

Goodwill: Good Thinking

Last week I discussed the value of real life branding — the important role staff play as branding channels themselves and the importance of carefully considering how your company can identify new, smart and cost-effective branding opportunities — in creating your brand's clear point of difference. Here now is a story that exemplifies the value of "real life branding".

Two or three years ago, in the Mediterranean Turkish city of Antalya, a luxury resort was being built. It so happened that the biggest economic crisis in Turkish history struck, making it difficult for such an enterprise to kick off.

Just as the hotel was being prepared for its grand opening, the Russian submarine, the "Kursk", sank in the northern Arctic Sea. Its entire crew perished, as I'm sure you remember. Anxious to offer help in the wake of this tragedy, the CEO of the hotel company contacted the Russian Embassy and arranged one-week vacations for the families of the lost submariners. A TV channel learned of the gesture and produced a story about it.

Today, the hotel is thriving. It has turned out to be a phenomenal investment, not because the local Turkish population adore the resort, but because Russian holidaymakers flock there. Clearly touched by the hotel's response to the "Kursk" disaster, Russians have remained loyal to the company and constitute the largest proportion of the hotel's guests. They've helped turn the hotel into

one of the most successful resorts in Turkey.

Clearly, the right move at the right time can result in positive financial growth as well as helping a worthy cause. So how can you make the most of your role as a responsible corporate citizen?

First, appoint a small think-tank made up of people who know your customers and your products really well. Ask them for ideas about changing the "outside world's" perception of your brand and prioritize them.

Next, define some loose rules to guide these cause-related branding ideas, like how frequently you should engage in charitable causes. Your guidelines should include success scenarios: what benefits do you expect your brand to accrue as a by-product of helping a good cause. What type of PR would you be looking for? How can you leverage relatively cheap tools to offer cause related help like the Internet or even the cell phone?

Then involve the whole company in the principle of civic awareness and corporate responsibility. Set up an Intranet (Clare this word is spelled correct) page enabling members of the staff or even customers to upload interesting ideas or stories. Keep everyone interested in current affairs and encourage everyone to keep a company-related eye on local and world events every day.

Involve your company in a case every month — one that you believe makes sense and which, in

the process, will shed a favourable light on your company. Run a PR program around the part you're playing to ensure that the "outside world" and you staff are aware of the company's involvement in assisting a good cause. The Internet is ideal to communicate cause related campaigns as it allows the world to explore the different aspects of the story and gives journalists the chance to download photos, statistical data and quotations from the people involved. Often this type of campaigns even turn into a viral activity, if the story is solid and amazing enough, speaking via emails across the globe in hours. Run a PR program around the part you're playing to ensure that the "outside world" and you staff are aware of the company's involvement in assisting a good cause.

The result could be as brilliant as the Qantas and British Airways' employee's now-universal idea: to relieve passengers of all their heavy and unexchangeable coins by passing them on, through the airline, to UNICEF. The "Change for Good" program is a stunningly simple, practical idea that nets contributions for the children's fund and enables airline companies to play a civically responsible role. Today, several airlines supply envelopes to collect coins for various aid organizations and are able to present million-dollar donations



every year at virtually no cost.

And, guess what: they've created goodwill onboard and impressed passengers with a responsible brand image. And that was the result of a well-run, structured internal company brainstorm. Gives you something to think about, doesn't it.

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