

Cause-related marketing: Why we do it and where the value lies

By [Joanna Costhuizen](#)

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In a society such as ours, in such dynamic, developmental evolution, causes are the fuel that helps drive change. Citizen activism brings issues to the nation's attention, it informs our people, inspires progress and supports our government.



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Causes reflect the needs of the country, what our people reject and what they aspire to. Inside a social cause, lives a vision for a better South Africa. A cause exemplifies what is relevant right now.

In this context, much is made of the idea that businesses should be responsible corporate citizens. This is true. As part of that responsibility, companies and their brands should align themselves with causes relevant to them, and to society.

This must extend beyond paying lip service to fashionable campaigns. To really live the values of corporate citizenship, companies and their brands should identify causes that are integral to their own existence, and to the market they operate in.

Emphasising the cause, not the marketing

Cause-related marketing emphasises the cause, not the marketing. It sees companies joining forces with NGOs to address social problems. This could take the form of an awareness campaign, or a fundraising initiative where the brand donates a portion of sales towards the cause.

However, the campaign could just as easily have no sales link at all. In fact, this often adds to its authenticity.

An example of this would be the [Shave to Remember campaign](#) by Philips and Ogilvy. This was a call to action for all people to find the Mandela within them by getting his iconic haircut. But it was more than a hairstyle. Getting the Madiba line shaved into your hair signalled a pledge to bring his values of freedom, peace, forgiveness and equality to life.

This campaign was relevant and topical, coming as it did around Mandela Day this year. Other causes, though, are relevant because they address a societal problem that never goes away. Highlighting such a cause may require a brand taking a long, hard look at itself, and facing some unpleasant truths.

An example of such a campaign was #NoExcuse, another Ogilvy campaign, which saw Carling Black Label acknowledge that alcohol plays a significant role in violence against women. Even then, there is No Excuse for it.



#NoExcuse: New movement to get Champion Men involved in tackling gender-based violence

30 Nov 2017



The campaign culminated during the Soweto Derby soccer match, where a group of women performed the well-known song “Mas’hambe Nono”, adapting the lyrics to condemn the epidemic of violence against the women of South Africa. The campaign reached 45 million people worldwide.

The benefits of cause-related marketing should not be evaluated through sales impact. Aligning with causes is part of a brand’s responsibility to its society. The real benefits come with practical social change. A safe, sustainable world means better business for everyone.

Cultural relevance is fundamental

Another benefit of cause-related marketing is that it enhances the cultural relevance of brands. By showing concern for issues that affect citizens, a brand shows that it matters. Cultural relevance is fundamental to a brand’s success.

Only when you are part of the conversations people are having, can you hope to influence their behaviour.

Cultural relevance opens the door to a new world of brand behaviours much deeper and more meaningful than the quest for sales. A culturally relevant brand can:

- Lead – It can stand for something
- Respond – Show it is interested in the lives of its consumers.
- Reciprocate – Give something back to consumers
- Create – Inspire and bring something into the world, and
- Convene – Bring people together in a unique new way.

Once a brand is culturally relevant, it becomes more than a product or a service. It becomes part of people’s lives. Cause-related marketing is an opportunity to gain such relevance. But it can only come from sincere engagement and understanding of consumers’ values and the issues they face in an emotional way.

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