

Not-for-Profit Industry

How Nonprofits Can Build Partnerships With Businesses

When it comes to increasing visibility and funds for a nonprofit, it can sometimes feel like an uphill battle. From social media marketing to email campaigns and in-person events, your nonprofit has undoubtedly run the gamut to find what works and what doesn't. But for many nonprofits, especially smaller ones with few volunteers or support staff, business partnerships are an often-overlooked or underestimated avenue for growth.

In reality, building a relationship with a for-profit business can be beneficial for both the business and the nonprofit in ways you may not have anticipated. However, the first step—asking businesses if they are interested in a partnership—can be the roadblock that prevents both businesses and nonprofits from reaping the rewards. That is why we are sharing what nonprofits have to offer partners, as well as how nonprofits can take the first step in seeking beneficial partnerships with for-profit companies.

NONPROFITS HAVE A LOT TO OFFER BUSINESSES

One of the most common obstacles a nonprofit group encounters when considering a business partnership is plain old confidence. Nonprofits have a lot to offer a business, even if they are small. How? It comes down to **sales, corporate social responsibility, employee satisfaction, marketing, and implementation.**

Sales

An increase in sales, better shareholder returns, and an improvement in return customers are all possible with nonprofit partners. That is because studies show [consumers want socially responsible businesses](#) and will actually choose these companies over their competitors. They may even seek out responsible products and services as alternatives.



Up to [66 percent of consumers are willing to pay more](#) to a company that reflects these values. By teaming up with a nonprofit, a business can sell more products, engage more of those elusive customers, and be more competitive in a flooded market. Sharing similar statistics with businesses when your nonprofit is seeking a partner can appeal to the social and fiscal sides of the company.

Corporate Social Responsibility

[Corporate social responsibility](#), or CSR, is a policy that businesses can put in place to decrease the social, financial, and environmental effects of “traditional” operations. By establishing these policies, businesses work both internally and externally to be more responsible stewards. Because consumers are demanding more transparent and responsible products and services, more and more businesses are creating [corporate social responsibility policies](#). This means a nonprofit could actually help a business become more profitable and attractive to consumers through partnership.

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Employee satisfaction

There is another unexpected benefit to partnerships between nonprofits and for-profits: employee productivity. In a world where employees feel disengaged and disconnected from their work, volunteering and giving back in the workplace can actually [improve feelings of engagement](#) and loyalty. This, in turn, decreases turnover, increases productivity, and builds company culture. Also, Millennials—currently the largest workforce in the U.S.—are [highly motivated to give](#), making a nonprofit partnership a great way to attract these highly skilled workers. Because partnerships are often executed by a company’s employees, this is highly valuable information to bring into your outreach.

Marketing

With marketing, a business and a nonprofit will likely see a boost in brand recognition and overall visibility—and they might not even have to pay for it! Because consumers want to see businesses supporting social causes, it is possible that a partnership could lead to media attention, social media engagement, and a better “word of mouth” reputation. This level of recognition can help attract new customers for the business and can increase donations and engagement for the nonprofit. Focusing on this potential byproduct of a partnership is great motivation for both the nonprofit and the business.

Implementation

Small nonprofits seeking business partners may feel especially ill-equipped to find them, but they are often more valuable to businesses than they realize. Small nonprofits offer a “foot in the door” that many larger operations do not normally provide; businesses actually have to jump through a lot of hoops—or donate a lot of money—to get into partnerships with large nonprofits (e.g., Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, etc.). With a smaller, more agile nonprofit, businesses are able to kick-start the partnership with much more ease—and they are able to make more of a difference immediately.

Of course, when deciding to partner with a nonprofit, businesses want to know they are going to see returns, which is why it is important that nonprofits know how to approach a business with a mutually beneficial offering.

Cole, Newton & Duran's Not-for-Profit Practice

Our nonprofit team has years of experience providing assurance, accounting, and tax services to a variety of organizations. Clients receive up-to-date information on the latest accounting developments and industry regulations.

Cole, Newton & Duran’s team of professionals are involved in every stage of our client’s engagement to ensure they are receiving high quality, responsive service.

Clients enjoy working with experts who help achieve their objectives. Clients receive industry knowledge and solutions they need to not only reach, but to exceed their strategic goals.

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HOW NONPROFITS CAN FIND BUSINESS PARTNERS

To find a business partner for your small or medium-sized nonprofit, start by looking for a business with values that align with your mission. Small and medium-sized businesses in your local area may be open to partnerships, as they likely haven't formed other partnerships themselves. To get started, do a quick internet search for businesses in your area and find contacts to email or call (Human Resources, Employee Relations, or Community Engagement titles may be your best bet). A combination of Google search and [LinkedIn](#) is a great way to do this.

Not sure what to say to a business once you have found the contact?

“Tell a story that will resonate with this particular business partner,” says author of *Storytelling in the Digital Age: A Guide for Nonprofits*, [Julia Campbell](#). “Find out what they have invested in previously, where their interests lie, and what other organizations they are involved with.” This does not have to require a lot of upfront work; simply search for small to medium-sized businesses and look at the About and Mission pages on their websites. This will tell you in quick time whether or not their values align with your own.

When [reaching out to companies](#) of any size, smaller nonprofits (or even large nonprofits unfamiliar with partnerships) can highlight how they are:

- > Aligned with the business's values
- > Able to help boost sales, visibility, and employee productivity
- > Ready to get started/implement a partnership
- > Able to engage with the business one-on-one
- > Positioned to strengthen the business's local reputation

Focusing on businesses that are a) strongly aligned with your values, b) local to the community you are working in, and c) both local and aligned will help with your outreach. Once you have contacted the right person (anticipate a couple of forwarded emails), you can start cultivating a partnership that is great for both organizations.

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BUILDING STRONG BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

The first step after pitching a potential partnership is to get clear on what both parties expect or want from the arrangement. Julia recommends, “Get them involved in organizing the partnership. This will ensure ownership from both sides and make the partnership stronger over time.” When both organizations understand how a partnership will support them over time, it will be easier to target the next course of action. To kick-start a partnership, Julia says, nonprofits should “ask [the business] how you can help them. Perhaps you can connect them with civic leaders, other community partners, other resources?” This way, nonprofits (especially those that are most worried they don’t have anything to offer) can establish their value right out of the gate.

Once the ground rules are established, it is time to rock and roll!

THE FUTURE OF YOUR PARTNERSHIP

Gaining a partnership and maintaining one are not the same thing. To ensure that your business partner is happy with the outcomes of your arrangement, make sure to schedule frequent check-ins or events where you can touch base. Companies want to see proof that the partnership is providing at least some ROI, whether through reporting methods (number of events, social media metrics, increased donations, etc.) or through stories of impact. Thanking the business for their help in improving your community programs, or for making a new venture possible for your nonprofit, is a great way to reaffirm their decision to partner with you—even if there are not tangible benefits to their bottom line (yet).

“Partnerships are like gardens, they need tending and they need attention,” Julia shares. “You can’t simply set one up and walk away. Be grateful, understand how the partnership benefits both sides, and acknowledge their involvement frequently.”

The preceding is an article by Latasha Doyle of [Latasha Doyle Writes](#).

Contact Us

If you would like to discuss how Cole, Newton & Duran’s not-for-profit team can help your organization with your accounting, tax, or consulting needs, please feel free to give me a call.

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