



Selling Your Message— From a Machine

Vending machine company gives shelters the opportunity to raise money and get attention

The Animal Rescue League of Iowa has something in its facility guaranteed to make your shelter's soda machine jealous: a vending machine that bears the ARL's logo, boasts eye-catching animal images, and features the ultimate accessory—an attached donation box. The machine became a fixture at the shelter last fall, after a company called All Brands Vending Resource asked the organization to give one of their new machines a test drive.

A conversation between the company's national sales manager, Bill Fankell, and his wife sparked the idea. The Iowa company had produced personalized equipment for the likes of General Motors and Ford, and Fankell was seeking new concepts: "Almost out of frustration, I said, 'What else could we put on vending machines?' and my wife ... [said], 'How about animals?'"

The couple envisioned placing animal-themed vending machines in animal shelters and in businesses willing to support the cause. Attached donation boxes would give customers, wallets in hand, an easy way to contribute to their local shelter.

Today, more than a dozen shelters take advantage of the program. To have a vending machine placed free of charge (and possibly receive 10 percent of the profits), an organization needs to have at least 25 staff members and volunteers. That way, the company can convince vending operators—those who own, operate, and stock the machines—of the profits to be made from purchasing a machine from All Brands

Vending and placing it in a shelter.

The company has also persuaded some shelters' current vending operators to make the switch to animal-friendly machines. If a vending operator isn't interested, All Brands Vending handles the transition to a new one.

Tom Colvin, executive director of the Des Moines shelter, appreciates the opportunity to adapt the machine to his liking. He can determine not only brand and product selection but also the look of the machine. Instead of seeing a brand name, vending machine customers see the ARL's logo and homeless pet images selected by the organization.

The machine earns the ARL \$50 a month through its donation box, and Colvin plans to position other machines in the community with the hope of raising money even from businesses unwilling or unable to make a straight donation. "Even if they [put a machine] in their employee break room ... that could generate a lot of money," he says, adding that people would be more likely to bypass regular vending machines to instead "feed a machine that looks like it's feeding animals."

When shelters provide names of businesses that have supported them in the past, All Brands Vending contacts those businesses to pitch the idea. When companies agree to house one of the vending machines, shelters are able to track sales online and receive the extra 10-percent cut through quarterly checks. For shelters that lack the staff to collect money from the machines' donation boxes, All Brands Vending arranges for the vending operators to take care of it.

When someone stops at one of those vending machines, his only thought may be of that cold drink he's about to enjoy. But as he walks away, his mind may be focused on the local shelter and the animals who need his help.

—Katina Antoniadis