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# CAUSE MARKETING

Bruce Burtch  
brings business and  
nonprofits together  
for mutual benefit



**INSIDE:** NEW NONPROFITS • WILLMAR  
COMMUNITY MATTERS • MENTAL HEALTH  
VOTE FOR **THE BEST OF THE NORTH BAY** (P.24)



Bruce Burtch at San Pedro Elementary School, which takes part in the Art from the Heart after school program, bringing art classes and sponsoring guest artist visits to underserved students.

[Duncan Garrett: Photography]

*The father of cause marketing describes how for-profit and nonprofits work together for the greater good.*

# GLOWING PARTNERSHIPS

*By Karen Hart*

In 1975, the Marriott Corporation was making plans to open a 200-acre Marriott's Great America family entertainment center in Santa Clara and hired Bruce Burtch to spearhead the opening promotional efforts. He was 25 years old and a rising star at Cedar Point Amusement Park in Sandusky, Ohio, the largest amusement park in the world, where he was director of public relations. Marriott's objective was to generate a cost-effective public relations campaign for the opening of its first Great America theme park. Burtch was given a copy of Marriott's standard operating procedures for opening a new facility, and the powers-that-be charged Burtch with getting people into the theme park by passing out free tickets to area nonprofit organizations.

There was just one problem: Burtch knew that would be an ambitious goal for Marriott. "At that time, Marriott had no presence [in the area]," says Burtch, now chief executive officer of Bruce W. Burtch, Inc., in San Rafael. "Marriott was Washington, D.C.-based and Eastern known. I knew there had to be a way to achieve the kind of viral impact we needed to get people into the theme park."

Burtch knew he couldn't generate the kind of publicity needed without some help. Inspiration struck one day while he was working in his office in Santa Clara. He knew he needed a partner to get people into the theme park, and he also knew there had to be a strong and appropriate alignment between both organizations. "Marriott is a family-oriented organization, so I wanted to find a partner with the right brand fit," says Burtch. "In the concept of partnership, I knew we needed a partner that had mutual needs and a mutual marketing objective."

He interviewed 20 nonprofit organizations. The leading question he asked each was: What can we do together that we can't do by ourselves? The organization he finally settled on was March of Dimes. According to Burtch, both organizations had similar goals. The March of Dimes is all about children's health issues, he explains. And like Marriott, the March of Dimes is family-oriented. "Marriott wanted to draw more than 2 million people to the theme park in 1976, and March of Dimes wanted to raise more money and have that money received by its fund-raising campaign deadline. We had marketing objectives that could support each other, and we built a partnership."

## History in the making

Together, Burtch and the March of Dimes came up with a marketing plan that met both organizations' objectives. It would soon make history with a sweeping publicity campaign that would later be identified as the first "cause marketing" campaign in history.

The March of Dimes sponsored fundraiser walks simultaneously in 67 cities in the western states. As part of the publicity campaign, each walk was branded with the Marriott's Great America logo, and Bugs Bunny became the official spokes*rabbit*. Most important, Burtch and the March of Dimes created excitement by holding a contest to get teens and young families into the theme park. Whoever raised the most money for the March of Dimes in each city (and turned the money in by the deadline), would receive 100 tickets to the opening of Great America. The winner was suddenly a hero, hosting a day of fun for friends and family; and with each fund-raising walk, Marriott was raising awareness for Great America and attracting people to the new theme park.

Burtch knew the idea would work, but Marriott was a little rattled. "Initially, Marriott was concerned with me for not passing out free tickets to local organizations," he recalls. Nevertheless, Burtch firmly believed in what he was doing and carried on.

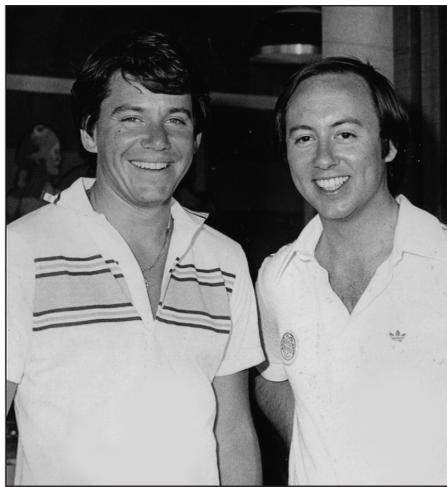
It turned out that his idea was genius—and incredibly right.

In 1976, a record-breaking 2.2 million people attended the opening of the Great America family entertainment center. According to Burtch, a great deal of the success can be attributed to the free publicity generated by the March of Dimes fundraising walks, which would've cost Marriott hundreds of thousands of dollars otherwise. What's more, the March of Dimes raised \$2.5 million—40 percent more money than it had ever raised in the history of its western region.

It was a win-win situation for both organizations, and Burtch knew he was on to something.

So why exactly did it work? "Because we were both honest about our agendas," says Burtch. "Marriott needed to put 2 million people in the park, and the March of Dimes needed to raise money. In a partnership, there can be no hidden agendas. If a for-profit organization says it wants to build its brand, but the real objective is to sell more product, then it's not being honest. Both partners have to be honest and focused on their marketing objectives."

Soon after, Burtch was approached by



Burtch (right) and Anson Williams, who played Potsie on "Happy Days," during a celebrity tennis tournament Burtch produced for the United States Olympic Committee in 1979.

the U.S. Olympic Committee to work his public relations magic for the 1980 games, which would be held in Moscow. Though he was only 29 years old at the time, the Olympic Committee recognized Burtch's talent for aligning the needs and missions of two organizations. It wanted Burtch to develop cause marketing (though it wasn't called that at the time), fund development and public relations programs. Unfortunately, the United States boycotted the games that year in protest because Russia invaded Afghanistan.

Despite this setback, Burtch wasn't put off his newfound mission. He was just getting started. He's since been recognized as an innovator for cross-sector partnerships and a new kind of strategic marketing.

## Cause marketing

Burtch's inspiration to partner two or more organizations from different sectors for the greater good became the seed of inspiration for what's known today as "cause marketing," which is nearly a \$2 billion industry in North America. Burtch, known as "the father of cause marketing," has a simple mantra he began in 1977: *Do well by doing good*.

Cause marketing is often defined as marketing involving the cooperative efforts of a for-profit business and a nonprofit organization for mutual benefit. However, Burtch points out that a cross-sector partnership can also include joining forces with education and government. (Sometimes the term is incorrectly used to refer to any type of marketing effort for social and other charitable causes, including in-house marketing efforts by nonprofit organizations.) Cause marketing is not the same as corporate philanthropy, and it's not sponsorship, both of which

may be tax deductible.

Chances are you've seen cause marketing at work on your grocer's shelves. For example, Campbell's soup created a unique pink-and-white label as a fund-raising effort to support Susan G. Komen for the Cure, and Dawn dishwashing liquid donated \$1 from each product sold to save wildlife after the 2010 Gulf oil spill. "Cause marketing does so well because you're forming a partnership to do good, and that's good for business," says Burtch.

Focusing on the greater good is the key ingredient in any cross-sector partnership. "That's the 'why' behind the campaign. If you don't focus on the greater good, you risk losing the emotional impact," he says.

## Working for the greater good

"There's nothing in business today that provides as much economic and social benefit—on as many levels to as many stakeholders—as a partnership between two or more from the nonprofit, for-profit, education and government sectors that's focused on creating a greater good," says Burtch. "Absolutely nothing else comes close."

Cause marketing is a powerful tool that business and nonprofit organizations are increasingly leveraging. For example, 87 percent of the general public will switch from one brand to another (of a comparable product and price) if the latter is associated with a good cause, according to the Cone Cause Evolution Study of 2010. What's more, 85 percent of the general public and 92 percent of mothers want to buy a product that supports a cause.

"When you embed a cause consciousness into your organizational culture, you create an exceptionally strong attraction to it *and* to its products and services," says Burtch. "People tend to value a company's reputation just as much—if not more—than its products and services."

## Raising awareness

While cause marketing is most often associated with buying a product that supports a cause, it can also be a powerful tool to raise awareness and change human behavior. "[It's relatively easy to] get someone to buy a product, but try to get them to stop smoking or drink less. It's the hardest, because you're asking them to make a change in their behavior," says Burtch.

Nevertheless, it's not impossible.

Case in point: From 2005 to 2007, the American Red Cross Bay Area Chapter and Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E) conducted the most comprehensive emergency preparedness campaign

ever initiated by a nongovernmental organization. While the partners in most cause marketing campaigns have separate objectives, these two organizations were focused on a *single* goal—to train 1 million Bay Area residents how to prepare for an earthquake or other emergency.

Burtch led the partners' marketing campaign—*Prepare Bay Area*—and sought the help of Publicis & Hal Riney, an internationally acclaimed advertising firm that donated its time and creative services to the cause. The theme they used to base their strategy was: *What do we have to do to get your attention?*

At that time, despite living in a geographical location where a catastrophic earthquake could happen (according to a U.S. Geological Survey), only 6 percent of Bay Area residents were prepared for a major disaster. The survey predicted a catastrophic earthquake would strike within the next 30 years—or 30 seconds. The problem was how to motivate people to get prepared. For some Bay Area residents, being prepared means having a radio and a case of water...but that's not enough, says Burtch.

To get the public's attention, Burtch and the advertising team used shock-and-awe techniques. They commissioned a photo-realistic decal that depicted Union Square cracked in half, mobile billboards portraying the Ferry Building and Market Street destroyed by fire, and a couple of cabs with debris and decals (that made them look as if they'd been damaged from an earthquake) drove around the Bay Area. In addition, booths were set up at Union Square so people could be trained and get information about how to prepare for an earthquake.

The efforts caused a sensation around the Bay Area, and the mobile billboards showed up on TV broadcasts and in newspapers and blogs around the world.

The partnership raised more than \$1 million, most of which was used by the Red Cross to train Bay Area residents. The media campaign raised awareness and amassed more than \$3 million in free publicity. And most important of all, 1 million Bay Area residents were trained in emergency preparedness within three years.

### Glowing your business

When done right, cross-sector partnerships have a synergy that benefits both partners and missions, says Burtch. Not only that, cause consciousness has a natural way of embedding itself into the very fabric of the organizations that partner together and creates a win-win situation for everyone.

"When you build partnerships that serve the greater good, everyone wins and your organization begins to glow," says Burtch, who's working on a book, *Glowing Your Business: The Economic and Social Power of Partnerships*.

It doesn't happen overnight, though. It takes patience and discipline, says Burtch. "However, the results have been proven, time and time again, to not only create benefits for all stakeholders but to have a significant impact on the bottom line," he says.

So what does a glow look like?

"When an organization develops a cause consciousness and it's embedded in its culture, a radiance begins," says Burtch. "This radiance begins to shine outwardly, and your business' reputation for doing something for the greater good attracts the attention of the public, new customers and the media." According to Burtch,



Burtch and Bugs Bunny on a media tour for the Marriott's Great America and March of Dimes promotion.

when you're focused on the greater good, your business begins to organically glow.

### All shapes and sizes

Do cross-sector partnerships and cause marketing work for small- and mid-sized organizations? According to Burtch, forming a partnership and working together for a cause works for organizations of all shapes and sizes. If your organization happens to be a nonprofit, though, the key is to sometimes think differently—to be open to new ideas and opportunities.

"Most nonprofits look to corporations and independent foundations for funding. I encourage people not to go to corporate or independent foundations because it's so competitive," he says.

"There are multiple benefits that both sides get, and more benefits that a for-profit organization gets when working with a nonprofit," he says. "Nonprofit organizations don't realize the value they can bring to a business. There are multiple benefits that both sides of a partnership can receive. Indeed, I've found more benefits for a for-profit organization, when working with a nonprofit, than the other way around. There are more than 30 distinct benefits that each partner can receive through cross-sector partnerships." (See "Benefits of a Glowing Partnership," next page.)

Recently, Burtch was approached by Sheila Jones and Kathy Eggert, who operate a nonprofit program called Art from the Heart. Their program is aimed at bringing all types of art classes and sponsoring guest artist visits to underserved students in after school programs. Schools typically have no funding available for these types of programs, and Art from the Heart's own budget is modest—they needed financial help.

Burtch suggested the women approach Autodesk, which is based in San Rafael, but they were skeptical that a small, local art program could form a partnership with a multi-billion dollar, multi-national corporation. Nevertheless, Burtch set up a meeting, and Jones and Eggert showed Autodesk's grant committee what their program was doing for children. Art from the Heart won them over.

The average first-time donation that Autodesk gives is generally \$500 to \$1,000. Instead, Autodesk wrote a check to Art from the Heart for \$5,000, which was about half of the nonprofit's program budget. What's more, the majority of the grant committee's members wanted to volunteer their creative services to Art from the Heart.

According to Jones, a number of other opportunities came along for Art from the Heart once it partnered with Autodesk. In addition to a generous grant, Autodesk encouraged Jones and Eggert to set up a booth during the corporation's lunch hour so they could speak with employees about the program. "We find guest artists all over Marin, and that day we found one in the Autodesk lobby," says Jones. "One employee said she made jewelry in her spare time and asked if the kids we work with would be interested in learning about that. So, of course, we said 'Yes' and scheduled her to work with 30 children at the San Pedro after-school program."

On another occasion, Autodesk sponsored a seminar that included dozens of Marin County-based nonprofits. "During the break, I spoke with a woman who was videotaping the event and she mentioned that she was also an artist," says Jones. "She's now been a guest artist at three of our sites. Autodesk doesn't just write

# Benefits of a Glowing Partnership

During his 35-year career, Burtch has discovered more than 30 benefits that nonprofits and for-profit organizations receive by working in strategic partnership. Here are 10 examples for each sector.

## For-profit benefits

- Increase sales of your products or services;
- Increase employee morale and retention;
- Increase customer and brand loyalty;
- Draw free media attention and coverage;
- Develop a motivating purpose for your company and employees;
- Increase shareholder return;
- Increase employee skill development, especially team building and leadership;
- Generate new ideas, insights and new ways of working;
- Attract new business partners and relationships; and
- Have your leadership and organization recognized for the good they create in society.

## Nonprofit benefits

- Increase funding;
- Expand donor base;
- Connect to new business partners and strategic relationships;
- Attract in-kind donations (such as equipment, furniture, computers and software);
- Provide professional development for employees;
- Attract new volunteers, board members or pro bono services;
- Increase brand recognition and leverage your cause to a larger audience;
- Increase media coverage and media relationships;
- Connect your leadership and organization to community through leaders; and
- Develop earned income opportunities.



Sheila Jones and Kathy Eggert of Art from the Heart partnered with Autodesk to keep art programs for underserved students in after-school programs.

a check, it extends opportunities for its employees and nonprofits to find ways to help one another.”

Today, Art from the Heart offers art programs to 300 students in five Marin County after-school programs, and during this past year it worked with 18 guest artists.

“Cross-sector partnerships work every bit as well with smaller to mid-size organizations when the campaign is designed on alignment of each partner’s missions,” adds Burtch. “And you don’t have to approach larger, nationally known corporations such as Coke. It’s far easier to go to businesses in your local community than to approach a Fortune 500 company.”

### 10,000 partnerships

Today, Burtch is a self-proclaimed evangelist for cross-sector partnerships and cause marketing. In addition to his consulting practice, Burtch established his own nonprofit organization called 10,000 Partnerships. People are often interested in forming a cross-sector partnership, but most small- and mid-size organizations don’t know how to put it together, he says. The goal of 10,000 Partnerships is to provide comprehensive training workshops to both nonprofit and for-profit organizations and provide them with a step-by-step process on the development of cross-sector partnerships and cause marketing.

“Many organizations feel taking on such partnerships is challenging, but it’s not that difficult,” he says. “It’s a matter of getting your mission aligned with the mission of another organization to create a greater good. My mission is to get organizations to

form these partnerships that will potentially affect millions of lives.”

What would the father of cause marketing like to see in the future of cross-sector partnerships? “I’d like to see more companies embed a cause consciousness into their corporate culture,” he says. “But don’t do it just because it’s a good thing to do—do it to make a difference. It’s amazing what can be accomplished when organizations from different sectors build a trusting relationship and work together for mutual benefit. When efforts are focused on the greater good...magic happens.” ■

For more information, go to [www.bruceburtch.com](http://www.bruceburtch.com).

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