

## The Case for Cause: Attracting the Best Millennial Generation Talent

How do you differentiate yourself on campus?

Given that a firm's commitment to a cause matters more to members of the millennial generation or "Gen Y" than any other, you're missing out on a valuable recruitment tool if you aren't talking about your firm's signature cause program with students and recent graduates.

Why? Members of Gen Y believe that as civic-minded and active participants in today's world, it is up to each of us to help make an enduring, positive impact. They are therefore more likely to choose to build their careers with firms that have a similar belief about our responsibility to improve our collective future. In fact:

- 87% of millennials say cause activity is important when they decide where to work.
- 83% want opportunities to offer their ideas and feedback on the company's cause-related efforts and programs.
- 84% want opportunities to donate money to a nonprofit that the company has identified.
- 81% want a chance to volunteer for the cause or issue.

In the corporate sector, companies have been using their charitable platforms as an integral part of attracting new talent for nearly a decade. A recent *Forbes* "Insight Report" surveyed top-level management at consumer, financial services, technology, energy, and healthcare companies and found that employers are heeding the message that employees — particularly those in Gen Y — care about their employer's commitment to the environment, volunteerism, and what they are doing for the local community. Seventy-two percent of the management leaders that weighed in on the *Forbes* survey reported that volunteerism and philanthropy had become critical in recruiting younger qualified employees.

So if millennials' passion for supporting causes has become a new barometer by which recent graduates measure their employment options, how can professional services firms yet heed the message and leverage how they give back to attract and retain talent?

The possibilities are endless, but Grant Thornton's Canadian operation offers one compelling example. Like other accounting and advisory firms, every year from September 1 to October 31, Grant Thornton visits dozens of campuses across Canada. Historically, the firm's campus marketing programs included distributing promotional items, such as pens with the firm's logo.

But in 2010, Grant Thornton took a different approach through a recruiting campaign called "Make a Difference." The firm said the campaign was developed as means to "better reflect the firm's culture and demonstrate their commitment to making a difference in the communities in which they work and live."

The firm took the funds typically spent on promotional items and redirected them to support a charity — a charity that students were asked to select by voting for one of three pre-screened nonprofit organizations at a special web page set up for the campaign at [www.grantthornton.ca/makeadifference](http://www.grantthornton.ca/makeadifference). While voting, students could also enter to win an iPad2.

To promote the campaign, the on campus team posted signage at each school and gave each student a postcard that read "Our gift to you — a chance to really make a difference," which contained a QR (quick response) code and a call-to-action to cast their vote online. The three participating charities also helped publicize the campaign through social media channels.

During most on campus seasons, the firm saw an approximate 135 percent lift in site traffic. In the first year of the Make a Difference campaign, the average number of site visitors jumped by an astonishing 742 percent over the previous eight months. Similar success was achieved in year two, with an increase of 163 percent over the previous four Octobers.

The lesson from Grant Thornton Canada's experience is simple: authentic cause initiatives foster stronger recruiting efforts among today's social conscious graduates, and a measurable overall brand lift in the market-at-large. Firms that integrate cause-related elements into their on-campus efforts have the potential to realize both true differentiation and competitive talent advantage.



[www.causewayonline.com](http://www.causewayonline.com)



[info@causewayonline.com](mailto:info@causewayonline.com)