

Robin Hood does a lot of good

New Zealand has been waiting for a more strategic approach to business and non-profit partnerships.

A growing number of business leaders believes that the Robin Hood Foundation is the organisation that will achieve it...



Jude Mannion

The 21st century, according to business visionary Peter Drucker, will be the century of the social sector organisation. As economies, money and information become increasingly global in nature, communities will matter more and more, he says. Events such as September 11 and well-publicised business debacles such as Enron and Arthur Andersen have also put pressure

on companies from consumers to communicate what 'values' their brands or services stand for.

When a company chooses to reinforce its brand values through non-profit partnerships, it achieves a unique connection or resonance in consumers' minds. The halo effect of these non-profit values helps reinforce the values of the brands at a deeper level.

The recently-launched Robin Hood Foundation enters 2003 with the partnership of two of New Zealand's retail giants: Farmers' Trading Company and Progressive Enterprises, who are expected to lead the way for many other industry players to follow. The Foundation was launched in October 2002 and immediately attracted partnership from some of New Zealand's largest companies, including Restaurant Brands, Kellogg, Griffins, Microsoft, Mainland and Coke.

A new concept for New Zealand, the Foundation performs the role of marriage broker between business and non-profit partners, and has attracted rapid interest from both sectors. The Foundation's core role is to bring a common language to both business and non-profits and create sustainable, mutually beneficial relationships.

The Foundation removes the risk element for businesses who are plagued

with many requests and a dilemma of "who to choose" by taking a due diligence and registration role with the non-profit sector. The Foundation does not register any non-profit for partnership until it has successfully completed the foundation's due diligence evaluation. The Foundation then presents the non-profit to its business partners and vouches for the non-profit's deliverables. This strategy is receiving very good feedback.

"New Zealand has been waiting for a more strategic approach to business and non-profit partnerships. We believe the Robin Hood Foundation will bring that strategic approach, taking the risk out of selecting partners and making it easier for companies to do the right thing," says Ted Van Arkel, Managing Director/ CEO Progressive Enterprises.

The Foundation's partnership work also confers a number of other benefits. When a company differentiates itself through its values it's almost impossible for competitors to copy it. And when the business and non-profit partnership is leveraged intelligently, companies can see that their staff is enabled to make a difference, and their consumers become inspired by what the company stands for.

"Companies can also see themselves forming strategic alliances with their business partners to mutually support the same non-profit and in doing so, creating deeper and more meaningful business relationships. The process enables a deeper working relationship between all parties, which is good for business and good for the non-profit," says Jude Mannion, CEO of the Robin Hood Foundation.

"The value of shared pride that's engendered from several partners working together to support a mutual non-profit partner is immense," she continues. "This was proven by the success of the family of four sponsors who established What's Up, a telephone counselling line for young New

Zealanders. Each of the four partners: Griffins, Anchor Milk, Woolworths and Kellogg have worked together to achieve the incredible results the professional counselling service has achieved in its first year. For a start, there were over 250,000 calls from a total target audience of 850,000 young people," Jude Mannion says.

The Foundation's influential board includes some of New Zealand's most high profile and successful individuals such as Sharon Hunter, Diane Foreman and Dick Hubbard. Under their direction, a unique feature of the Foundation will be to broker strategic alliances between several companies (often business partners) and a mutual non-profit partner.

From a business partner's perspective, the Foundation is a much needed and positive forum where the business and charity communities can work together, says Farmers CEO Nick Lowe. "The Foundation allows businesses to give back to the community in a manner that makes the money work harder for the charity. We are excited to be part of the Foundation," he said. "The Foundation's work and philosophy fits in perfectly with Farmers' tradition of supporting the community, which goes back to the early days of company founder Robert Laidlaw who believed strongly in giving back to the community.

"I am particularly thrilled with how quickly the Foundation has gained momentum," says Mr Lowe, who adds that the partnership with the Foundation will not affect Farmers' existing sponsorships, including the Farmers Santa Parade and the Salvation Army Charity Day.

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