

## **For Immediate Release**

For an interview with Michael Houlihan, please contact Dottie DeHart, DeHart & Company Public Relations, at (828) 325-4966 or [Dottie@dehartandcompany.com](mailto:Dottie@dehartandcompany.com).

### **Branding the Barefoot Way: How Worthy Cause Marketing Can Help You Grow Your Company...at (Almost) No Cost**

*If you have a great product or service, a passion for giving back, and a tiny budget, guess what? You're the perfect candidate for worthy cause marketing. By partnering with the right nonprofits, small and medium-sized companies can gain instant access to loyal customers, give them a social reason to buy...and have a lot of fun in the process.*

**Forestville, CA** (August 2012)—So you're starting up a small business. Or maybe you're already established, but still in the exciting, nail-biting initial phases of your venture. Either way, congrats...and bring on the customers! What's that? No one seems to know about your fantastic product or service, and your shoestring budget (okay, *dental floss* budget might be more accurate!) won't support an ad campaign? Michael Houlihan and Bonnie Harvey invite you to pour yourself a glass of wine and discover a highly cost-effective way to get the word out: *worthy cause marketing*.

Houlihan and Harvey are the founders of Barefoot Cellars, the company that transformed the image of American wine from staid and unimaginative to fun, lighthearted, and hip—and they owe it all to this unconventional method of marketing.

“Most start-ups have little money to spare,” notes Houlihan, coauthor along with Harvey of *The Barefoot Spirit: How Hardship, Hustle, and Heart Built a Bestseller* (coming in February 2013 from Evolve Publishing, [www.barefootwinefounders.com](http://www.barefootwinefounders.com)). “And even if they do, traditional methods of advertising can be a huge drain on the budget. That's the problem we faced when we founded Barefoot Cellars in 1986. Frankly, we discovered the power of worthy cause marketing almost by accident, but once we did, our company really took off.”

Their book tells that story, among the many others woven into Barefoot's history. In a nutshell, Houlihan and Harvey spread the word about their wines by partnering with nonprofit organizations (NPOs) that believe in a common cause (or causes)—in their case, environmentalism and civil rights. In this way, they gained access to huge numbers of potential customers and gave them a “social reason” to buy Barefoot wine.

“Basically, we gave away wine at fundraising events, we worked festivals, we got out into the community and talked about causes we were passionate about and Barefoot wine in the same breath,” says Harvey. “It was very much a grassroots effort, and because we worked hard, had fun, and believed in what we were doing, it paid off.”

Indeed it did. Fueled by this inexpensive and highly effective style of marketing, Barefoot grew by leaps and bounds (to make a small pun) and soon made a name for itself as a top-quality wine sold at a reasonable price. In 2005 Barefoot Cellars was acquired by E&J Gallo Winery, which continues to proudly carry on the off-beat message of “the wine that didn’t take itself too seriously.”

Today, Houlihan speaks and gives seminars to audiences comprised of entrepreneurs and leaders of small and medium-sized businesses, teaching them how to follow the Barefoot method of worthy cause marketing. This topic is so popular that Cause Marketing Forum has asked him to present a webinar on Tuesday, August 21, 2012; click [www.causemarketingforum.com/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=bkLUKcOTLkK4E&b=6423029&ct=11929159](http://www.causemarketingforum.com/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=bkLUKcOTLkK4E&b=6423029&ct=11929159) for more information and registration details.

Here are some tips your company can follow to harness the power of worthy cause marketing to build your own brand:

**Find a worthy cause that resonates with you or your product.** In this context, a “cause” refers to what your company stands for *besides* the product you sell, and it’s usually something bigger than your company or even your industry. (It’s worth noting that even if you never articulate a particular cause, your customers can still gather a fair idea of what you do or don’t support based on your sourcing, manufacturing, and labor practices, as well as which other organizations you might support.)

“If possible, choose a cause that has something to do with your product,” recommends Houlihan. “For instance, could your company be linked with conservation, preservation, education, human rights? You could also choose a cause that doesn’t directly tie back to your product, but does reflect your personal core values. Barefoot Wine’s causes centered on local parks, civil rights, and environmentalism, which Bonnie and I had felt strongly about long before creating our company.

“It’s important to start by identifying a cause, *not* by choosing a nonprofit organization (NPO),” he adds. “An NPO can change its mission, while a cause will always remain the same. Plus, multiple NPOs might operate under the umbrella of one worthy cause. If conservation is your cause, you might be able to work with parks, fisheries, endangered species groups, air quality and clean water activists, and more. Why limit yourself?”

**Identify nonprofits that champion your cause.** Houlihan recommends starting with smaller, local groups. While they may be underfunded or less well-known than national and international behemoths, they might also be more appreciative and loyal, and they're unlikely to have multiple-thousand-dollar sponsorship fees.

"It's especially helpful to partner with an NPO that complements your product," he adds. "For example, if your company manufactures hammers, you might try to work with your local Habitat for Humanity organization. And the best part is, as your company and the NPO gain traction, your cause will also move forward."

**Start small and stay loyal.** Everybody has to begin somewhere. (Think about it: Even the world's largest and most well-known NPOs didn't start out that way!) Sometimes a small group with a big idea just needs time and hard work to get the word out. Your access to the distribution channel can provide your partner NPOs with the publicity they need to grow. And as you grow, they'll grow...and vice versa!

"At Barefoot Wine, we found that smaller NPOs really appreciated any help they could get—and they were concentrated in the local market where our product was being sold," Houlihan explains. "Plus, these groups tend to stay loyal to the organizations that supported them in their grassroots phases. Remember that many small NPOs eventually become national organizations with large memberships. And many groups that were marginalized in their grassroots stages go on to become mainstream."

**Donate products in exchange for recognition and brand visibility.** During its first years as a start-up, Barefoot Wine donated bottles of its product to its partner NPOs, and also helped to run and staff these organizations' events. Barefoot didn't have to spend much money out of pocket, but in return, it gained valuable public recognition, introduction to an expanding customer base, and brand visibility.

"Maybe you can't spend money on advertising, but you *can* spend time," points out Houlihan. "Ask NPOs for marketing help they can do at little to no cost, like thank-you announcements, newsletter and blog mentions, and site links. And whenever you help with an event, bring your signage, fliers, and lists of where to buy your products."

"When Barefoot Wine was starting out, Bonnie and I attended many events at which we were able to help the NPOs, talk up our product, *and* conduct market research by asking attendees how they felt about the wine world, where they bought their wine, and their impressions of Barefoot in particular," he adds.

**Ask NPOs for the right things.** As Houlihan has already suggested, ask your partner organization to mention your company in their publications and on their website. (Specifically, request that your company logo and recognition as a sponsor be included.) Other things to ask for include:

- Live appreciation from the podium at events
- Links to your company's webpage

- Complimentary passes, tickets, or seats to the NPO's event, which you can use as "thank-yous" to your local buyers
- Copies of formal announcements and invitations for your records (You might want to frame and display some of them!)
- Signage at their events
- A display table at their events for your company's handouts

"Before any events actually happen, it's always a good idea to go over 'the plan' with NPOs to make sure there are no misunderstandings and that everyone agrees on what is going to happen," adds Houlihan. "You should know beforehand how your product will be used; for instance, will it be consumed? Auctioned? Visible?"

**Shine a light on your partners' causes.** Worthy cause marketing is a two-way street. Do whatever is in your power to get their message out. Start by spotlighting their cause, the NPOs with which you work, and why you support them on your company's website, publications, and merchandising materials. In their work with partner NPOs, Barefoot actually sent their own local salespeople to help set up, serve, and clean up at events.

"You might even get the NPO's message out through your packaging, signage, social media, and distribution channels," suggests Houlihan. "Also consider helping the NPO raise funds through donation of products and promotion of fundraising events. For instance, in store displays you might provide information about the NPO, its goals, the products you donated, and details about upcoming events."

**Keep your retailers in the loop (and in your advertising!).** Tell your retailers about the local groups you support, and make sure to share the dates, times, and locations of their upcoming fundraisers. Also, include your retail locations at which your product can be found on any fliers or emails that you may distribute about events—and make sure the retailer knows about this free publicity! It may be a reason why they decide to bring in extra stock and promote your product.

"If you show the retailer's name on your where-to-buys, the retailer may make an extra effort to promote your product in their store," explains Houlihan. "Think special in-store displays, possibly even with a sign linking your product to your partner NPOs and their events! What a great opportunity for you to leverage your volume at retail.

"Also, don't forget to continue reaching out to *new* retailers," he adds. "When Barefoot Wine was starting out, Bonnie and I asked attendees at NPO events where they bought their wine. If a lot of people mentioned a particular store *and* confirmed that they enjoyed Barefoot and wanted to buy it, I'd go to that retailer and say, 'I just poured for 250 people, and a lot of them wanted to buy Barefoot at your store if you carried it.' Usually, the retailer was thrilled to order a few cases."

**Remember to have fun.** Worthy cause marketing is one of those activities in which sincerity and positivity really pay off. If you're just going through the motions in order to make money, it's less likely your partnership will last and that you'll get the results you want. But if you're

genuinely interested in promoting your cause as well as your product, you'll enjoy the work you're doing, and your NPO partners will notice and respond well to your enthusiasm.

“When you and your people are sincerely involved in a cause, you will be eager to do what you can to help, and you'll genuinely celebrate any and all achievements,” Houlihan promises. “It's fun to be part of something bigger than yourself or your product.”

That's the “heart” he and Harvey are referring to in the subtitle of their book, and they firmly believe it has made all the difference in Barefoot's success. Worthy cause marketing just carries a lot more emotional impact than making a charitable donation or writing a sponsorship check.

“Writing a check is great, don't get me wrong,” he says. “Big companies with big budgets can afford to do that, and many NPOs rely on these donations. But I believe there is no substitute for willing hands and hearts. Showing up and working demonstrates true commitment, and NPO members and supporters will see that and become apostles for your brand. You just can't buy that kind of loyalty.”

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**About the Authors:**

Michael Houlihan and Bonnie Harvey, authors of *The Barefoot Spirit: How Hardship, Hustle, and Heart Built a Bestseller*, started the Barefoot Wine brand in their laundry room in 1986, made it a nationwide bestseller, and successfully sold the brand to E&J Gallo in 2005. Starting with virtually no money and no wine industry experience, they employed innovative ideas to overcome obstacles and create new markets.

They were pioneers in what they termed “worthy cause marketing” and performance-based compensation. They held a comprehensive view of customer service, resulting in the National Hot Brand Award for outstanding sales growth in 2003 and 2004.

They now share their experience and innovative approach to business as consultants, authors, speakers, mentors, and workshop leaders. Their book, *The Barefoot Spirit*, chronicles the history and lessons learned building the popular Barefoot Wine brand.

To learn more, visit [www.barefootwinefounders.com](http://www.barefootwinefounders.com).