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## Find a cause

It may sound cynical, but embracing a good cause can present a viable opportunity for low-cost marketing. There are many approaches to cause-driven marketing. Earmark a portion of your company's revenue for a worthwhile cause, suggests Joel Warady, a marketing consultant. Volunteering or offering training and mentoring programs can cement the central marketing message that you wish to convey. "You're trying to build emotion associated with your brand," he says. "Not only does cause-marketing allow you to connect with customers, but it also allows customers to get some insight into your company's soul. Then, it becomes less about *what* you give than it does about *why* you give."

Cause-marketing can also address a common problem shared by customers. Take Mike Faith, CEO of Headsets.com. When he heard that hundreds of drivers in California and Washington had gotten traffic tickets for violating new hands-free cell phone driving laws, he jumped at the chance for easy marketing. "We needed an inexpensive promotion to take advantage of the hands-free law," says Faith, 44. "We offered a headset giveaway for people who got ticketed. Our message was 'Send us proof of your ticket, and we'll send you a free cellular headset.'"

Total cost: roughly \$2,500 per month. Not bad, considering the projected \$25 million company reached readers of 40 print publications and listeners of 30 radio stations around the country.

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## Offer a guarantee

With few exceptions, every business stands behind its product or service in some capacity. But few also leverage that form of assurance as the powerful marketing tool that it can be: a rock-solid declaration of the unshakable faith you have in what you provide, if nothing else. "It really speaks to a level of customer service," says Mettler. "You're showing that you have complete confidence to provide a warranty that underwrites your product or service."

Of course, guarantees and warranties carry a level of risk. For one thing, there's always the possibility of an unscrupulous client or customer taking unfair advantage by attempting to obtain a refund, a free service or product, or some other unjustified benefit. And, Mettler notes, with the pervasive nature of the internet, a customer who feels wronged can quickly share his dissatisfaction via online reviews, chat boards and other means. That underscores the importance of customer service as an essential adjunct to any sort of guarantee. No matter the level of quality, dissatisfaction and complaints are inevitable. To keep salty customers happy, says Mettler, "Talk to people and make sure you fix their problems. Make that as much a part of your guarantee as anything else."

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## You're a winner

Everyone loves contests. They offer visibility, customer interaction and the lure of victory. C.A.R.E. Addiction Recovery, a holistic rehab clinic in North Palm Beach, Florida, is one company that wasn't about to remain on the contest sidelines. Recognizing the pricey nature of its services (\$22,000 a month for in-house treatment), the clinic has sponsored several "30 Days of Care" giveaways.

The program lets listeners call a radio show and make a pitch to clinic director Dr. Mitch Wallick (he's also the show's on-air medical expert) for themselves or a loved one as to why they're most deserving of 30 days of rehab free of charge. The clinic has sponsored two contests to date and plans more for the future. "It's worked really well for us," says the clinic's Denise Sullivan. "It's hard to get people to talk about rehab. It has really put us on the radar with people who normally wouldn't hear about us."

Wallick's role as ongoing on-air authority points out an essential element of a successful contest—namely, that any contest, however popular, innovative or engaging, must be part of a more expansive marketing program. As Lipe notes, any contest that comes and goes without follow-up to leverage visibility is little more than a forgettable one-off. "Contests can generate great leads, but it's important to make the contest just one stage in the overall strategy," he says. "You have to think about what you're going to do with the publicity and attention that you receive from the contest." ■

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