

Size doesn't matter if a company wants to contribute

By Steve Fall
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Following Hurricane Katrina's devastation, Dominique Love of Corporate Community Outsourcing wanted to help. Undeterred by the size of her company, she sent an e-mail offering her parking lot as a drop point for goods.

"That e-mail was circulated so much that we ended up with a full-fledged drive where we filled a huge, 18-wheel tractor trailer and two 20-foot cargo vans," Love said.

"Had I stopped and said, 'I have a small business, and we really can't contribute,' we would have missed out," she added.

Although Love and other small businesses have found ways to make a big impact with limited resources, and are reaping the bottom-line business benefits in return, many others still haven't jumped on board when it comes to volunteerism and philanthropy.

"There's a notion that philanthropy excludes small businesses," said Love, whose two-person company specializes in philanthropic consulting and helps corporations make the most of their donations to the community.

Benevolink Corp. also maximizes limited resources by giving its 15 employees the option of using four workdays per year to volunteer, said CEO Tunstall Rushton. The entire company also volunteers as a group twice a year.

"What's true of every small business is lack of resources," said Rushton,



SPECIAL

Drop point: Volunteers collected massive amounts of goods for Hurricane Katrina victims in the parking lot at Corporate Community Outsourcing.

whose company helps consumers give to their favorite charities through the act of online shopping.

Edelman's Atlanta office also sees a value in donating human capital. The public relations firm offers each of its employees the opportunity to spend 40 hours a year on pro-bono work through its Edelman ACT (Atlanta Community Team) program.

Small businesses should be creative and not focus on just donating cash, which too often is in short supply, Love said.

"When you're designing a plan to get involved in the community, you have to look at what resources are available,"

she said. "Money is an obvious one. The second is in-kind support — supplies, tools and materials. You also look at your talents and intellectual capital."

Rushton said he believes corporate citizenship gives his company a competitive edge and helps the bottom line.

Love said the same principles that make philanthropy a smart move for large corporations apply to small companies. "It strengthens their brand, increases customer loyalty and creates a better environment for employees," she said.

In addition to a competitive edge, Rushton said Benevolink's volunteer program provides both visibility and credibility.

"It gives us a credibility that no other avenue can," he said. "It takes a small business and puts a big-business face on it. One of the biggest problems for every small business is credibility. You try to make a sale, and they've never heard of you. Having heard of you is crucial."

MetroPCS has found a way to help the community and boost sales. The company's Community Scholars Program, now in its fourth year, provides \$1,000 college scholarships each year to 12 high school seniors in metro Atlanta. Scholarship winners also receive a free cell phone and service.

"These kids are leaders in the schools, and influencers," said Mike Loverde, MetroPCS' director of advertising and public relations. "So, if they have our phones and they're hanging out with the cool kids, then the buzz of MetroPCS builds within that school and community."

Although goodwill is the No. 1 goal of the Community Scholars Program, Loverde said it also helps the company reach a key market.

Although Love knows she has seen results, she says quantifying the impact of her company's volunteerism and philanthropy still remains difficult. The Corporate Community Outsourcing Web site did experience increased traffic after the Katrina drive, but it often takes time to see a return on investment from community involvement, which may come in the form of recommendations, referrals and eventually business, she said.