

**What Do You Stand For?**  
**Principles for Success in Cause Branding®**  
By Carol L. Cone, Founder and Chairman of Cone, Inc.

“What do you stand for?” is the resounding question being asked of companies around the globe by consumers, employees, business partners, and governments. In an age of corporate scandals, increased scrutiny by consumers and advocacy organizations, and increased competition globally, companies are evolving how they interact with society.

“Cause Branding” has emerged as a new marketing and philanthropy discipline that integrates social causes and commitments into a company’s brand equity and organizational identity to impact business and social objectives. Cause Branding has become an important and substantive public face for the overall corporate brand. Avon (through breast cancer), Timberland (through community service), and Target (through local K-12 education) have created new ways to make their brands relevant, build consumer loyalty, enhance their images, and impact social issues.

Companies today cannot afford to be anonymous benefactors or disengaged citizens. The majority of Americans (86%) say that when price and quality are equal, they will reward companies that support a cause with their business (2004 Cone Corporate Citizenship Study). Employees are also seeking employment at responsible companies; 81% say that a company’s commitment to a social issue is important in helping them decide where to work (2004 Cone Corporate Citizenship Study).

Cause Branding helps a company bring its values to life. Building upon its brand theme, “Every day is an opportunity to do more,” PNC Financial Services created *PNC Grow Up Great*, a ten-year, \$100 million commitment to early childhood education, that has become a call-to-action for the company. Through grants to Head Start centers, employee volunteering opportunities in Head Start programs, free educational toolkits for children and parents, a national public awareness campaign, and national advocacy initiatives to increase Federal funding for early childhood education, the company’s commitment to the well-being of young children is becoming a core part of its brand and culture.

Today, leaders in all sectors are challenged to develop and communicate cause programs that simultaneously meet business and community needs. To help executives infuse social issues into their brands and organizations, we have outlined five key principles for success:

- **Treat Cause Branding like other strategic business investments** - Put a formal planning process in place. Begin by setting clear business and social objectives for the program and identifying and prioritizing key audiences to reach and impact. Then determine criteria against which future program decisions will be made.
- **Commit to an issue first, then pick your partners** - Focusing first on an issue allows a company to set its own course around a cause that is relevant to its business objectives. Companies should then identify the strongest partners to add needed expertise and to direct service execution and communications to bring the program to life.
- **Engage your employees’ hearts and minds** - Successful programs are inspired by leadership from the Chief Executive and driven by action from employees throughout the company. The power of thousands of employees passionate about a shared cause has the potential to deeply energize and galvanize corporate culture. In addition, a

deep and long-term commitment to a cause can create brand evangelists with consumers, communities, and business partners.

- **Make your current assets work harder** - Whether it leverages employee expertise, technical knowledge, communications vehicles, sponsorships or products, each company has a myriad of resources that can be used strategically to support its issue, in conjunction with philanthropic grant making.
- **Earn the “accolades”, then communicate** - Cause programs should accomplish real societal goals before they are communicated. While 86% of Americans say they want to know what companies are doing to address social issues (2004 Cone Corporate Citizenship Study), critics are increasingly vocal and cynical. Supporters and critics alike are watching to ensure that companies walk their talk. Don't brag; let the program results and grassroots supporters tell your story first.

To answer the question “What do you stand for?” companies should take a strategic approach to developing cause programs that are credible, substantive, and relevant to their stakeholders. By using these five principles as an initial guide, Cause Branding can strengthen brands and make significant improvements to our society.

### ***About Cone***

Cone, LLC ([www.coneinc.com](http://www.coneinc.com)), based in Boston, is a brand strategy and communications agency engaged in building brand trust. Cone creates stakeholder loyalty and long-term relationships through the development and execution of Cause Branding<sup>®</sup>, Brand Marketing and Issues and Crisis Management initiatives. Cone is a member of the Omnicom Group. For further information on this study or to speak with Cone executives and other experts who can discuss the importance of corporate citizenship on companies' brand and reputation, please contact Kiva Starr at 617-939-8335 or [kstarr@coneinc.com](mailto:kstarr@coneinc.com).