

Media & Advertising

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Campaign Spotlight:

Giving Back, by Backpack

By [STUART ELLIOTT](#)

It has been many years since pupils and parents heard the clothing-store jingle that used to signal the beginning of the end of summer vacation: “School bells ring and children sing, ‘It’s back to Robert Hall again.’ ” Today, the resumption of classes is foreshadowed by campaigns for office-supply chains, seeking to sell notebooks, pens, staplers, markers, crayons and other back-to-school merchandise.

One of those chains, Staples, has added to its product pitches — most notably its annual one-cent deals — a cause-marketing campaign meant to help the millions of American schoolchildren who live in poverty. The campaign, now under way, encourages better-off students to donate 11 “most-needed” school supplies, which include index cards, No. 2 pencils, spiral notebooks and loose-leaf paper.

For the campaign, called Do Something 101, Staples is teaming up with Do Something, a national nonprofit organization aimed at cultivating community service among teenagers. Its [Web site](#) promotes itself as “using the power of online to get teens to do good stuff offline.”

This is the second year that Do Something and Staples have joined forces for Do Something 101 and the first year that Staples is supporting the campaign with an initiative centered in the social media.

The social media effort is being created by Mr. Youth, a social marketing agency in New York. Staples is devoting more than \$500,000 to the campaign between its charitable contribution to Do Something and its work with Mr. Youth; there will be additional spending to promote the campaign.

The social media aspects are centered on creating a virtual backpack to be sent to friends, who are to fill them with the 11 school supplies. There is an Adopt a Pack application on [Facebook](#) as well as a fan page on [facebook.com](#) for [Do Something 101](#).

“Do you know that more than 13 million kids just like you can’t afford even the most basic school supplies?” the text on the home page of the [Facebook](#) application asks. “Staples and [DoSomething.org](#) have teamed up to collect donations to help those kids in need across the country.”

Other elements include a sweepstakes to win a trip to New York to meet the singer Ciara and take part in a bag-stuffing event, which is being sponsored by Staples, and weekly Show Us Your Pack challenges for those on the Facebook fan page to do something in the real world like filling collection bins in Staples stores with donated school supplies.

Teenage bloggers and cause bloggers are being invited to write about the campaign. And banner ads on Web sites are also promoting the effort; the online ads are being bought by MediaCom Interaction, part of the MediaCom division of the GroupM unit of [WPP](#).

The campaign is emblematic of efforts by marketers to woo consumers by demonstrating they have altruistic interests along with their short-term business needs. Such cause-related campaigns are increasing as the recession continues, perhaps because the economy's woes have reminded the public that there may be more to life than accumulating possessions for oneself.

"We have millions of kids coming into the stores," says Don LeBlanc, senior vice president for retail marketing at Staples in Framingham, Mass. "We want to make them feel good about their trips."

In the second year of Do Something 101, he adds, the goal is to "turn it up a notch" by adding "a social media element we think will be very powerful."

The back-to-school shopping season "is one of our biggest times of the year," Mr. LeBlanc says, and "it's a bit of a two-step: We need the parent to drive the kid to the store and we need the kid to buy the stuff."

"As we've shifted focus more toward the student, with the high school student as the sweet spot, we've had to think a little more creatively about how to reach them," he adds. "It's not always a TV commercial for a circular."

That is where the social media come in, Mr. LeBlanc says, because the target audience is already on Facebook and "we want to be part of their conversation."

A major benefit is what he calls the "multiplicative power" of the Adopt a Pack application, in that "instead of 1 person making a donation, you could have 8, 10, 20."

Mr. Youth, which also handles social media assignments for brands like [Microsoft Xbox](#), Mountain Dew, [Nike](#) and Neutrogena, was added to the Staples agency roster in March.

The agency's purpose is to "figure out how to converse with people across social networks in an authentic way," says Doug Akin, managing partner for brand development at Mr. Youth, using tools like RepNation, a [Web site](#) where the so-called millennial generation can talk back to brands, share trends they spot and earn rewards.

For Staples, the idea is to create awareness for Do Something 101, Mr. Akin says, by "using a core group of teens to champion the cause" through harnessing the impulses behind activities on Facebook like "photo tagging," labeling who is in the photographs on the site that users share among themselves.

"It has a bit of a game component, a bit of entertainment value," he adds, which should assist in attracting the target audience.

Other agencies that work for Staple include McCann Erickson Worldwide in New York. McCann Erickson — part of the McCann Worldgroup division of the [Interpublic Group of Companies](#) — creates campaigns for Staples carrying the theme "That was easy" and featuring the big red "Easy" button.

Or, to mash up the campaigns, how about: "Do something. That was easy"?