

Two Amazing Women Help Dealerships Reach Women

A business case for cause-related marketing and stretching ad dollars

by **Gerry Myers**

Vicki LaRoe's duties as community relations director for Park Place Dealerships include attending Fort Worth's Cowtown Ball, the Northeast Tarrant County Heart Ball and the Crystal Charity Ball, one of Dallas' most prestigious annual charity events.

Under her guidance, Park Place has supported Big Brother-Big Sister events and hosted receptions for other nonprofit organizations at its dealerships. Park Place has also donated money to build batting cages at local parks and sponsored Little League teams.

But last year, the dealerships did something completely different.

"We created a signature event," said LaRoe. "Park Place Dealerships presented Step-Up-to-the-Plate at the Ballpark in Arlington, raising \$51,000 for Children's Medical Center of Dallas. The event included running the bases, an Iron Man obstacle course, a scavenger hunt, face painting and much more. Over a five-year period, we plan for this event to raise more than \$250,000."

Why does Park Place spend the time, energy and dollars it does supporting these programs? Park Place Dealerships owner Ken Schnitzer is very community-oriented and believes in giving back to the communities in which he does business.

The power of cause marketing

"For the luxury segment, building relationships is what it's all about," LaRoe said. "Sponsoring and hosting events is a terrific way to reach this market. We want to be involved with charities that are important to the community and to our customers."

While Schnitzer is philanthropic and devotes a substantial portion of his dealerships' overall marketing budget to community relations and cause marketing, he is also a businessman. Tracking results is a very important part of the equation.

"When we sponsor events, we enter the respondents' names in a database," LaRoe said. "We track who comes back in and if they buy."

Stretch your ad budget

Over 20 years, Dorthy Miller Shore, president of the Miller Agency, Dallas, has built a successful full-service automotive advertising agency. When asked what makes ads targeted to women successful, she has the answer.

"Knowing what not to do is as important as knowing what to do. For instance, women don't like hard sell 'screaming' advertising. Ads should feature a variety of people. The women should be attractive and professional, rather than young, cute and sexy," she said.

Television is the best medium for reaching women. When showing vehicle features, use a spokesperson having a warm, engaging personality. Women viewers will relate to the

commercial better if you do. Advertise features women find important, whether you're promoting buying, leasing or servicing a vehicle. Women bring in the majority of cars for service. They are also more loyal to dealerships than men are, especially after the warranty period.

Your service advertising should focus on:

- Convenience
- Value
- Service advisors who listen to and respect her
- Appointments that respect her time

Shore believes the advertisements her agency produces for its clients return outstanding results because of her agency's four-step process involving research, analysis, creation and execution.

"Our ads are targeted to the demographics of a client's best customer," Shore said. "We conduct and analyze research to determine what the ads should look and sound like. Then we develop an effective media buying strategy."

Tips for Reaching Women

1. Be sure your ads don't scream, patronize, insult or offend
2. Create ads that are sharper, less cluttered, and that have appealing graphics
3. Select your spokesperson carefully
4. Focus on value rather than price
5. Consider using e-mail to reach both male and female customers. It is very popular, simple to use and can accomplish a variety of goals, including sending thank you notes, service reminders, coupons and announcements.