

# May I Have Your Attention, Please

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# THE GOLDEN AGE *of* GIVING



The fifth Golden Age of Giving article explores the various ways companies creatively market and brand their philanthropic campaigns to gain public traction and engagement.

## Creative Ways to Give

Forty six percent of corporate giving is done with cash gifts according to the recent CECP survey 2011 Giving In Numbers. However, with more companies participating in philanthropy, CSR leaders must develop eye-catching and original programs in order to stand out from the crowd. Timberland partnered with Ringo Starr on the "Canvas that Cares" eco-footwear contest, while Groupon employed its daily deal platform for the Feeding America Grassroots campaign. Rock stars and witty copy writers turned these joint ventures into dynamic partnerships that allowed both the corporation and the partner charity to reach an expanded consumer base. The benefits of innovative philanthropy are too cool to ignore.

Groupon, Inc., in particular, is doing an exemplary job of spearheading creative giving campaigns. In fact, Groupon's very origins are tied to its precursor, The Point, a group action and fundraising platform. As the socially focused team behind The Point recognized the potential of their

"tipping point" platform, they found a way to leverage the concept in the consumer market place, thus, giving birth to the lucrative coupon-purchasing platform, Groupon. As Groupon blossomed (or perhaps more appropriately, juggernauted), in April of 2012 it came full circle and launched what is now known as Groupon Grassroots, a division dedicated specifically to hosting fundraising campaigns. Grassroots uses Groupon's daily email platform to promote and support select targeted fundraising projects with realistic goals.

From buying jeans for foster kids to funding a turtle sanctuary, Groupon has partnered with charities for a diverse range of causes. "Our campaigns are visible in any [geographic] market, which is new, so we can run fewer of them and give them more attention. Now we can really serve the organizations that don't have the skills to be successful initially with their campaigns," said Patty Huber, Head of Groupon Grassroots. Ms. Huber and the Grassroots team take a hands-on approach and coach each nonprofit

organization through the campaign process. Huber emphasized capacity building as a major focus, as "step by step, we help them develop a way to leverage their existing supporter base and turn them into real evangelists for their cause." The Grassroots team takes care to give their nonprofit partners the best chance at success in their mission beyond the isolated campaign.

Indeed, the campaigns are about more than just raising cash. Ms. Huber revealed, "Some organizations are just excited about getting people to read the copy whether or not they donate." Advocacy groups, for example, are thrilled to reach a wider audience with their message. Ms. Huber continued, "with any advocacy group, it's really hard to say, 'If we raise this much money, it's going to have this tangible result.' A huge part of their mission is public education," and Groupon has a knack for communicating pertinent information in fun, creative, witty ways. Active Transport Alliance, a cycling advocacy organization, appealed to Grassroots for assistance with drawing

awareness to the law which makes it mandatory for a biker to have a light on their bike when riding after dark. The campaign, which Grassroots scheduled to coincide with Daylight Savings, culminated in a flash mob which included volunteers to distribute lights to bikers who had been caught in the dark. The Grassroots channel enables organizations such as Active Transport Alliance to cast a wider net, creating an impressive messaging impact.

Not only has Groupon Grassroots successfully helped charities with small-scale projects, but it has created a new outlet for corporate gift matching as well. DonorsChoose.org secured a \$50,000 matching grant from JPMorgan Chase & Co., when their campaign tipped and sold out within 2 days even though it had been scheduled to run a week. "Because we can deliver on the media impressions, these groups are able to cultivate larger and stronger corporate relationships than they would have if they were doing a typical matching campaign, which is really awesome to see," said Ms. Huber. Although Chase is a sizeable national corporation, through Grassroots, it was able to make a large and yet focused, local impact. Grassroots helps build a mutually beneficial relationship between the local charities and the corporations because of its high impact marketing and reach.

While Grassroots is predominantly partnered with existing non-profits at present, their future goals include working with more social enterprises, community members, and growing their role in advocacy. Ms. Huber mused, "I think the most impactful CSR is invisible." As a corporation, Groupon is very aware of its social impact, and very aware that they still need to investigate how it will evolve. Huber recalled reading a thought provoking piece saying, "someone once wrote an article [asking], is Groupon the largest social enterprise ever because of our impact on the local community. We are disrupting commerce and leveling the playing field for these businesses. It's really powerful." Groupon recognizes the inextricable link between being both profitable and responsible in the marketplace.

When it comes to maintaining a CSR program that engages the public, the real question is how do you keep the programs and ideas fresh? For Groupon the answer is to apply the same principles that prove successful in business to community initiatives. That means choosing campaign cover-images that people connect to no matter how obscure a product or cause. That means finding a way to market the littlest fish in the pond, whether that fish is a retailer or a charity. Most importantly, that means being creative. Whether the goal is to sell a service, raise funds, or

educate, the first step is always the same; get peoples' attention. A little creativity goes a long way when trying to make the public receptive to communication, and with conventional giving programs easily lost in the sea of fundraising campaigns, it's critical to stand out. Done well, like by Groupon, creative CSR outreach can expand a consumer base, cultivate new markets, improve a corporation's social footprint, and champion worthwhile causes simultaneously.

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A special thanks to Patty Huber of Groupon Grassroots for her time and insight.

