

# Connecting With Your Customers

We are seeing so many businesses today who are vested in the same old routine and would so clearly benefit from exploring their direction, to reawaken and rediscover the passion behind their business, at their very core. Passion is simply a commitment that has been brought to life. We commit to our passions, and when we do, the passion itself becomes contagious. Let's be honest, which of us wouldn't be more willing to dedicate more of our minds, our time, and our efforts into things we are passionate about and into passionate people?

Today's marketplace is awash with savvy consumers and a wealth of choice for those consumers. Increasingly, most customers would prefer to do business with companies that strive for something beyond just profits. Violence against women, providing a solid education for children, economic development, health and disease, sustainable environment, disaster relief, world hunger, human and animal rights ... you name it, there is a loyal following supporting the cause.

Increasingly more consumers are more aware and more receptive to cause-related messages than ever before. Importantly, consumers are also willing to reward socially conscious companies with money and goodwill if they feel they were supporting a good cause.

The Cone Cause Evolution Study found that 75 per cent of consumers said it was important for businesses to offer them a way to purchase products and services that supported a cause and to be offered a range of ways to support issues they care about.

Still not convinced you're ready to tie yourself to a tree while facing down the front end of a bulldozer yet? Let me swiftly emphasise that having a 'cause' does not mean you have to support the trendiest, celebrity-endorsed charities! A cause is a direction you are passionate about – one that reflects your genuine personal values, beliefs and integrity.

A business may simply be built on a solid commitment to influence a healthy lifestyle. Fitness First gyms for example, have operated from day one under a commitment to provide affordable fitness for everyone, everywhere.

Instead of competing on product advertising and economies of scale, Dick Smith chose to compete with an Australian-made range of products that creates a better future for Australian kids – a cause the customers found appealing and truly believe in.

As long as your cause is emotionally fulfilling and your target market can identify with it, you can generate tremendous goodwill and achieve stand out from your competition. Cause-related marketing is the activity you do to promote those products or services which support a worthwhile cause. Indeed many cause-based marketing focuses almost solely on the cause itself. Your business' cause should be communicated in all your advertising and marketing, and through your whole culture. Passion for a cause is infectious and your customers will find it difficult look past your enthusiasm and love for what you do, and they will become attracted to it.

Take a look at the Apple brand. Apple's brand strategy has focused heavily on the emotions associated with lifestyle, imagination, hopes, dreams, creativity and power. By creating a sincere connection with its customers, Apple have been able to compete with the personal computer industry. Loyal customers have become so passionate about identifying with Apple's Macintosh innovative line, that the Mac Vs PC debate is probably one that should be avoided in polite company.

Engaging with consumers at an emotional level offers your business the opportunity to demonstrate the brand values and benefits of the products and services behind the

cause. As your cause generates interest and motivates people to buy, your business can begin to experience tangible benefits such as an increase in sales, greater awareness, stronger brand loyalty, a positive corporate citizen reputation, as well as potential free publicity.

Not only are customers drawn to businesses that are fuelled by a genuine cause, but employees also want to work for you. I am sure we have all experienced the differences in working for someone who clearly dislikes what they do, and a boss who radiates positivity and commitment.

If you drop a pebble into a pond, what happens? It has a ripple effect on the whole of the pond. The same concept applies in 'cause marketing'. The point where the pebble hits the water represents the foundation of your business. If you are truly passionate about your cause, you will attract employees with passion that will radiate through to the circles of customers who in turn, will communicate their passion for your products and services by word-of-mouth.

And never forget about your business' cause. It is probably your main motivation to get up to go to work most days. Reignite the passion and use it to satisfy you, your employees and, most important, your customers. Remember, if you don't truly believe in yourself, why would your customer believe in you?

By Simon Moore  
[www.onprofit.com.au](http://www.onprofit.com.au)