

# What Goes Around

Investing in community relationships is also a smart way to invest in your business.

BY YVETTE HYMEL AND RACHEL ZABALA



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One of the best investments a wearables distributor can make is investing time and resources into developing a strong relationship with her local community. Our distributorship, Proforma Key Solutions (*asi/490541*), had a golden opportunity to develop such a relationship with our community. That is, the community of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina – and we're glad to say, we embraced it.

When Hurricane Katrina hit, the business we both worked for was reduced to rubble, along with our neighboring businesses and much of New Orleans. Our boss moved her business out of town and we were left with a critical decision: Should we stay or should we go? When we looked at all the destruction and realized how important communication efforts would be in rebuilding the businesses and lives around us, we decided to stay and, with the help of Proforma, open our own business: Proforma Key Solutions.

In our first months as owners of a fledgling business in a devastated area, we began contacting the businesses staying in New Orleans to let them know we were there to help them with their graphic communications needs. We also saw a great need for a morale boost in the city. We tried to help by looking for a way to provide the volunteers who poured into our city with T-shirts, jackets, hats and other items of clothing so our residents could identify them.

We were soon asked to donate shirts to the University of New Orleans for volunteers, and we were only too glad to help. After our first donation, the idea

ing because the people of New Orleans are showing a fierce loyalty to our business and other businesses that stayed and helped them through the storm's aftermath. By providing wearables to the people who came together to rebuild our city, we helped boost morale and also boosted awareness about our business and our commitment to the community. The best part for us, however, isn't the benefit to our business, but the intrinsic reward of knowing that we helped our community get back on its feet in one of the toughest times in our history.

## Get started

Your wearables distributorship can benefit from building a strong relationship with the community. Recognition goes a long way in business, and being the business that provides much-needed help to the community builds credibility and will ultimately help your business grow. Community service is also newsworthy and can bring your business public relations opportunities in many local publications. The saying, "what goes around comes around," really is true. If you help enough people, you can't help but also help yourself.

The first step to building relationships in your community is finding a genuine need. Contact your local nonprofit organizations to learn what they do for the community and where they need your help. Often, the best way to become involved is to offer wearables as a donation or at a greatly reduced cost for the volunteers or employees of these nonprofit organizations. You should also keep an eye out for local fundraising events for a cause such as the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure.

You can become a sponsor by donating T-shirts for the participants or logoed jackets as prizes for the participants who raise the most for the cause. After you've completed the large jobs, suggest a nice bag or jacket as a way of thanking volunteers who participated in the event. People like to help the community come together – they certainly don't expect something in return, but would proudly wear something that commemorated the gift of their time. ■

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caught on, and we were soon providing a variety of wearables to all sorts of businesses, large and small, that handed them off to volunteer workers. And, we were developing new relationships at every turn.

The relationships we forged in that difficult time have become strong business relationships. We probably lost money at first because we stayed in New Orleans instead of relocating, but now we're benefit-