



Corporate Social Purpose: It's in What You Don't Sell

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It's now possible to improve your business by giving away your products and services. Not by traditional free trial offers. By embedding your social purpose in what you *don't* sell.

Here are three inspiring examples of companies that had the courage to abandon the most fundamental principle of business and built or strengthened their firms in ways that wouldn't have been possible without offering their products for free.

Since its founding in 2006 by Blake Mycoskie, TOMS has matched every pair of TOMS shoes purchased with a new pair given to a child in need. Mycoskie calls the matching concept the One for One movement. Even some of the most cynical Gen-Y'ers are supporting the company by raising awareness about the impact a pair of shoes can have on a child's life at more than 1,200 TOMS Campus Clubs across North America.

This year, Campbell Canada launched Nourish, "a complete meal with a full serving of three food groups created to help address the growing issue of hunger in Canada and abroad." Nourish wasn't for sale. The company produced 300,000 cans exclusively for distribution by Food Banks Canada. The organization's executive director said, "It is the first time in Canada that a food company operator has created a product thinking about Canadians who are struggling to put food on the table."

Panera Bread, which has 1,400 restaurants in the U.S., also has three "restaurants of shared responsibility" that offer a full menu but don't have cash registers. Customers make donations through an honor system. According to Panera co-founder Ron Shaich, "If you've got a few bucks, the right thing is to leave it. If you're feeling pressure, you can take a discount. If you've got nothing, you're free to enjoy your meal with dignity." Shaich decided to establish the new restaurants after visiting soup kitchens across the country and feeling like "waiting in line for a handout is an experience that lacks in dignity."

What is giving away your products and services for free really worth?

More Differentiation. It's unlikely your competition will be this courageous. It's first-mover advantage with a social purpose.

More Loyalty. The less you appear self-interested, the more loyal your customers and employees will be.

More Authenticity. There's no better way to establish your authenticity than not trying to sell someone something. This is pure corporate social purpose and it goes far beyond simplistic cause marketing campaigns.

Embedding your social purpose in what isn't for sale can also work in other industries. Here are some ideas: Mining companies could help combat poverty by giving away a percentage of what they extract to local indigenous people. Banks could offer higher-interest savings accounts to people with the lowest incomes. Pharmaceutical companies could help people stay healthier by giving away exercise equipment to local community centers. Automotive companies could provide free retrofits for people with disabilities.

Companies of any size in any industry that embrace this concept will be seen as authentic social purpose leaders. How's that for free advice?