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*Breast Cancer Awareness: Jumping on the Marketing Bandwagon?*

The month of October brings a lot of important and exciting events into our lives. There’s Halloween, Oktoberfest and midterms; more importantly, however, it’s also Breast Cancer Awareness month. During this month, people everywhere pay their respects and give donations to charities that endlessly search for a cure for this deadly disease. You can walk down an aisle of any local store and find items sporting the signature pink ribbon, symbolizing the fight against breast cancer. However, that little pink ribbon might also be a sneaky trap; with the rise in popularity of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, many companies stick pink ribbons on the packaging of their products in order to give themselves a marketing edge.

As horrible as it sounds, some companies really do take advantage of this memorial month to try to make an extra buck. They employ heavy use of pink wrapping, slap the cancer ribbon on labels, and use vague statements such as “a portion of your purchase is donated to breast cancer awareness” in order to sucker you into choosing their brand over others. The worst offenders will simply use the pink ribbon logo without any verbal explanation of what they are doing to help support breast cancer awareness. In reality, these companies may be donating extremely little-if any-money to breast cancer charities. This travesty hasn’t gone unnoticed by legitimate charity associations, either. Organizations such as the Susan G. Komen foundation are reaching out to caution consumers to look before they buy.

Companies who wish to be connected with legitimate breast cancer foundations must go through a lot of paperwork first. Therefore, it’s important to look for products who state the name of the charity that your money will be going to. Some big names to look out for are the Power in Pink campaign, the Susan G. Komen foundation, and the National Breast Cancer Foundation Inc. If the product endorses the name of a large organization like these, then it is actually giving a good sum of money to that organization (whether it’s a portion of your portion or, more popularly, a large lump sum). In addition, you should also search the packaging of your product for the amount the company plans to give. Even if it does not state the specific organization, a company will rarely promise a fixed amount of money to charity without actually delivering.

So, which companies are actually pulling their weight? If you walk through Publix, you can find plenty of legitimate ways to give to the cause. Dannon plans to donate 1.5 million dollars in total by giving 10 cents from each purchase of its yogurt cups to the National Breast Cancer Foundation. Buying products by Nature Valley, Yoplait, Pillsbury, Green Giant, or Progresso will also support the cause; their parent company, General Mills, has donated over 2 million dollars to Susan G. Komen as well. If you’re not much of a cook, you can donate through Tijuana Flats’ “Just in Queso” foundation. Hungry Howie’s, a Tallahassee favorite, is donating a portion of each pizza purchase to the National Breast Cancer Foundation (and you get a neat pink box, too!).

Other companies (who aren’t in the food business) are also doing their part to raise awareness of breast cancer. Under Armour has its own charity, called the Power in Pink campaign, which gives 2 dollars of every purchase to a variety of breast cancer charities. Proctor and Gamble, which specializes in many home products, has also teamed up with Susan G. Komen and has donated substantially to the cause.

While it’s great to see companies pitching in to help fight such a serious disease, you have to remember that even those that are legitimately donating to the cause are still thinking from a marketing standpoint. They know that, by attaching Breast Cancer Awareness logos to their products, consumers are much more likely to purchase their goods over other brands. Also, for most companies, the amount they donate pales in comparison to the revenue they bring in each year. Basically, they’re not as innocent as they seem; if breast cancer were not such a widespread problem, these companies wouldn’t be paying as much attention. Why don’t they have campaigns for other issues, such as finding a cure for Alzheimer’s or raising money for low-income school districts? The answer is simple: they probably wouldn’t see as large of an increase in sales with those less-publicized problems.

If you want to contribute to Breast Cancer Awareness month, the best piece of advice I can give you is to stay away from all the hype. You can give directly to the cause by visiting the National Breast Cancer Awareness Month website ([www.nbcam.org](http://www.nbcam.org)) or by donating to Susan G. Komen. Thet way, you know exactly where your money is going. It’s not being used to make more pink packaged products with ribbons stamped all over them; it’s going to women and their families who are struggling with breast cancer. While it’s great that Breast Cancer Awareness Month is so popular and widespread this year, just make sure you are careful and smart. Your help could save a life!