powerful.



Yahoo Haiti Relief Landing Page



AOL "How to Help" Homepage Links

## Can you communicate appropriately with customers and employees?

Everyone is very sensitive to email spam these days and donors are especially weary of online and offline donation appeals. If your company plans to communicate with your customers or employees about disaster giving, it is essential to clearly and concisely outline a compelling and reasonable ask. If you have fully developed your corporate social responsibility strategy, the link between your brand and charity will be readily apparent to your audience. If they believe you, they will understand why you are communicating with them in a crisis. But don't abuse that trust. Don't inundate the inbox and respect opt-out settings for email appeals.

## Can you amplify the impact?

An obvious way for your company to amplify the impact of your customers' and employees' donations is to offer a matching grant. [TimeWarner](#)<sup>cxxxiv</sup> was able to motivate its employees to donate \$500,000 to Haiti relief by matching their donations to send \$1 million to four nonprofits responding to the earthquake. Likewise, [Capital One](#)<sup>cxxxv</sup> provided matching grants to employees who donated to [GlobalGiving's relief fund](#)<sup>cxxxvi</sup>. As mentioned above, it's not the size of the matching grant that matters, but rather the gesture that shows your customers and employees that you care about what they care about, too.

Another gesture that shows your company's dedication to the cause is to cover transaction costs associated with online donations. [Capital One](#) generously covers all the transaction costs for its cardholders to use the [Giving Site](#). Likewise, [TimeWarner](#) covered the transaction costs for its employees' donations to Haiti charities. Covering these costs eases the barriers for your customers or employees to take action, demonstrates your goodwill and results in more funds getting to the causes that need them.

## Case Study: Capital One No Hassle Giving Site Haiti Response

**The Call to Action:** [The No Hassle Giving Site](#) was launched in partnership with Network for Good in August 2008 to provide Capital One cardholders an easy way to research, select, and donate to the cause of their choice. Capital One covers the transaction costs for every donation, ensuring that 100% of the donation is delivered to charity. When the horrific earthquake struck Haiti in January 2010, Capital One anticipated its cardholders' desire to help and quickly responded with outreach and clear relief options on the Giving Site homepage. Capital One chose only a handful of the top relief organizations to keep the user experience extremely simple and minimize distractions on the path to donating.

To promote the campaign, emails were sent to several million Capital One cardholders encouraging them to make a donation or cash in rewards points for charity. Further, banners and links soliciting support were displayed on Capital One's highest traffic web pages, including the corporate homepage. Flyers were posted in all bank branches, offering customers the option to donate through the Giving Site or in person at the teller window. Finally, Capital One reached out to employees to encourage donations and offer matching contributions. Having employees excited about supporting relief helped the overall effort and also built support for the marketing campaigns to cardholders (and the long hours required to make them a success).



**The Impact:** Capital One set a goal of facilitating a million dollars in earthquake relief donations from cardholders, employees and corporate sources across the Giving Site and offline bank network. In total, Capital One exceeded its goal, facilitating over \$1.4 million in donations to Haiti relief charities. Rewards donations were particularly effective, generating several hundred thousand dollars in donations without requiring customers to even open their wallets. Capital One also stood out as a positive example in the wake of media outcry over credit card companies who reserve 3% of charitable donations to cover transaction costs and are often vilified for appearing to profit from human tragedy. Capital One has always covered transaction costs for donations made through the Giving Site, demonstrating that a gesture of goodwill can go a long way in generating loyalty and reciprocal generosity.

### The Takeaways:

1. Make it super-easy for your customers to take action. Provide a clear call to action and minimize distractions on the path to completing a donation.
2. Focus the project on what is absolutely necessary to achieve your desired outcomes. In other words, don't get sidetracked from the main goal of driving donations to charity.
3. Encourage all of your employees to get involved. Their generosity will help the overall effort and their enthusiasm will support marketing efforts to customers.

## Conclusion

As the Corporate Social Responsibility movement evolves, companies will continue to leverage cause marketing initiatives to meet new, triple bottom line demands and create a halo effect for brands. The potential for online social good campaigns to achieve real impact – both in terms of return on marketing spend and return on social good – remains high, if companies are thoughtful and strategic in how they structure their cause marketing programs.

Cause Marketing is at its best when all the pieces – relevant cause, strong marketing proposition, and compelling call to action – come together. It's difficult to do, but really worth it.

In navigating the risks and rewards of online cause marketing campaigns, companies need to remain true to their brand, consumers and employees. In times of disaster, they need to be authentic about their intent to give. All the pieces come together when companies have a clear understanding of what they stand for and how a partnership in the cause sector will impact all stakeholders involved – the company, the cause and the participants. Real cause marketing success results when a campaign reinforces the brand as it inspires others to take action and make a difference.

### Ready to plan your campaign? Contact us to get started.

For help with charitable engagement  
expertise, tools and technology, contact:



**Kate Olsen**  
Senior Manager, Partnerships

**Contact:** [web.networkforgood.org/partnership](http://web.networkforgood.org/partnership)

**Learn:** [networkforgood.org/whypartner](http://networkforgood.org/whypartner)

For help with campaign strategy  
and communications, contact:



**Geoff Livingston**  
Chief Marketing Officer

**Contact:** [zoeticamedia.com/contact](http://zoeticamedia.com/contact)

**Learn:** [zoeticamedia.com](http://zoeticamedia.com)

## End Notes

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