



Sweet Charity



Cause-related products are popular among consumers, but the main advantage of carrying such products is helping not-for-profit organizations.

By Meghan Boyer

You already know that any time you can bring people into your store it means more money, but have you thought about using more than plants and fertilizer as bait? Many garden centers now carry home décor and gift items as a regular part of their offering. What about other items? What about products that are not usually considered garden products...things like pet supplies and gourmet food? These kinds of ancillary categories are proving profitable for garden centers around the country.

"Developing Markets," a monthly series that will appear in each issue of Lawn & Garden Retailer, will profile eight of these potential new markets, giving insight into the health of the market, relating how other garden centers have mastered the category and profiling some of the best new products in the category.

- January: Fashion Accessories
- February: Cause Merchandise
- March: Candles
- April: Children's Department
- June: Apparel
- July: Art
- August: Books
- November: Home Accessories

Cause-related marketing got its start the last quarter of 1983 when American Express announced it would pay \$.01 toward the restoration of the Statue of Liberty each time customers used their American Express credit cards. Since then, the essential idea of cause-related marketing — corporations joining with charities for marketing campaigns — has morphed to include the sale of cause-related products. Lance Armstrong's successful "Live Strong" bracelets are a great example. Proceeds from sales of the ubiquitous yellow bracelets benefit the Lance Armstrong Foundation, a not-

for-profit organization that supports people living with cancer.

The basic foundation of both the American Express campaign and cause-related products is in transactions, perhaps what can be known as the common denominator among cause-related marketing. *Working Woman* magazine converted the idea into a simple equation: "If you buy X, we will support Y." With that formula in mind, company/charity duos are doing their best to fill in the X variable with assorted merchandise. From jewelry, shoes and T-shirts to collectibles, yogurt and cookware, products that support charities come in nearly any form and are associated with a breadth of causes. Garden centers can support the trend by carrying cause products and advertising their presence to customers. Doing so can brighten the spirits of employees and con-

sumers alike and make everyone feel good that they're helping a worthy cause through retail.

Feeling Good

Helping others and supporting charities makes most people feel good, which is why a majority of consumers say they'll switch brands to a company involved with a charitable cause if price and quality are equal, according to *Sales & Marketing Management* magazine. In fact, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that in 2004, "86 percent of Americans said they would rather buy a cause-conscious product than one of equal value not tied to a charity, up from 56 percent 12 years ago."

For one example of consumers' eagerness to purchase cause-related products, look to Calphalon and Share Our Strength. Calphalon, a maker of cookware, partnered with Share Our Strength (SOS), an anti-hunger organization, in 1996 to raise



Visual markers, such as these ribbons, can help consumers determine which products are cause related.



Cause-related plants are a good fit for garden centers looking for products that support a cause.

money for world hunger. In addition to marketing promotions such as fundraisers and in-store promotions, "...Twice a year, the Toledo, Ohio-based Calphalon sells a cooking pan with the SOS label on the packaging, which promises that for every pan sold, \$5.00 will be donated to SOS. Sales of the logoed pan increased tenfold over what they were without the SOS logo," reported *Sales & Marketing Management*.

To see if garden center shoppers feel the same as the majority of Americans, stock two similar items in the store — the only major difference being that one is associated with a charity and one is not. Then track the sales, and see which item consumers' prefer.

Helping Sales

Even though cause-related products can almost sell themselves because so many people would opt to buy them, there are still ways to increase consumer excitement and boost sales. One aspect that can help is ensuring that the cause is close to the heart of the local community. Carrying products sold by local charities or ones that are in league with local interests will show that the garden center supports and cares about its community.

In order to get consumers to care deeply, choose a charity that has com-

munity relevance, and let people know what percent of the proceeds will be benefiting the cause. To help get the word out, have the local charity be involved in the launch of their products at the garden center. The charity can even raise funds onsite. By developing an event with a charity and its products, the garden center will be fully engaging in cause-related marketing.

Also try catering to your target demographic: Women are both the primary garden center shoppers and main supporters of cause merchandise. A survey commissioned by Cone Communications, a Boston, Mass., firm that promotes the idea of cause-related marketing, found that, "84 percent [of women] are more receptive to products associated with a cause they care about; affluent, educated women are the most responsive group." Bring in merchandise that supports causes women feel strongly about, such as breast cancer.

Relevancy to the business is also important. Choosing to sell products that support garden and nature causes is a good way to target garden center consumers. Consumers that love gardening are likely to purchase products that support their interest. Think about Calphalon and SOS: A cookware company and an organization that fights hunger are a well-matched partnership that makes sense in consumers' minds. Garden centers can carry items that support community gardens, national parks, the environment, etc. Such causes meld with garden centers, and the partnerships are easy for consumers to understand. Some growers even grow cause-related plants, which are a perfect fit for garden centers to sell.

Carrying cause-related merchandise is also a good way to differentiate one's business from competitors. Continued sales of cause merchandise can show that your garden center is interested in helping others, not just with boosting profits. The long-term differentiation is worth a lot of community respect. ▶

Spread The Word

Once the cause-related products are on the shelves, get employees

Judith Gille, merchandise manager and one of the owners of City People's Garden Store and City People's Mercantile, Seattle, Wash., shares how her store gives to charities through cause-related products.

How long have you been stocking cause-related merchandise?

Every year at Christmastime we feature an item that is what we call our donation ornament or donation item. We select an item where all of the proceeds, even the cost of the item, are donated. We've been doing that at least for 15-16 years.

What made you decide to add cause-related merchandise?

Our store is sort of in a very urban community, and our particular owner group is very politically active; we all just have hearts and minds that are oriented towards giving back to the community.

How much space do you devote to it?

We do it on a seasonal basis, so we do a display with it. For instance, this year we had an ornament and we had a whole tree that was covered with these angels that people could buy.

What kind of cause-related merchandise do you sell?

One year it was the [Serenity] Midwest angels, and frequently, it's a kind of an ornament or a candle or some kind of little decorative item.

What is your philosophy in choosing the products?

Generally, we try to buy something that, even if it is an ornament, it might be a little bit more generic than that, and you don't have to hang it on a tree, just so we can be more inclusive to people who might not have Christmas trees. So that's important. And then price point is important too. We have found the things we sell that have a lower price point just sell better.

What products sell best?

We keep selling things like ornaments just because at holiday time they do sell the best. We've had other kinds, but this is what sells the best.

What kind of margin do you get?

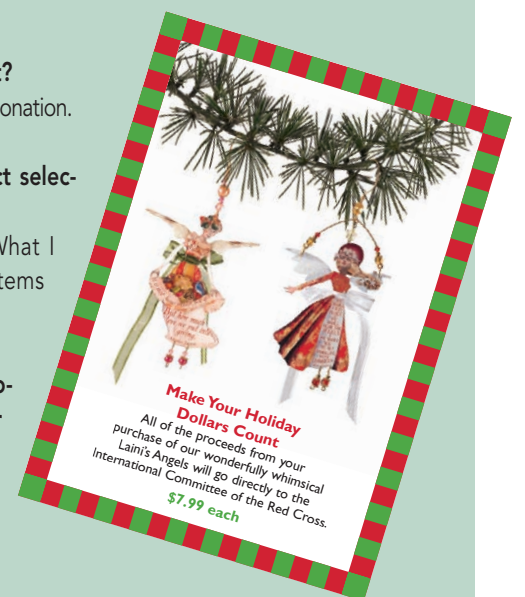
We don't make any margin: total donation.

Who is responsible for product selection and helping customers?

Generally, I am responsible. What I do is I pick something or some items and then run it by our board.

Does this category bring people into the store more often or when they wouldn't otherwise be there?

It might. There are people now who come in every year and buy our donation ornaments. I had several people this year say that they buy it every year. ☺



All of the proceeds from the City People's Garden Store and City People's Mercantile yearly donation item go to a charity. (Photo courtesy of City People's Garden Store and City People's Mercantile)

DEVELOPING MARKETS

excited about selling them. Employees are the best tool for letting customers know which products are cause related and how much of the proceeds go toward benefiting the associated charity. When described as an added value, the association of a not-for-profit charity with a product becomes an essential selling point. Couple this with the fact that many customers are already inclined to purchase cause-related products, and selling becomes easy. Employee morale may even improve when they understand that the sales of certain products help others in need: They'll know they're working for a business that cares.

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Resources

Web sites:
BBB Wise Giving Alliance
www.give.org

Cone Communications
www.coneinc.com

The NonProfit Times
www.nptimes.com

1. Soap

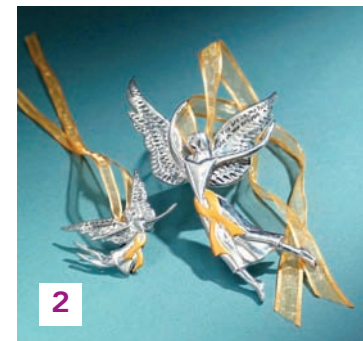
The scent of the Breast Cancer Awareness soap is designed to smell like a sea breeze. A percentage of net sales benefits the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. Primal Elements. (800) 434-8277. **Write in 1515**



1

2. Pewter collection

The Support collection includes a pewter angel ornament and lapel pin bearing a yellow ribbon symbolic of the fight against cancer. A portion of the proceeds from the Support collection will be donated to finding a cure for cancer. Each item in the collection includes an engraved quotation. Midwest of Cannon Falls. (800) 776-2075. **Write in 1520**



2

3. Bracelet

Proceeds from this bracelet support breast cancer research. It is made of rhodium and has a heart pendant embellished with pink Swarovski crystals. The clasp is an adjustable toggle. The bracelet comes in a pink organza pouch. Alexa's Angels Inspired Designs. (877) 264-3576. **Write in 1517**



3



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4

4. Ornaments

These ornaments feature the American Lung Association's Christmas Seals designs. A portion of the proceeds from this line will help benefit the American Lung Association and help prevent lung disease in America. Kurt S. Adler, Inc. (800) 243-9627. **Write in 1519**



5

5. Sun catcher

The Yellow Ribbon sun catcher supports American troops. It is oval shaped and measures 5 1/4 x 7 inches. Joan Baker Designs. (800) 248-1983. **Write in 1516**

6. Shoes

These Pink Ribbon shoes are made of washable leather. The cool-tex lining is designed to be breathable, and the sole is



6

100-percent leather. Shoes come in whole sizes and medium width. Anywear Shoe Company. (888) 425-0077. **Write in 1518**

7. Lighthouse figurine

The Round Island Michigan lighthouse measures 5x6 inches. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of all Great Lighthouses of the World goes to a lighthouse preservation society. Harbour Lights. (800) 365-1219. **Write in 1523**

8. Tank tops

These 100-percent-cotton, ribbed tank tops feature rose-colored Swarovski crystal wings on the back. Twenty percent of the sales go to the National Breast Cancer Organization. Cotton Sisters. (866) 925-2779. **Write in 1521**



7



8



9

9. Plant program

American Beauties is a native plant program that can create four possible gardens in the landscape: Bird, Butterfly, Dry Shade and Moist Sun. The northern-grown native plants come in branded pots. Marketing materials also include informational tags, instructive handouts, posters, bench tape and wooden benching. Each American Beauties plant sold benefits the National Wildlife Federation. (800) 437-5168. **Write in 1522**

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