

Incorporating a Signature Charity into Client Communication

By Dan Richards
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There's an old expression that people like to do business with people they like – the best relationships between advisors and clients cross the line from being purely business to developing an emotional component.

The most successful advisors are both respected and liked by their clients.

One of the things that makes advisors likeable is when clients know that their concerns go beyond their financial success – a bigger home, flashy car and fancy office – and that advisors have a broader commitment to give back to the community.



Many advisors do lots of things to give back to the community but aren't rewarded for it in terms of how clients view them. If you want your charitable efforts to register with clients and help position you as someone who is genuinely community spirited, there are some things you have to do beyond just writing checks.

The three steps to a signature charity

First, you need to focus on one or two key causes that are a fit for you. That doesn't mean you don't support other charities as well, but you have to emphasize one or two in particular.

Second, you have to be consistent in that support over a number of years, so that those charities become your signatures with clients.

Finally, you have to let clients know about this in an appropriate fashion. You've got to be careful about not having this appear self serving, and there are ways to do this.

On the issue of focus, a number of successful advisors have gravitated to support one particular cause that they communicate to clients.

And typically, this cause is one that clients can relate to at an emotional level. You might be a strong supporter of the local opera company or symphony. That's great if it's



something you're passionate about, but it doesn't seem to resonate the same way as supporting a foster child in South America, a cause like Make a Wish or a hospice in your community.

Size matters here – it's harder to have clients feel that you're making a difference in your support if it's a larger, more institutional charity, no matter how good the work it does.

As an example, I was talking to one advisor in a mid-sized community who took a leadership position to help save the local Santa Claus parade. This advisor not only found it personally rewarding but got great feedback from clients. Another advisor sponsors breakfast clubs at a local school, providing a nourishing breakfast to kids who would otherwise go without.

Still another advisor got involved in supporting a dental clinic and hospital in a remote community in Kenya because some clients had travelled to volunteer there. This advisor has now made her support for this children's home a focal point of her charitable giving.

Remember, it takes repeated mention for clients to notice something. If one of your goals is to get some positive payback on your business from your commitment to a cause, you have to communicate this consistently.

Communicating your cause to clients

When it comes to communicating your cause to clients, some advisors host golf tournaments for charities they support and invite clients.

Others use their newsletters and material in their office to let clients know what they're doing. And some use their holiday messages to clients to say that instead of gifts, they have made a contribution to XYZ charity, which they've been supporting for a number of years.

Here's an example of an advisor who has profiled two foster children she supports in Bolivia in her quarterly newsletter for 15 years. Every quarter she has a picture of these kids. A couple of years ago, she was in South America and visited these kids and had a picture of her and the two children, who were now 16 and 18 (so no longer children).

And she says it's remarkable how many clients have mentioned this to her and talk about watching those kids grow up – the key is the consistency of that photo appearing each and every quarter. The other thing she's done is to position this support as coming from her on behalf of her clients, and she has pictures of these kids over the years in her office, so that it really is something that's very visible to clients.

Let's be clear, this will not be every advisor's cup of tea. Some advisors like to be anonymous or lower profile in their support, believing that giving should be its own reward.



That's an absolutely legitimate decision. But if you are genuinely passionate about a cause, as you think about your activity plan for 2011, find an opportunity to give back and do good and translate that activity into a positive perception by your clients.

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