**MARKETING 160**

**January, 2017**

**Pink Ribbon Campaign – Cause Marketing and Ethics**

**Class Exercise:**

**In MODULE TWO, the class will be divided into two groups. One group will take the position of corporate businesses who partner with organizations such as the Canadian Cancer Society to raise awareness of their own brand (in addition to supporting the non-profit!). This group will brainstorm and discuss THREE main points in favour of this type of business activity.**

**The other group will take the position that this type of business activity is unethical. This group will brainstorm and discuss THREE main points as to why this type of activity is unethical.**

**To prepare for Wednesday, you should come up with three arguments for each side so that you are prepared to represent and contribute to either team.**

ARTICLE:

Beat breast cancer by buying pink shoelaces. Buy yogurt in the special pink-labelled container and money will go to breast cancer research. That’s the relentless message of October — buy and consume the pink-ribboned products to beat breast cancer.

It’s called cause marketing, a chance for companies of all types to associate their products with a righteous cause, combining sales with good works. It’s a style loved by some, hated by others, but even its opponents can’t deny it works.

“Cause marketing is a really intense approach to getting the message out,” said Jocelyne Daw, of Calgary-based CauseMarketing.ca. “It’s a way of channelling the power a company can bring to reach a whole new audience. It gives causes a reach they could never have on their own.”

Breast Cancer Awareness Month goes back to 1985 — founded with the help of AstraZeneca, a British pharmaceutical company and maker of breast cancer drugs. Pink ribbons became associated with the campaign in 1991 during the Race for the Cure in New York City organized by the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. The next year, Self Magazine and cosmetics maker Estee Lauder teamed up to distribute 1.5 million ribbons attached to laminated cards telling women how to do a proper breast self-examination.

That campaign coincided with a growing corporate awareness of research showing a willingness among customers to buy products they thought were associated with good causes, and even to pay a premium for them.

Boston-based Cone LLC issues an annual report on those consumer attitudes. In September, it reported 41 per cent of consumers in a survey said they had purchased a product because it was associated with a social or environmental cause; 83 per cent said they wanted more such products; 85 per cent have a more positive image of a product or company when it supports a cause they care about; 80 per cent said they’re more likely to switch brands to back a cause; and 19 per cent would pay a premium.

Cone’s research has also shown breast cancer is an especially good cause for companies to back. Breasts are cultural symbols of nurturing and femininity, and breast cancer doesn’t come weighed down by the “lifestyle” baggage attached to AIDS. More importantly, because the main message of the month is awareness, and that usually translates into education about self-examination, companies can reap the benefits of breast cancer marketing at relatively little cost. All they have to do is put a pink ribbon on their product.

That’s the aspect of the pink ribbon campaign that most troubles its critics. They see the month and the marketing around it as a distraction — focusing attention on awareness and finding a cure rather than what they say is the more important search for a cause.

“These campaigns are about awareness, but awareness of what?” asks Samantha King, a professor at Queen’s University and author of Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy.

King notes studies have shown Canadian women are well aware of the threat of breast cancer and of the need for self-exams — so aware, in fact, that most overestimate the threat of the disease. (Current figures say one woman in eight or nine will be affected.)

“A lot of money is raised in these campaigns, but overall it’s a very small piece of the income of cancer foundations,” she said. “If all of the pink ribbon money stopped, it wouldn’t really make much of a difference.”

Rather than rushing out to buy and consume in the hope of doing some good, groups such as San Francisco-based Breast Cancer Action urge women to read the fine print of the special promotions before putting their money down.

In a campaign called Think Before You Pink, the group urges women to ask how much of the price of a special product actually goes to research projects. In one promotion, King noted, a company promised to donate 10 cents from every container of pink ribbon-labelled yogurt sold during a period. Only those who read the fine print learned the donation was capped at $80,000, so every sale after that went straight to the company’s bottom line.

Another warning is to ensure the pink ribbon product isn’t made by a company that also sells products linked to cancer. That same brand of yogurt, for example, was made with dairy products from cows treated with bovine growth hormone — a product linked by many studies to the development of breast cancer.

If you can’t get a satisfying answer to any of those questions, King said, it may be better to give money directly to a cancer-related agency “rather than filtering it through a large corporation.”

So, where does the money raised through the various corporate-sponsored events in Canada during October go?

In Canada, the pink ribbon campaign is owned by the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation. It’s backed by heavyweight companies such as CIBC and Ford, among others. The Toronto-based agency said its staff were all too busy preparing for this weekend’s events to comment for this story, but its annual report for 2009 shows just under 52 per cent of the almost $17.3 million it raised that year actually went to the fight for a breast cancer cure.

The Canadian Cancer Society, which isn’t affiliated with the pink ribbon drive or its associated marketing, says even if the actual financial results of the campaign are small, it’s still a worthwhile contribution to the larger cause.

“Overall, awareness and money are being raised,” said Donna Czukar, acting senior director of public affairs for the society. “It’s really not useful for us to go out in a general way. We have to get the message to women where they’re at.

“A lot of organizations are making a lot of effort around this and it’s having an effect,” she added. “We support anything that causes people to take action or maybe talk to their doctor. We mostly care that increased awareness happens.”

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