

‘Makeovers’ a Growing Strategy in Corporate Charitable Giving

John Seelmeyer, 11/2/2009

The big-dollar makeover — a staple of reality TV — is finding its way into business charitable campaigns throughout the Truckee Meadows. **IQ Technology Solutions** and **Microsoft Licensing GP** just launched a campaign that will provide technology makeovers valued at \$15,000 to two nonprofits in the region.

DM Productions LLC of Reno/Phoenix drew national media attention for a program that will provide \$50,000 in services that could range from public relations to brand development for a nonprofit.

And **HSP Painting Co.** of Sparks won recognition from a national industry group for a charity makeover program that just completed its second year, bringing together a team of companies to support repainting of the Step 2 building in Reno. HSP’s makeover is worth \$10,000.

The overriding motivation, organizers say, is a desire to give back to the community in a meaningful way.

“For us, this is all about being a good corporate citizen,” says Chris Holder of Microsoft Licensing.

But organizers say the makeovers also generate some useful business contacts and build employee morale.



“It builds a stronger company, raises your standing in the community, and just plain feels good,” says Dianemarie Collins (left), communications director of DM Productions LLC (www.DMProductionsLLC.com).

And her husband, Doug Collins, the firm’s marketing director, says earlier pro-bono projects undertaken by DM Productions have exposed the company and its staff to the senior executives of private-sector companies who often serve on nonprofit boards.

In at least one case, he says those relationships have led directly to a contract for DM Productions.

Steve Cerocke, president of IQ Technology Solutions, says the IT Makeover launched by his company and Microsoft last year was an outgrowth of his desire to find a way that his company could put its expertise as well as its monetary donations to work in the community.

Selected nonprofits can put the \$15,000 in makeover funds to work to purchase Microsoft products and technical consulting as well as implementation and support services from IQ Technology Solutions.

The Friends of Academy for Career Education and the Crisis Call Center were selected from 56 applications for makeovers last year.

In fact, Cerocke say the most-daunting task organizers encountered last year was identifying two winning organizations. He put together a team of about 10 community members to help with the selection.

Adds Microsoft's Holder: "The thing that amazed us was the need in the community. The most difficult part was picking just two of the nominees."

It's helpful, Cerock says, that the Technology Makeover winners are selected on the basis of an essay that details the applicant's mission and spells out a clear use for the funds.

HSP Painting solves the selection problem by opening it to a community vote. The 1,200 votes on the company's Web site this year doubled the number from the first year, says owner PJ Guarino.

Nonprofits to benefit from the HSP makeover are suggested by the Sparks Chamber of Commerce. Company employees visit the nonprofits suggested by the chamber and winnow a list of finalists for the vote. "It's a lot of work," say Guarino.

Some work involves lining up sponsors who provide cash and materials to help with promotion and completion of the makeover.

Guarino says it's difficult to judge if the makeover has brought any business benefit to the company — partly because HSP, which is careful to track the source of every lead, doesn't tally the times that potential customers mention the makeover.

Collins says DM Productions, which has been involved in cause-related marketing for 15 years, expects a heavy outpouring of applications.

"Charities have been hit harder than the rest of the economy," he says. "It's a tough time for them."

Cerocke, meanwhile, notes that contributions to nonprofits have fallen even while the demand for their services has risen with the recession.

Month of Giving

The IT Makeover program co-sponsored by Microsoft Licensing is part of a month-long giving campaign that raised more than \$24,000 during October at the company's Reno office.

The campaign carried the theme "Give time, give money, give hope."

Events included a breakfast served by executives of the office, a poker tournament, an ice-cream eating contest, and a BINGO game (the name is a spin on Microsoft's new Bing search engine).

Chris Luce, a senior manager in the Reno office, says the events were organized by a team of thirty-six employees.