How Can Social Entrepreneurs Sell a Product While Promoting a Cause?

These 8 mission-driven founders share their expertise.

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We asked eight of the entrepreneurs featured on our 100 Powerful Women list: How do you strike a balance between selling a product and promoting a cause?

"Businesses throw away food all the time because it's the easiest thing to do. So we've created waste management software that gives businesses a way to understand what is being wasted and why. We've built predictive analytics to inform purchasing decisions. Our clients benefit from tax deductions, savings from reducing waste, and corporate social responsibility marketing and PR." — ***Komal Ahmad; Founder and CEO, Copia, which has recovered and distributed more than one million pounds of unused food***

"The product is the product — functional, cool, off-duty bags. The cause is our DNA. We will always fuel our philanthropic efforts, whether it's trendy or not, whether the topic is ugly or polarizing. We hope the balance of being a brand with a giant heart and the product to support it will compel our community to engage with us again and again." — ***Jacq Tatelman; Cofounder and creative director, State Bags, which has donated more than 100,000 fully stocked backpacks to***

kids in need across the U.S.

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“In the two years since launching our eco-friendly denim brand, we’ve sold half a million pairs of jeans and saved more than 580 million gallons of water. Now we want to be a zero-waste company by 2021. By giving our customers full transparency on these efforts, we hope to be held even more accountable. Our new website will track our zero-waste progress and share updates on exactly how the funds from our partnership with Charity: water are being distributed.” — ***Sarah Ahmed; Founder and CEO, Warp + Weft, a sustainable denim company***

“After a friend was diagnosed with skin cancer at age 29, I founded Supergoop! to create SPF products people would want to apply and reapply every single day. To strike a balance, we infuse education into all our consumer touchpoints. We recently opened our first pop-up, which featured an interactive learning center and Sun101 educational panels. Through our blog, *The Brightside,* we offer educational content from dermatologists and other experts and communicate our commitment to our Ounce By Ounce giving program, which provides free sunscreen to schools.” — ***Holly Thaggard; Founder, Supergoop!, a sunscreen and skin-care brand***

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“We would love to respond to every disaster and help every community, but we simply don’t have the infrastructure

to do that – yet. So we're balancing our desire to expand with our ability to deliver. We do our best work when we have local roots and expertise where we're operating. We match our customers with a 'homeowner concierge,' who understands the ins and outs of building in their community and works directly with the homeowner throughout the process." – ***Nikki Pechet; Cofounder and CEO, Homebound, which helps communities rebuild in the wake of natural disasters***

"When starting a social enterprise, people often think you need to launch a business and then add the philanthropic part. But it's the other way around. Identify an issue. Then identify a product that aligns with that cause. The sole purpose of selling conflict-free fine jewelry at MiaDonna is to fund our foundation, The Greener Diamond. Some people love the idea and cause; some don't. It's not about persuading. It's about finding people who align with your vision." – ***Anna-Mieke Anderson; Founder and CEO, MiaDonna, a lab-grown-diamond and jewelry company***

"Our goal at Bumble has always been to create a place where our users feel safe, and our community is not just digital – it also lives in the physical world. We live by our values, and we believe in holding users accountable for their actions both online and offline. This past year, we were proud to make an impact in our home state of Texas by successfully passing a state law that makes the sending of unsolicited lewd images online illegal." – ***Whitney Wolfe Her; Founder and CEO, Bumble, a dating and networking app***

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“I founded Inkwell when I noticed a brain drain of high-achieving moms exiting the workplace when they have children; we need more flexible work arrangements for companies to retain this talent. I worried about balancing a profit-driven business with my mission of supporting women’s issues, but the more profit we make and the more money our candidates earn, the better we are at bringing undertapped talent to the top and supporting the future of work.” — ***Manon DeFelice; Founder and CEO, Inkwell, which places high-level talent in flexible job opportunities***

Check out more stories from our October/November issue’s list of 100 Powerful Women.

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