Conklyn’s Florist, headquartered in Alexandria, Va., is a short drive from the White House, Congress and the Pentagon, but owner Paul Brockway, AAF, often eyes another seat of power: PTA presidents. Brockway began tailoring his cause marketing efforts to PTAs half a dozen years ago while his own children were in elementary school and he learned firsthand how hard some groups work to raise funds and how engaged parents can become in those efforts, with the right leadership.

Brockway’s program is simple: Charities, churches and PTAs – any nonprofit with a fundraising need – can sign up to participate in the florist’s Helping Friends program (modeled after the Helping Hands program at Beneva Florist in Sarasota, Fla.). Once the group is enrolled, customers reference the nonprofit when they place an order, verbally if they call or walk-in and via a scroll-down menu online. When they do, Conklyn’s donates $2 per order to the charitable group.

“We tell them, ‘we know you’re going to start your fundraising efforts very soon,’” Brockway said. “And then we say, ‘here’s something you can do that doesn’t cost you anything.’ If you can get into that very first PTA newsletter, you’re set.”

Brockway makes it easy for the groups to promote the partnership throughout the year — at meetings, on social media sites and in newsletters — with pre-printed cards and gentle, timely reminders; he’s been known to deliver a donation check right before a PTA meeting to encourage groups to step up their efforts. Some groups have stricter guidelines than others about promotions in meetings and group bulletins, so it’s helpful to understand those rules, too, said Brockway.

While Conklyn’s staff invests time in identifying the presidents and making initial contact, in the end, it’s up to the groups, not the florist, to promote the partnership. In recent years, one particularly active PTA raised a total of $600 (averaging $200 in the fall, winter and spring) through Conklyn’s program. When that happens, Brockway is more than happy to cut the check.

“They get a nice donation, and I get exposure to new customers,” he said. “Am I giving away $2 on some orders I would have gotten (without the PTA’s endorsement)? Probably. But if I do a direct mail piece, I’ll spend $3,000, whether I get an order or not. With this program, it doesn’t cost anything to try.”

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Business Builders
STOP THE PRESS RELEASES

> If you’re laboring over a press release about your shop’s latest good deed, you may be wasting time and energy on an outdated approach, according to Jeremy Porter, a digital communications strategist, who encourages business owners to post updates on in-house blogs rather than distribute releases.

The model, which has the potential to improve your rankings in online searches (search engine optimization or SEO) and reach a wider audience, is one that major corporations, including Google,

BLOGGING FOR PRESS
Central Square Florist blogs for good SEO and media pick-ups alike.

have already adopted, Porter explained on his website, Journalistics.com. The strategy shift also encourages reader comments and sharing, and it makes for a more interesting read and more flexibility: Instead of the same-old, same-old release, why not post a great photo of your team presenting the donation check, alongside a Q&A with the charity’s president?

“Blog posts stand a better chance to be read, provided you write them as stories,” Porter wrote. “When you share a link to a blog post with a journalist about your latest news, I predict you’ll get a much stronger response than if you send them a press release.”

Best Practices
GET TO KNOW YOUR CHARITIES

> Public meltdowns. Shady finances. Fat-cat salaries. These are words you don’t want to see when you partner with a nonprofit. Before you attach your hard-earned brand reputation to a charity’s name in a cause marketing effort, ask a few pointed questions, according to Charity Navigator, an independent agency that rates U.S. charities.

How will you spend my donation? Nonprofits have to invest in staff, buildings and supplies, but “the most efficient charities spend 75 percent or more of their budget on their programs and services and less than 25 percent on fundraising and administrative fees,” according to Charity Navigator. Larger groups generally spend a higher percentage on staff salaries and infrastructure. Look for detailed financial summaries online and in a group’s annual report or newsletter.

Can you tell me about some of your accomplishments? Ask representatives of the group to tell you a few recent success stories and to share some of the organization’s future goals. Involve your staff in these discussions so that they understand what the nonprofit is about and can communicate that message to customers when appropriate. Reputable groups will be able to quickly and clearly articulate who they are and what they stand for; if they can’t, that’s a red flag.

A final tip: Be wary of sound-alikes. Many groups have similar-sounding names, taglines and messages. As Charity Navigator reports, “How many of us could tell the difference between...the Children’s Charity Fund and the Children’s Defense Fund?” Their names sound the same, but their performances are vastly different.” (The group rated Children’s Charity Fund zero out of a possible five stars for factors such as transparency and financial accounting; the Children’s Defense Fund earned three out of five.)

Benchmark
DOES YOUR FLOWER SELECTION CUT IT FOR MOM?

> During Mother’s Day 2012, almost three quarters of consumers who bought floral items for mom chose fresh cut flowers, a percentage that has steadily increased since 2009. That’s almost twice as many as the next most popular floral gifts: bedding/garden plants (37 percent) and flowering houseplants (38 percent).

Consumers: If you bought flowers or plants for Mother’s Day, what did you buy?

SOURCE: Results based on an SAF-funded survey of 1,000 adult consumers, conducted by Iposos Public Affairs, 2012.