

Cone LLC Releases the 2010 Cone Cause Evolution Study

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**EVEN AS CAUSE MARKETING GROWS,
83 PERCENT OF CONSUMERS STILL WANT TO SEE MORE**

More than 9-in-10 moms want the opportunity to buy a product benefiting a cause

BOSTON (September 15, 2010) – Forty-one percent of Americans say they have purchased a product in the past year because it was associated with a social or environmental cause (41%), a two-fold increase since [Cone](#) first began measuring in 1993 (20%). But even as their purchasing power grows, consumer appetite for socially conscious shopping has yet to be satiated. A full 83 percent of consumers want more of the products, services and retailers they use to benefit causes, according to the new [2010 Cone Cause Evolution Study](#), the nation's only [17-year benchmark](#) of [cause marketing](#) attitudes and behaviors.

Recession Didn't Alter Expectations

The nation's ongoing economic woes have not deterred Americans' social sentiment, nor their expectations that companies will benefit society. Eighty-one percent said companies should financially support causes at the same level or higher during an economic downturn. It appears business rose to this challenge – nearly two-thirds (64%) of consumers believe companies responded well to social and environmental issues during the recession.

Americans' enthusiasm for [cause marketing](#) also emerged from the turmoil fully intact and continues to strongly influence their purchase decisions:

- 88% say it is acceptable for companies to involve a cause or issue in their marketing;
- 85% have a more positive image of a product or company when it supports a cause they care about; and,
- 80% are likely to switch brands, similar in price and quality, to one that supports a cause.

Not only are consumers willing to switch among similar brands, they are also willing to step outside their comfort zones. When it supports a cause:

- 61% of Americans say they would be willing to try a new brand or one unfamiliar to them;

- 46% would try a generic or private-label brand; and,
- Nearly one-in-five consumers (19%) would be willing to purchase a more expensive brand.

“When price and quality are equal, we know most consumers will choose the product benefiting the cause,” explains [Alison DaSilva](#), executive vice president at Cone. “But cause alignment can have an even bigger influence on consumer choice, pushing them to experiment with something different and unfamiliar. [Cause branding](#) is a prime opportunity for companies to extend beyond their traditional market and increase exposure to potential new consumers.”

Moms and Millennials: Most Cause-Conscious Consumers

By all measures, moms lead the way as the demographic most amenable to [cause marketing](#). In fact, moms virtually demand the opportunity to shop with a cause in mind. A staggering 95 percent find cause marketing acceptable (vs. 88% average), and 92 percent want to buy a product supporting a cause (vs. 81% average). They are also more likely to switch brands (93% vs. 80% average), so it is hardly surprising that moms purchased more cause-related products in the past year than any other demographic (61% vs. 41% average).

Millennials (18-24 years old) are close on moms’ heels as they also shop with an eye toward the greater good. Ninety-four percent find cause marketing acceptable (vs. 88% average) and more than half (53%) have bought a product benefiting a cause this year (vs. 41% average).

A company’s support of social or environmental issues is also likely to influence this group’s decisions outside the store, including where to work (87% vs. 69% average) and where to invest (79% vs. 59% average).

Engage Consumers Beyond the Vote

At a time when consumer voting campaigns have emerged as the [cause marketing](#) tactic du jour, a majority (61%) of consumers say they would prefer to see a company make a long-term commitment to a focused issue rather than determining themselves which issue the company supports in the short-term. This does not suggest they do not want to be engaged, however. Buying a cause-related product (81%) continues to be the leading way consumers want to support a company’s efforts, but they also seek other higher-touch opportunities, such as lending their voices through ideas or feedback (75%) and volunteerism (72%).

“Putting the charitable dollars in the hands of consumers has, no doubt, been the standout cause strategy of the last two years. But although these campaigns are notable, they are not building long-lasting brand equity,” explains DaSilva. “They are big and bold today, but in one year, or five or 10, they won’t have clearly defined what the company stands for, and it may be hard to gauge social impact. This will require greater focus and more meaningful consumer engagement beyond the click of a button.”

Dual-Role of Employees

Consumers are the primary audience for most companies’ [cause branding](#) programs, but businesses should be wary of overlooking employees as a key participant in their efforts. Sixty-nine percent of Americans consider a company’s social and environmental commitments when

deciding where to work. The correlation does not end once they are employed. Employees who are involved in their company's cause efforts are much more likely to feel a sense of pride and loyalty toward their employer:

- 93% say they are proud of their company's values (vs. 68% for those who are not involved); and,
- 92% say they feel a strong sense of loyalty to their company (vs. 61% for those who are not involved).

Employees may translate their experiences and knowledge as participants to their role as front-line ambassadors for a company's cause efforts. Seventy percent of consumers say a knowledgeable employee may drive their purchases or donations. And when consumers do not receive the details they need to make an informed cause-related purchase, whether through employees, on-pack messaging or other channels, 34 percent will either choose another brand or walk away.

Issues Stand Test of Time

Even as businesses face a set of complex new issues, consumers remain steadfast in their expectations of what companies should address. They continue to want companies to prioritize support of issues close to home, in local communities (46%) and in the U.S. (37%), but they are gradually recognizing the need for companies to address issues globally, as well (17%). The leading causes consumers want companies to support include:

- Economic development – 77%
- Health and disease – 77%
- Hunger – 76%
- Education – 75%
- Access to clean water – 74%
- Disaster relief – 73%
- Environment – 73%

Americans may feel some of these issues personally, but they also recognize the impact a company can have when it supports a business-aligned issue. They are equally likely to say that a company should consider supporting an issue that is important in the communities where it does business (91%), as well as one that is aligned with its business practices (91%).

“[Cause branding](#) is standing the test of time, but leadership companies must continue to innovate to ensure their programs offer an original consumer experience, tackle tough emerging issues and make bold new commitments,” says DaSilva. “Those that are most successful and meeting the competing needs of many stakeholders are aligning issues with the business for mutual benefit and integrating these efforts into a larger corporate responsibility strategy for maximum impact.”