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Philanthropic Marketing

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A Call to Action

A measurable, brand-building strategy

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of columns by Social Capital Partnerships in collaboration with The NonProfit Times and the American Marketing Association. This column will bring you best practices in philanthropic marketing, a strategy in which companies make philanthropic investments and promote marketing affiliations with nonprofits.

Whether trying to reach donors to a nonprofit organization or consumers who care about a cause, a call to action can be a powerful tool. A call to action is a succinct marketing tagline that engages people to participate in an activity to benefit a cause. Often a call to action encourages consumers to purchase a product and a donation goes to the cause. A call to action can spur citizens to take part in a run or walk to benefit a cause, or it can encourage consumers to “vote” with a purchase or take an action to further an advocacy effort. Many top tier nonprofits are successfully deploying calls to action in lieu of taglines that simply state their missions. A call to action done right can:

1. Translate the essence of your mission with a memorable, simplified message;
2. Provide a compelling statement for cause marketing promotions;
3. Utilize a unique communication expression specific to your cause, which is preferable to general statements like *Make a Difference* and;
4. Be tailored to reflect a specific program or individual partner needs.

Developing your organization's call to action is an educational, consensus-building process. Essentially, you want to translate your organization's mission into a short, actionable statement that can be applied to a multitude of marketing campaigns across several types of partners. If your mission is hard to narrow in scope, a call to action can be your organization's tagline that you make actionable.

For example, the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation's mission is: “To eradicate breast cancer as a life-threatening disease by advancing research, education, screening and treatment.” The essential message for Komen is finding a cure for breast cancer, resulting in one of the most recognizable and successful calls to action: *For the Cure*.

America's Second Harvest—The Nation's Food Bank Network's mission is: "To create a hunger-free America. We distribute food and grocery products through a Nationwide Network of certified Members, increase public awareness of domestic hunger and advocate for policies that benefit America's hungry." The core message to America Second Harvest's mission is ending hunger. The result: Their branded call to action became *Ending Hunger* or, depending on the promotion, *To End Hunger*. While America's Second Harvest uses a verb phrase in "end" or "ending," Komen's short phrase of *For the Cure* works as well. In any case, you want to set up your organization's call to action to be easy to attach to a verb to make the call to action tagline an actionable—and marketable—statement.

Here are some great examples of how Komen and America's Second Harvest have put their calls to action in place with corporate partners. Among Komen's many high-profile *For the Cure* promotions, one standout is KitchenAid and its *Cook for the Cure*® program, designed to appeal to consumers who enjoy cooking and are likely to support a worthy organization at the same time. *Cook for the Cure* is more than a transactional donation-with-purchase tie; it employs co-branded products, special events, grassroots initiatives to aid supporters in hosting their own *Cook for the Cure* fundraising dinners and more. KitchenAid heavily promotes its tie to the foundation with co-branded materials and a dedicated Web site. To date, the relationship has raised more than \$3 million for the Komen organization in addition to being a brand-building promotion.



America's Second Harvest created an actionable program utilizing its call to action through a retail-targeted *Shop to End Hunger* program, a turnkey initiative to engage retailers and their vendors. The *Shop to End Hunger*-branded logo utilizes America's Second Harvest's core colors as well as integrates the cause's name and logo. Within the first year of launching the call to action, America's Second Harvest has sold in three retailers to participate, including Kroger, an affiliation of New York-area metro supermarkets and HyVee grocery stores.



One aspect to employing a call to action program is that sometimes a corporate partner, oftentimes a retailer, will want to customize the program to a greater degree. When America's Second Harvest approached Kroger, a long-time food and financial supporter of the cause, Kroger was seeking something more tailored that only it could promote and therefore pass through the exclusive promotional opportunity to its packaged goods vendors. Therefore, to meet the needs of Kroger, yet grow the brand value of America's Second Harvest, the partners co-created *Bringing Hope to the Table*, which Kroger successfully launched nationwide, engaging 6,500 stores across 35 states and raising nearly \$3 million. While Kroger utilized a different promotional tagline, the result was the same: an engaging, traffic-driving consumer call to action that directly ties to helping America's Second Harvest fulfill its mission of ending hunger—plus, the nonprofit credits Kroger with stepping up to become the founding partner of the *Shop to End Hunger* initiative on the whole.

Both Komen and America's Second Harvest have integrated their call to action partner promotions within deeper relationships, epitomizing philanthropic marketing partnerships with numerous touch points that strive to further the causes' missions.

More and more, the nonprofit industry is seeing call to action promotions as a marketing strategy that works—and that can translate to most nonprofit genres. Other great examples include American Heart Association's *Go Red for Women* campaign, American Forests' *Every Dollar Plants a Tree* and sponsor-driven Stonyfield Farms' *Bid with Your Lid*, which supported American Farmland Trust, the National Audubon Society and the Rainforest Alliance. Between drilling down into your mission to find the core message and determining the right partners to activate the concept, most causes can find success with a call to action.

Paula Oyer Berezin and Julie Hogan are with Social Capital Partnerships, a Chicago-based consultancy dedicated to building sustainable partnerships between nonprofits and corporations. Social Capital Partnerships is an industry authority on philanthropic marketing working with *The NonProfit Times* and the American Marketing Association. www.socialcapitalpartnerships.com