

Raising The Bar

Genumark Promotional Merchandise (asi/204588) is a *Counselor* Top 40 Distributor, has been voted one of *Counselor*'s Best Places to Work, and was recently named PPPC's Canadian National Distributor of the Year. Want an extra accomplishment for this Toronto-based company? It's involved with more than 30 charity organizations annually.

CEO Mark Freed has learned over the years that community involvement is directly linked with business success.

"Cause marketing is a business platform that we have and advertising specialties play a very prominent role in that kind of stuff," he says. "So it's good for business, but more importantly, it really gives you an opportunity to give back."

Freed strives to set an example for the company's employees, its supplier and vendor partners and anyone else Genumark interacts with. "We want to show people that there are tons of opportunities to be charitable," he says.

Genumark has been involved with charity work for as long as Freed can remember. The effort began one year during the holidays when the company decided to raffle off the gift baskets employees received from suppliers and donate the money to The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. The tradition still holds true today, but benefits a different charity each year. "It's a fun thing to do at the end of the year and we usually combine it with our holiday party and secret Santa," says Freed. "We usually have 30 to 40 gift baskets and some are really quite extravagant, so it creates excitement throughout the office and the employees raise money that the company then matches to donate."

As the distributorship continues to grow, it's able to incorporate more charity work into its yearly budget. An organization that Genumark is heavily involved with (and one that strikes a personal chord with Freed) is the Baycrest Hospital. Genumark has been the marketing sponsor for the last five years for the Baycrest Hospital's Annual Golf Fundraiser, raising as much as \$500,000 for the tournament on an annual basis. The distributorship also provides prizes, giveaways and volunteer uniforms for the event.

"I got into that one because it's a great high-profile cause (each golfer has to raise \$2,500 to play) and it deals with stroke and Alzheimer's research, and my grandfather was affected by Alzheimer's, so it's meaningful," Freed says. "It's held at some of the best golf courses in Canada and I love to golf, so there are many reasons why we're involved with this."

The 2011 tournament is at Saint George's, where the Canadian Open was held, which gives this year's event extra prestige.

Freed also encourages employees to participate in national events each year, such as the CIBC Run for the Cure to benefit the Canadian Breast Care Foundation that they completed as a company last year. "There are tons of people who participate in the run and we had Team Genumark with about 40 employees, so it was a good showing," says Freed. "We've been doing a different charity for about five years now. It's a good way for employees to get involved with us, and if our employees have charities that they support,

the company can get involved with them, too."

This year, Genumark chose Becel's Ride for Heart to raise money for the Heart and Stroke Foundation, in which a major highway in Toronto is closed and participants bike to raise money. "I want the employees to get involved with other things besides work and to get out, get active and meet new people," Freed says.

On the extensive donation list are large foundations including Parkinson Society Canada, Children's Miracle Network, Jacob's Ladder, Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada, United Way and several natural disaster funds, including Haiti Relief.

"Some we donate money, some we do their prizes and some we volunteer time, so we're all over the map," Freed says. "With any of these major events, it's amazing how many ad specialties are used, so it's natural for what we do. We're planning to expand our social media platform to include our fundraising, making it available through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. You hope it goes a little viral, one thing leads to another and soon everybody's doing it."



Mark Freed, CEO of Canada's Genumark Promotional Merchandise, donates to over 30 charities annually.