

The art of giving

Getting corporations to cough up money for cultural causes takes business finesse

by Lindajoy Fenley

Cultural organizations knocking on corporate doors aren't holding out tin cups for charity donations—they're offering opportunities to market products and services.

That's the message Alice Sachs Zimet, a pioneer in cultural affairs marketing, brought to Mexico during a series of U.S. Embassy-sponsored meetings earlier this year with business executives, government officials and cultural promoters. Before starting her cultural consulting business in 1999, Zimet worked for nearly two decades at The Chase Manhattan Bank where she "helped generate over US\$2 billion doing good work with wonderful arts organizations all around the world."

Backing up her claim that sponsorships build business, the former Chase vice president in charge of cultural affairs rattled off a list of accomplishments, including:

- US\$40 million worth of business thanks to a Chase-sponsored Martha Graham presentation in Paris which cost the company only \$40,000.
- A US\$1 billion increase in accounts under management for Chase's corporate finance and private bank following a series of concerts with Cecilia Bartoli, Tony Bennett, José Carreras, Plácido Domingo, Kiri Te Kanawa, Frederica von Stade and Dionne Warwick.
- The signing of a US\$80 million telecommunications deal in Japan after

co-sponsoring an American dance company tour with the Japanese government.

While Zimet was at Chase, the bank strengthened its relationships with high-end clients and government officials by entertaining them at special dinners with performers as well as inviting them and the general public to art and photography exhibits, music and dance performances and even circus events

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DOWN MEXICO WAY

Although Mexico's world of corporate cultural sponsorships is still in its infancy compared to how it has grown in the United States, Zimet

included one local example during her conferences here. She said Chase reaped a 30% increase in a major client account after co-sponsoring a José Carreras concert with Grupo Durango. The event launched a new Chase subsidiary in Mexico City. Maintaining corporate cultural sponsorships create win-win situations, according to Zimet.

When meeting with CEOs at U.S. Ambassador Jeffrey Davidow's residence and with public relations and marketing executives in the Rufino Tamayo Museum Auditorium, she explained why "doing good is good for business." Business can use the arts as an integral part of a corporation's communications mix and turn culture into a strategic marketing tool, she said. In a separate meeting at the museum, she gave cultural organizations tips on how to turn corporations into sponsors. She urged them to "talk business" by offering access to special audiences, community visibility, merchandise, good press and employee benefits.

When meeting with officials from Mexico's Culture and Arts National Council (Conaculta), she learned that the Mexican government is also looking to develop private-sector partnerships. At each meeting, she hammered home a basic precept she used at Chase: Money for corporate sponsorships of the arts comes from public relations or marketing budgets, not from funds earmarked for philanthropy or charity. For years,

▶ 10 ways that sponsorships help business

- 1) Create business-to-business relationships through co-sponsorship
- 2) Promote products and services
- 3) Enhance customer loyalty
- 4) Gain government access
- 5) Cultivate prospects
- 6) Get publicity for opening a new office or store
- 7) Penetrate a new market
- 8) Spotlight an executive
- 9) Acknowledge clients, referrals and sources
- 10) Gain access to hard-to-reach individuals (through entertainment and private events)

Zimet said, "brand building" or image enhancement was the primary motivation for sponsorships. But since a recession in the early 1980s, the focus has been bottom-line business objectives.

"Sponsorships are a communications tool, part of that bag of tricks you use to get your message across," she said. "They are much more targeted and much less expensive than advertising or public relations for reaching a specific audience." However, she added, "it's not an either-or (situation). You use both."

Christina King Miranda, a former Fulbright scholar who like Zimet wants to serve as a bridge between the business and arts communities, arranged Zimet's recent trip to Mexico as the first step toward improving the environment where corporations and cultural organizations work together. She said she wants to help create a committee for business and the arts in Mexico.

"That (business) people are ready is obvious," King said. However, she added, they are also wary and they do not necessarily want to apply the same approach used in the United States to corporate sponsorship in Mexico. Zimet agreed that Mexico is ripe for cultural sponsorship development.

But she noted, "I don't think the United States is better (at corporate giving), I think they've just done it longer. They have a longer tradition of corporate giving because our government gives so little."

Zimet pointed out that despite a huge disparity in wealth and population, both the U.S. and Mexican governments each give approximately US\$550 million per year to the arts.

CHIPPING IN

Although the Mexican government's cultural contribution is greater in relation to its total budget and population, resources could tighten. Cultural funding—whether from government, corporate or individual sources—is tight everywhere in the world, according to Zimet and King. Zimet, who earned two degrees in art history and worked in museums before entering the corporate world, left Chase after a corporate merger that led to the bank's refocusing its sponsorship program on sports rather than the arts. She claims she feels equal loyalty to business and cultural communities.

"I have a responsibility to help the art world learn how to better approach corporations for money and a respon-

sibility to corporations not to waste their money," she told *BUSINESS MEXICO*. "So often corporations give away money; they just don't leverage it enough."

While sponsorship decisions can be based on the heart, Zimet tells her business clients, they must use business acumen. They should expect any sponsorship to meet several of the following criteria: image enhancement, target audience, exclusivity, geography, franchise building, quality, line of business tie-ins, effort, employee impact, seasonality, appropriateness of the project and cost. In addition to consulting for businesses and cultural organizations, Zimet teaches at the University of Pennsylvania and at the U.S. State Department. Zimet, who lives in New York, can be reached at alice@alicesachsizmet.com.

Lindajoy Fenley, director of Dos Tradiciones, A.C., a non-profit organization that promotes traditional music and cultural exchange, has received corporate, government and individual support for her project including a 1998-99 grant from the U.S.-Mexico Fund for Culture and the Arts.