

Feeding Good, Feeling Good

Promoting good nutrition remains The Vitamin Shoppe's mission, even when searching for the right nonprofit partner.

At The Vitamin Shoppe, the company's maxim is "Every Body Matters." The retailer and marketer aims to improve the health and well-being of its customers through good nutrition from vitamins, minerals, dietary supplements, homeopathic remedies, and health and beauty aids. "Every Body Matters" also aptly describes the mission of Vitamin Angels. Vitamin Angels is a nonprofit charity dedicated to reducing child mortality in underdeveloped countries by providing nutrient supplementation—vitamin A especially—to at-risk populations. When Vitamin Angels president and founder Howard Schiffer recruited The Vitamin Shoppe to join the charity's cause in 2007, the two organizations were a natural fit

"As companies that promote wellness and supplementation, it made perfect sense to work together," says Susan McLaughlin, The Vitamin Shoppe's director of corporate communications. She says the company immediately jumped into fundraising that first year and has been a strong Vitamin Angels supporter ever since.

Today, all Vitamin Shoppes participate in the cause. "With more than 560 stores across the United States, The Vitamin Shoppe has the opportunity to reach out to our customers and let them know about the good work that Vitamin Angels is doing," McLaughlin explains.

Much of the giving from customers comes in the form of donation with purchase. The Vitamin Shoppe promotes this fundraising drive every fall. McLaughlin says stores get very competitive over which can achieve the greatest fundraising increase year over year.

Stores also encourage customers to write inspirational messages on slips of paper. To further promote the cause, store personnel

then turn those slips of paper into decorative designs. "Our stores have made angels out of the paper sheets or used them to form the words Vitamin Angels on store windows," McLaughlin says. "The customers enjoy helping, and the designs look great on the walls and windows."

To inspire giving, The Vitamin Shoppe gives as good as it gets. In return for customer donations, the company distributes bags, T-shirts, mugs, and insulated cups touting both The Vitamin Shoppe and Vitamin Angels logos.

A few years ago, The Vitamin Shoppe—together with another dietary supplement manufacturer, Nature's Value—began underwriting a golf outing to encourage the companies it works with to get involved with Vitamin Angels. "It's a relaxing day that allows us to spend time with our partners in a social setting and raise money for a great cause," says McLaughlin.

"We're always searching for new ways to help raise money for this great cause," she continues. "Overall, a partnership with a charity is what you make of it."

When Causes Align

By choosing a charity whose mission is so close to its own, The Vitamin Shoppe found it easy to inspire its own customers to donate. Customers who shop at The Vitamin Shoppe already place a premium on good nutrition. It's not a stretch, then, for these customers to embrace Vitamin Angels, which seeks to ensure children around the world have similar access to adequate nutrients that others can so easily afford.

The Vitamin Shoppe benefits from the partnership, too. The company gains the loyalty of customers who prioritize doing business with companies that give back. "Customers want to do business with organizations that are supporting their community and their world," McLaughlin says.

Doing good raises the morale of the company's own team, too. "Giving back is good for a company's culture and soul," McLaughlin says. "Making time for charitable efforts and donating talent and money go a long way in building a company of compassionate and dedicated people."

In fact, some of The Vitamin Shoppe's own team members have joined the Vitamin Angels team on the road during missions to Belize, Haiti, and Peru, where the organization personally distributes and administers nutritional supplements to children in need.

THE VITAMIN SHOPPE CORPORATE PROFILE



Founded: 1977

Number of employees: 3,500

Primary Business: Retailer of Nutritional Supplements

Website: www.vitaminshoppe.com

Seeing Vitamin Angels achieve tangible results has been thrilling. “To know that the mortality rate is down where they have gone to help is very satisfying,” McLaughlin says.

For companies looking to build philanthropic programs, she suggests keeping employees involved, asking them to brainstorm new ideas, and keeping programs simple and easy to understand and execute.

Of course, it also helps to find an organization whose mission is so close to a company’s own. “Find a charity who is a good partner to your brand and is creative. Try new ideas and keep an open mind. By working together and supporting a nonprofit that is a good fit, we all win,” she says.

VITAMIN ANGELS



When Howard Schiffer learned that just one, inexpensive vitamin A capsule given every six months can reduce the childhood mortality rate in at-risk populations by about 24%, his mission became clear. Schiffer, whose background is in natural products, founded Vitamin Angels in 1994. The organization is dedicated to ensuring that children under the age of five have access to lifesaving micronutrients in the form of vitamins.

In its first year, Vitamin Angels gave away 100,000 vitamins. Fast-forward, and last year the company estimates it gave away more than 165 million. “In 2012, we reached almost 27 million children and mothers with lifesaving and life-changing micronutrients in 49 countries, including the United States,” Schiffer says.

Today, Vitamin Angels supporters number approximately 150 companies working in the natural products and dietary supplement industry, including major international brands. “Companies in the natural products industry remain our base of supporters; the cause rings true to their origins and reinforces the central role vitamins play in global health,” Schiffer says. “We have the most incredible group of partners and never cease to be amazed at the new and innovative ideas they bring forward to raise funds.”

In one of the most popular partnership models, a company donates 25 cents to Vitamin Angels for every item it sells—an amount of money that can provide one child with vitamin A supplements for an entire year. Other models include co-

branding products with Vitamin Angels, pledging a percentage of sales, or holding retail promotions.

Even ingredient suppliers and contract manufacturers can get involved. “Corporate donations are one way to engage, but certainly not the only way, as many of our partners will tell you,” Schiffer says. “Donations of raw materials or production services—bottling, tableting, labeling, etc.—from some of our corporate partners are responsible for the majority of the multivitamins we distribute. That’s huge for us.” Companies can even donate consulting services, like legal counsel. Media and trade show organizers can also get involved.

“Where the intention exists to support us, our partners always find a way,” Schiffer says.

As he has seen firsthand, doing good also benefits the companies involved. Companies increase their sales—sometimes by up to 40–50% during promotions—and at the same time build employee morale and gain customer loyalty by aligning with a good cause.

“Our partners continue to come back to us year after year, pledging not only to continue their support but to increase it. That could only happen because they are seeing a positive benefit of their relationship with Vitamin Angels,” Schiffer says.

He continues, “Customers understand the impact of their purchases. Studies have shown that 80% of Americans would switch from one brand to another brand that is about the same in price and quality if the other brand is associated with a good cause. We are that cause.”

ABOUT BUSINESS4BETTER



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