

➤ Cause Marketing - Vodafone's partnership with The National Autistic Society

Introduction

Vodafone is the third largest UK company by market capitalization. Its main business is in mobile phone supply and technology. Many businesses provide examples of good practice to others. Corporate responsibility (CR) is when a business runs itself well, behaves ethically and makes a wider contribution to society. As part of its CR, Vodafone is in partnership with the National Autistic Society. This is a national charity working with people affected by autism. Autism manifests itself in many ways, but it is true to say that all sufferers have difficulty making sense of the world.

Marketing

Marketing involves finding out what customers want and then providing it. Market research is used to find out what customers want. It can also ask how customers expect the company to behave. Cause marketing is part of CR. It is when a company makes sure that marketing activity benefits both the business and a cause that will benefit society.

Cause marketing

All stakeholders benefit from cause marketing. Customers, employees and the government support it. Investors see the benefit of it and causes gain from it. Cause marketing fits with Vodafone's overall vision and goals which include 'delighting customers' and 'being a responsible business'. Vodafone can help the NAS improve the lives of people with autism, publicise the issues and help the NAS to grow.

Why NAS?

Vodafone carried out research with its stakeholder groups before deciding which cause to partner. It also looked at the best examples of existing Cause Related programmes. 60 charities were looked at initially. This list was then reduced to 3 before the final selection was made. The research showed that the NAS was the best fit. As the core of Vodafone's business is communication, it made sense to partner with a cause directly related to communication issues.

The partnership

The partnership was set up with clear objectives. Vodafone's vision for the partnership included 'breaking down barriers' and making 'more things possible for people affected by autism'. The partnership programme covers three years and three main elements. It helps parents and carers with children recently diagnosed as autistic. It provides an online and interactive database of services for carers and people with autism. This is accessible in a number of ways, including via mobile phone. It sponsors a media campaign to raise awareness of issues associated with the condition.

Conclusion

Cause marketing has benefits to both partners. For instance, the NAS gains the money from Vodafone's handset recycling activities. Also, staff at Vodafone are keen to volunteer to help and raised over £100,000 in the first year. Cause marketing helps Vodafone show its Corporate Responsibility. Research showed that 55% of Vodafone's customers now regard it as responsible (up from 45%) and that there is greater understanding of the work of the NAS. This success led to the programme winning a Key Award for Excellence.