

Pink ribbons and cause marketing -- be informed

Posted At : October 20, 2009 1:19 PM | Posted By : Kathy LaTour

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It's the month of pink everything and as a breast cancer survivor, I am the first to say I love it – and I hate it.

I love the fact that there is now no way to avoid breast cancer information. While you may think every woman out there knows the facts, I have had two women this month who have told me they aren't at risk for breast cancer because it's not in their family.

How they have missed the fact that genetics is a very small part of the cause of breast cancer, I'll never know. This points to the need for continued information. On the other hand, I hate the fact that the pink ribbon is everywhere because in some ways it diminishes the reality while commercializing a terrible disease. Maybe women have become immune to the messages because there are so many.

As a 23-year survivor I have watched the evolution of the entire pink ribbon movement. When I was diagnosed there were no pink ribbons and no one talked about breast cancer. One elderly woman came up to me at church and whispered in my ear, "I had the operation too." I turned and said, "You had a mastectomy?" She almost ran the other way.

I was not ashamed of having had breast cancer, I was angry. And, like many women who came of age during the women's movement, I wasn't about to sit home and hide. I wanted action. I wanted a cure. And then my mother was diagnosed, and I realized my daughter may have inherited more from me than just blue eyes. Then I got angry. Not my daughter, I screamed at the universe.

I've heard more than one person attribute the success of the breast cancer movement to the women like myself who were diagnosed in the 1980s. We had just come through a period in history when we were learning how to make ourselves heard about a number of social issues. So when breast cancer showed up, we applied what we had learned to breast cancer. This included marketing professionals who understood that a product attached to a cause will get attention for the product as well as the cause.

And now we know that, when given a choice between two similar products, people will buy the one connected to a cause --- and Ta Da, a pink empire was born. What we have now are pink everything, many of which bring a promise of all or some of the purchase price going to breast cancer in some way. In many cases, these products and events do result in significant money going to the places we need them for early detection to save lives and research to look for a cure.

But with the pink ribbons comes a responsibility on the part of those who are pulled in by these promises. Check them out. Know where your money is going, and be sure it's what you think it is.

When someone says a percentage of profits goes to breast cancer research, find out what percentage, find out if it's capped at a certain amount, and find out exactly who will get the funds. Is the donation based on gross or net profit, which is a huge difference.

Read the fine print to determine if there are other things you have to do once the product is purchased for funds to be sent. Was it a come-on or was it legit? Do your research.

For example, I heard about a winery called [Cleavage Creek](#) that purported to donate funds to breast cancer. Checking it out online, I found that the owner had lost his wife to breast cancer and that breast cancer survivors are featured on the bottles – and he has donated funds toward helping create the Integrated Oncology Research Clinic at Bastyr University.

Now, instead of assuming he was telling the truth, I went to the web page for the university where it was confirmed. And I liked the fact that the clinic would be working in conjunction with the Hutch in Seattle to do clinical trials on complementary therapies.

It doesn't take much energy to check out where these pink-focused funds go to in these days with the Internet.

The same can be said for any nonprofit you are considering for a donation. There are a number of watch-dog organizations that evaluate nonprofits, such as www.charitynavigator.com

Now, in light of the apparent connection between alcohol and breast cancer, you may find you don't want to buy wine for the cause. Then don't. There are lots of other ways to contribute. Just do your homework first.