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Generosity in different flavors benefits everyone

Insider view:

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Most businesses feel, and fulfill, a responsibility to give back to the community that has contributed to their success. They often give money, offer staff for volunteer work, or donate other tangible items—because they know that non-profit organizations count on it. Taking this idea a step further, service companies, such as those providing legal counsel, advertising, or strategic communications and graphic design, are in a unique position to help by providing much needed services to non-profits while boosting employee morale, building expertise, and forging new business relationships.

Working together for a greater cause

As an example of where a service company can benefit a non-profit, a non-profit organization is unable to effectively communicate with the community at large about its needs or upcoming events without compelling marketing and development programs. But the costs for such efforts aren't always covered in their operating budget. With pro-bono help, a non-profit can benefit remarkably.

Bonds between non-profits and service companies often extend beyond just two organizations. A communications and graphic design firm might donate the design of a fundraising piece, and find a photographer to contribute imagery, a writer to craft copy, and a printer to provide printing at little or no cost. Many projects are possible only because a team of organizations or individuals come together to benefit a cause.

The recent production of the 150th Anniversary Commemorative Report and CD-ROM documentary / tour of the Boston Public Library is a prime example of how diverse businesses can come together to benefit a community institution. As the leader of this project—which will help to further enlighten the public at-large to the Library's vast resources, services, history, art, and architecture—we approached dozens of individuals and companies about

donating time, materials, and services to create these two major pieces. Contributors ran the spectrum from writers, photographers, and sound companies, to printers, binders, paper manufacturers, transcription services, and many more. In most cases, there was an enthusiastic willingness to help—over \$325,000 of services and materials were donated, and no library funds were expended.

Companies donating their services benefit in many ways—from helping staff feel more fulfilled, building expertise, or contributing to the economic well-being of their neighborhoods.

In the 1852 Trustees Report that serves as the foundation for the copy in the printed book, it is clear that the Library's founding trustees believed that the institution would be able to count on the commitment of private citizens and businesses to further its mission—knowing that a partnership between the city and its citizens would be necessary for continued success. The collaborative success of the book and CD-ROM serves as further testament to that vision.

A win-win relationship for all parties

This type of work doesn't just serve the non-profit; the companies donating their services benefit in many ways—from helping staff feel more fulfilled, building expertise, or contributing to the economic well-being of their neighborhoods.

Staff get a real morale boost from helping a worthy cause and contributing to projects that often allow them to push their creativity. Recent work for the Provincetown Repertory Theatre in Provincetown is a prime example of how a designer can extend his or her creativity through pro-bono work. We produced a series of posters highlighting the theatre's productions for each of the last two seasons. "I thoroughly enjoyed the complete creative freedom with which we worked. The purely conceptual approach to interpreting the plays for the posters was a great release," says Jay Highland, a designer.

Pro-bono projects are often an opportunity for younger staff to take on assignments that might not otherwise be assigned to them, or for a company to build its portfolio in a particular area of expertise. These projects can be exciting opportunities to produce very innovative solutions.

Companies can also benefit from pro-bono work by helping organizations in the community in which they do business—thereby contributing to a better environment and economy. The Boston Center for the Arts, in the heart of the South End, has received local help to build awareness of their art exhibits, theatre productions, and other events. Because of these efforts, more visitors come from other parts of the city, and the economy of the neighborhood as a whole gets a boost.

In addition, pro-bono work can lead to new business relationships through contacts with board members and other business people who are supporters of the same organization. In many cases, a non-profit will facilitate introductions between the companies that support them.

While these benefits may not be the driving factor in a company's choice to do pro-bono work, they are the underlying business nod to the "bottom line" that allow many private companies to support the organizations they do. With both parties working towards their respective goals, pro-bono relationships are an excellent way for businesses and non-profits alike to work together, support each other, and grow their organizations along the way.

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