

Leveraging corporate philanthropy and community partnerships to maximize earned media

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ABSTRACT

Relationships between corporations and community-based not-for-profit organizations have evolved over the years from just donations and sponsorships, to integrated partnerships and collaborations known as strategic philanthropy. When details of these philanthropic relationships and activities are covered by traditional media or shared organically on social media, the coverage is known as earned media. Earned media has the potential to influence stakeholders' awareness, perceptions, and actions toward an organization because an organization's publics regard this coverage as highly credible and reliable. Effectively leveraging earned media provides an important benefit to both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. This article explores the literature, case studies, and interviews to understand earned media in terms of the philanthropic relationships and partnerships behind it, the methods and approaches that generate it, and its impact on corporations and not-for-profits.

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According to the literature review, and personal experience, relationships between corporations and community-based not-for-profit organizations have evolved over the years from just donations and sponsorships, to integrated partnerships and collaborations known as strategic philanthropy (Smith, 2013). It is increasingly more common for corporate entities to create relationships with charitable causes that hold a significant meaning to the corporation's stakeholders. These relationships benefit both corporations and not-for-profit organizations, by raising awareness of the community causes involved, improving corporate reputations and, long-term, impacting their bottom lines (Smith, 2013).

Sometimes, media notice these relationships and activities, and provide

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coverage about it, known as 'earned media.' An organization's publics regard this coverage as highly credible and reliable. As such, earned media has the potential to influence their audience's awareness, perceptions, and actions towards an organization. This article explores the relationship between corporate philanthropy and partnerships, and earned traditional media and social media, in a effort to understand how to leverage these relationships to maximize earned media.

Organizations work hard to inform media about their corporate philanthropy and partnerships in the hopes of earning media. Effective methods to attract media attention include profiling an individual or organization, highlighting innovative philanthropic partnerships, sharing heart-wrenching personal stories, and using celebrity appeal. Factors that increase the amount or type of media coverage relating to these activities are also related to aspects of content creation. Underwriting all content that successfully drives earned media, are rich, genuine messages, enhanced with multi-media aspects, that reflect an in-depth understanding of the audience and forges a deep connection with them. However, content that brings larger societal issues to the forefront and reflects an obvious tie to a charity can also be effective.

Examining several underlying factors related to relationships between corporations and not-for-profit organizations provides insight into why relationships can influence earned media. Some organizations develop philanthropic partnerships as part of their strategic focus, while others found partnerships because of personal connections or philanthropic passions. In the case of smaller not-for-profits though, resources and knowledge of public relations practices limit their ability to form and leverage these types of partnerships.

The impact of earned media associated with these relationships is not consistently, nor simply measured. These outcomes are impacted by earned media: increased audience awareness and recall that result in advocacy or other actions, elevated shaping of brand reputations and the relationships between an organization and its stakeholders, sales increases, and motivation for companies to adopt community partnering models. This article supports the use of best practices and experiences to leverage earned media with the objective of driving results for corporations, not-for-profits and the community.

Earned media

Earned media, aptly named and highly credible with audiences, cannot be bought or paid for – an organization must earn it. Communications pieces and information about an organization created outside of the organization and shared across channels they do not own, are known as earned media (Bao & Chang, 2014; and Stephen & Galak, 2012). When organizations strategically communicate the right messages to the right audiences through the right channels, they seed their potential for earned media. What happens with that content next and how it grows, while out of their control, can produce earned media with a lasting impact.

When an organization's communications evolve into new content published by sources and channels they do not own, publics perceive the information as highly credible. These perceptions, be they positive or negative, impact how audiences interact with and view causes, organizations and their messages (Kornfield, Smith, Szczypka, Vera & Emery, 2015). Understandably, earned media – news articles and online social media content including commenting, blogging, re-tweeting, sharing and more (Case Study -Whirled, 2008; Stephen & Galak, 2012) – is highly sought after. Traditional and social earned media are quite different entities, as are the approaches that work to earn coverage.

Traditional media includes television, radio, newspapers, magazines, periodicals and more (Broom & Sha, 2013). Some of these are mass media, while others have more specific audiences. The process to engage traditional media often includes successfully navigating past gatekeepers, charged with limiting the flow of information to the editor to only stories that meet their criteria. Traditional media relations approaches including news releases, press events, media advisories, and networking relationships are still commonly used, even by large organizations. However, with the ever-increasing presence of the internet and social web, traditional media are competing with online media and citizen journalists and the field has changed (Broom & Sha, 2011; Smith, 2013).

Social media includes all online channels where two-way communication can take place. Some of the more common social media channels are Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat (Newson & Haynes, 2014) and TikTok. News appearing on social media, can come from almost anywhere, and if it tells a good story it catches the audience's attention, even if it's not accurate (Broom & Sha, 2011). The speed with which social media moves information and news, combined with the audience penetration, can provide significant earned media coverage about a cause, organization, corporation

or individual. Tapping into earned social media and building a community of support however, does not come with a manual. Organizations, like those in the following examples, are spending significant resources to attract interest and earn coverage from both traditional and social media, albeit with different approaches.

Profiling an individual or organization impacted by a corporate-not-for-profit partnership can be leveraged into earned media. Large corporations like the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) use pitches and press releases to attract traditional media attention that earns media coverage (Willers, 2017). For example, RBC has communicated their past partnership with WE, “a movement that empowers people to change the world” (RBC, 2017), to traditional media by highlighting individual profiles of youth impacted by social situations that their high-profile partnership addressed. As relationships grow and change over time, for non-profit and corporate relationships to last there must be an ongoing mutually beneficial alignment in values, vision and actions. This is why, in 2020, RBC’s philanthropic relationship with the WE charity abruptly ended (Waldie, 2020). Organizations disassociated while WE restructured, ending their Canadian operations due to “disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the controversy surrounding a cancelled contract with the federal government to run a student volunteer program,” (Waldie, Kerr & Walsh 2020, para 2).

RBC’s “Canada 150 Program” featured stories of Canadian youth who have spent their \$150 stipend to improve their communities. This type of storytelling multimedia content generates both traditional and social earned media (Maloney, 2016). Similarly, when Purolator shares the impact of their community-based efforts resulting from their “Tackle Hunger” program, they receive more interest and earned media (Reistetter, 2017).

Highlighting innovative philanthropic partnership programs can attract earned media. The Village Mall’s “Books for Breakfast” program, that focused on local literacy issues in St. John’s, Newfoundland, is a good example. By collaborating with a local not-for-profit literacy organization, the program secured media sponsorship from print, radio and television outlets, which generated significant earned media and publicity. The program also brought traffic into the mall’s underused food court, raising awareness of the businesses there. As the literature references, items that get media attention, sometimes attract more media attention, and it held true in this case. The content, focused on the not-for-profit and community impact angles, resulted in earned media from additional media outlets that found the program newsworthy (Newton, 2017).

Sharing heart-wrenching personal stories of triumph over literacy challenges profiled during the “Road to Reading Festival,” held in Barrie, Ontario, were repeatedly sought after by local media. To capture traditional media attention, the organizers held a pre-event media launch, sent news releases focused on the cause and those impacted, and pitched media to go in-depth with the literacy issues in the community (Newton, 2017). These planned approaches resulted in earned traditional media stories that raised awareness of the literacy cause and its partnering supporters, making it an all-round public relations success. As it was a not-for-profit organization, the media were more receptive to their pitches and they received more earned media support than they may have as a corporation without such a partnership (Newton, 2017).

Enlisting celebrity support may enhance media interest and is well documented as a tactic appealing to both traditional and social media (Doorley & Garcia, 2011; Ly-Le, 2015; Panis & Van den Bulck, 2014; Smith, 2013). Gaining earned media is often a shared goal of both the celebrity and the organization, and the right celebrity endorsement or partnership works (Doorley & Garcia, 2011). Interestingly though, in Chinese campaigns, Hassid and Jeffreys (2015) found no correlation between earned media and use of celebrity endorsement.

Purolator used the celebrity angle to strengthen their traditional media pitches by aligning their “Tackle Hunger” program with Canadian Football League (CFL) celebrities. This strategic CFL pairing combined with Purolator further leveraging the partnership into unique customer experiences, has generated significant earned traditional and social media for them (Reistetter, 2017). Bell Media, also successfully uses celebrity figures, including Olympian Clara Hughes, as leads for their philanthropic campaign “Bell Let’s Talk” (Bell Aliant joins Bell Let’s Talk Campaign, 2011). As “Bell Let’s Talk” spokespeople they are willing to share their own personal mental health story – also leveraging the individual profile strategy. The award-winning, “Bell Let’s Talk” campaign is reputed to be one of the largest, and most successful corporate philanthropic campaign in Canada (Mental Health, 2011). When it comes to earned media, size matters.

Launching a large scale, multifaceted campaign can also make a difference in garnering media attention, as the “Tips from former smokers” campaign exemplified with its imagery and placement. Extensive traditional and social media were earned due to the campaign communication, adding to the impact of its health messaging (Kornfield et al., 2015). While the approaches reviewed may seem to indicate otherwise, there is no one proven approach to make media pay attention, and earned media is not easy to elicit.

Even with high profile partnerships, celebrity endorsements, and despite

the best efforts of corporations and organizations, earning traditional media is becoming progressively more difficult to accomplish. In part, this is a result of the ever-declining number of journalists and that the requirements of their media outlets may be stringent, requiring them to filter coverage to only formulaic news stories (Doorley & Garcia, 2011; Wallace, 2017). Communications that highlight corporate philanthropy initiatives or programs need to be newsworthy to effectively gain the attention of the media and their audiences (Smith, 2013). For causes and campaigns to be news focused, their communications must be founded in facts and feature issues or causes that are timely (Bao & Chang, 2014; Corrigan-Brown, 2016; Smith, Kromm & Klassen, 2010).

Traditional media are also attracted to stories and articles that appeal to human interest, deal with change or controversy, and have a unique appeal, unusual story or quirky approach (Darr, 2016; Newton, 2017; Redbrick, 2012; Scott, 2017; Ly-Le, 2015). There is significant evidence supporting the use of high-quality enticing or graphic visuals, dark or light humour, opinions or rally cries to effectively catch traditional media's attention (Bonk et al., 2008; Case Study - Whirled, 2008; Lawson, 2017).

While newsworthiness is a key, gaining coverage can also be a result of receiving other earned media coverage. When traditional media come across an engaging story on social media, they may pick up that story and begin to cover it. This scenario frequently also happens in reverse, where social media picks up on and develops a traditional media piece (Bo & Chang, 2014; Ly-Le, 2015; Momany & Alshboul, 2016; Scott, 2017).

After reviewing a variety of tactical approaches that have been shown to earn media, content creation is clearly integral to attracting attention of both traditional and social media. Given that each channel or audience requires a different content strategy, achieving success will require organizations to apply public relations skills and resources.

Content creation

Mastering the art of content creation is central to public relations, and practitioners need to be, or become, very strong writers (Broom & Sha, 2013; Newsom & Haynes, 2014). Be it traditional or social media, how effectively the content conveys a philanthropic program or campaign's connection to the real world and to real people, correlates to whether it will earn media courtesy

of the intended audiences, or not.

Knowing and understanding one's key audiences drives effective content creation, and is behind every well designed public relations program or campaign (Broom & Sha, 2013; Doorley & Garcia, 2011; Smith, 2013). When communications are designed to build relationships that benefit the stakeholder and the organization, they effectively "build community" (Broom & Sha, 2013). Corporate philanthropy and partnerships are also founded on community building, which makes for compelling, interesting, and socially stimulating content. According to Doorley and Garcia (2011), Reputation = Sum of Images = Performance + Behaviour + Communication. When an organization's performance, behaviour and communication earn media, it impacts their reputation and their value in the community. Creating content that resonates with the audience is the catalyst of earned media, and the research suggests several effective approaches.

Content that brings larger issues to the forefront in an engaging and interesting way is an angle that traditional media audiences are seeking (Smith, 2013). Social movements and their impact in the community make good news stories (Corrigall-Brown, 2016), however for increased success, organizations' media communications need to reflect their clear understanding of what news is (Tam, 2015). Sharing how an organization's philanthropic activities connect to larger community issues or exploring the organization's role in developing tangible solutions provide content that can result in more earned media (Newton, 2017; Reistetter, 2017; Willers, 2017). Purolator's "Tackle Hunger" program specifically identified their work against the backdrop of Canadian food bank statistics (2017):

Since its inception in 2003, Purolator Tackle Hunger (PTH) has helped deliver the equivalent of more than 10.5 million pounds of food to food banks across Canada. According to Food Banks Canada's 2016 Hunger-Count report, more than 850,000 Canadians, one third of whom are children, rely on food banks each month (p.1).

According to Willers (2017) content highlighting the "tangible solutions" their philanthropic partnership with WE delivered in Canada and around the world, was a reliable way to generate earned media.

Reflecting an obvious tie to a charity or not-for-profit in the content also influences the amount of earned media (Lawson, 2017; Newton, 2017). As the public relations consultant for a local car dealership, Lawson created high profile community events while partnering with not-for-profit organizations. The "hook" used in press releases and media pitches focused on highlighting

the charity supported through the partnership or program and were successful at earning traditional media (Lawson, 2017). Now, as a communicator for the United Way of Greater Simcoe (UWGS), Lawson confirms that content focused on the charity first and then the corporate partners, sent to media outlets from the UWGS staff, is highly effective at getting traditional media's attention and earning media.

Creating rich social media content can engage large audiences in the conversation and generate earned media along the way (Momany & Aoshboul, 2016). Well-produced videos and high quality pictures, along with resonant messages are needed to catch the interest of a social media audience (Kornfield et al., 2015; Lawson, 2017; Reistetter, 2017; Scott, 2017; Willers, 2017). Developing strategic content with these points in mind, organizations can become a news source via their owned social media channels, featuring well-written communication and multimedia pieces that are ideal for their audiences to connect with and share (Vincx, 2016).

Developing genuine content that forges deep audience connections and makes a personal tie relating to the "what's in it for me" sentiment drives increased earned social media (Willers, 2017). Evolving content to provide a "social value," an organization must really understand its online audience, and tailor messaging to the different social media channels it is using (Kilgour et al., 2015). Effective social media content must be genuine and have direct relevance to the audience to elicit engagement interaction and sharing, in turn generating earned social media (Reistetter, 2017). When a topic is popular on social media, it can spread quickly through the online community resulting in audience generated content (Stephen & Galak, 2012), so timeliness is also important (Reistetter, 2017). To be timely, quality content must be ready and available for publishing.

In meeting social media's demanding publishing needs, smaller not-for-profits sometimes repurpose their traditional media communications for use on social media channels. These organizations are typically under-resourced and may have minimal knowledge about social media (Lawson, 2017). Although re-purposed content is typically less effective at earning social media, in these cases, using re-purposed content was preferable to having no social media content at all (Lawson, 2017). Ideally, when working with existing content, the message must be revamped, refocused on audience needs, and "amplified" for social media effectiveness (Scott, 2017). Larger corporations typically have more resources to dedicate to developing social media content:

Evidence and experience show that content rooted in the relationships between corporations and not-for-profit organizations has the power to earn media. The relationships themselves then, must have unique, interesting, relevant and impactful features that can be highlighted through content. (Lawson, 2017).

Relationships and Their Influence on Earned Media

The connection between earned media and philanthropic partnerships or programs begins with the motivations behind corporate relationships with not-for-profits. Corporate philanthropy enables a corporation or organization embrace their roles as caring community partner – giving back and contributing to solving social issues – and it can strengthen their reputation in their community (Cho & Kelly, 2014; Hartnett, 2011; Liket & Maas, 2015; Tam, 2015). There are many relationship models that businesses choose to adopt including: corporate social responsibility, partnerships, sponsorships, cause marketing and donations (Barkay, 2013; Cho & Kelly, 2014; Clarke & Ayer, 2010; Suárez & Hwang, 2012; Willers, 2017).

According to Clarke and Ayer's (2010) Canada Survey of Business Contributions to the Community, of 1500 businesses surveyed, there are different reasons for supporting the community:

72% of large corporations contributed because healthy communities are good for business ; 51% of large businesses identified philanthropic reasons for giving; and 45% of all businesses said they gave because it is a good thing to do, regardless of the business benefits (p. 3).

These reasons underscore the importance of corporate partnerships, sponsorships and philanthropy as valuable components of an organizations' public relations strategy (Doorley & Garcia, 2011; Smith, 2013). When an organization reflects on its strategic goals and objectives, it may determine a gap exists between where they are now and where they would like to be in the future (Broom & Sha, 2013). Developing a public relations strategy, and taking into consideration stakeholders' perception of the organizations' actions and words, becomes a key part of the way forward (Broom & Sha, 2013; Doorley & Garcia, 2011).

Some corporations deliberately build community relationships around their strategic business focus (Smith, 2013). Aligning the corporation's core

business with social causes and issues is an essential starting point to building a strategic “win-win” relationship for both the corporation and the not-for-profit (Lawson, 2017; Reistetter, 2017; Willers, 2017). For example, RBC recently re-assessed its core values and restructured their “Corporate Citizenship Program,” determining that their focus had been too widely spread across five community need categories. Their community philanthropy is now focused on youth, aged 15-29, and their sponsorships, partnerships and community programs reflect and align with that focus.

Youth are the future of RBC’s business and supporting youth through corporate citizenship is also good for the community. RBC’s partnership with WE, a not-for-profit organization centred around children and youth of the world (Willers, 2017) is strategic. While no specific results were provided, Willers (2017) shared that RBC’s results tracked were by various paid measurement companies and showed that communications around the WE partnership had a “fantastic” earned social media performance. Clearly, this strategic relationship benefitted the community, RBC and WE.

Sometimes, though, well-planned strategic corporate partnerships that were intended to benefit the community can end up one-sided. One such community partnership initiative between Coca-Cola and a community in Israel, displayed a one-sided focus that left the community with negative perceptions of the company (Barkay, 2013). The project to build a local park and playground was driven by Coca-Cola’s objective to show the corporation’s involvement in their community. The focus on employee volunteerism in Coca-Cola’s communications overshadowed the actual needs of the partner community and local participating organizations. The earned media resulting was not the type of coverage that a corporation strives for through their community partnerships (Barkay, 2013).

Other corporate and not-for-profit relationships begin with a personal connection to a cause. In the case of Bell Media, mental health issues had personally affected their chief executive officer, who chose, as a result, to make mental health Bell Media’s philanthropic priority and launched a \$50 million-dollar multi-year project (Marlow & Picard, 2010). By focusing on one cause and leveraging their core business of telephone and web-based services, Bell Media continues to impact real change in Canadian communities, and their reputation is strengthened through earned media. In 2013, the “Bell Let’s Talk Day” campaign resulted in “more than 96 million long distance phone calls, texts, tweets and Facebook shares to help raise awareness for mental health” (Miller, 2013, para 2). Combined with their financial support of hundreds of mental health programs and organizations across Canada, “Bell Let’s Talk

Day”, has improved Bell Media’s reputation, while changing public perception of mental illness and its stigma (Ladurantaye, 2013). As much as a personal connection to a cause may evolve into a significant corporate philanthropic partnership, so can an altruistic passion.

Philanthropic passions can develop into collaborations, as Ben & Jerry’s unique and creative program, “Imagine Whirled Peace” showed. Clearly linked to their brand and their corporate objectives, the campaign generated significant earned media. Endorsed by John Lennon’s estate and advocating Peace One Day’s mission, the “Imagine Whirled Peace” program met the criteria of a well-planned strategic public relations program (Doorley & Garcia, 2011). Although it was their first endeavour into earned social media, and the tracked results in Case Study – Whirled (2008) proved its success:

Visitors to the microsite submitted more than 1,200 images pledging a passion for peace; nearly 70,000 people have clicked to view the individual images that make up the mosaic; and, the average time spent on the site is 5.5 minutes--an eternity in terms of advertising / marketing (p. 2).

With results like this, organizations that can strategically leverage corporate philanthropy stand to earn significant media coverage and build meaningful relationships with their stakeholders and audiences.

An ideal corporate partner for a not-for-profit is one with the resources to pursue earned media through their own communications channels. A significant number of small- and medium-sized not-for-profits do not have the resources to build strategic partnerships, let alone leverage relationships to earn media (Lawson, 2017; Newton, 2017). One such example is the Barrie Food Bank, and they partnered with The Faris Team, a medium-sized real estate business in Barrie, Ontario. The partnership was formed ten years ago, in response to a deep personal connection of the business owners to the community need for a food bank. The Faris Team recently provided media communications about a partnership event and was successfully able to attract four traditional media outlets to the Barrie Food Bank (Newton, 2017).

The communications content was created for the traditional media audience and highlighted on the relationship between The Faris Team and the Barrie Food Bank’s need for community donations and volunteers. While the resulting earned media is still being tracked, the event successfully generated a television (CTV Barrie, 2017) and an online daily news piece (Sgambati, 2017) within 24-hours of the event. Both articles raised awareness of the charity, and of the profile of the corporation’s caring community nature (Newton, 2017). Without the public relations support provided by The Faris Team, the Barrie

Food Bank would not have received this earned media.

Based on a recent blog post written by the author (Newton 2020), both the COVID-19 pandemic and the global resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement are shifting corporate attitudes towards partnerships and collaborations. These changes are so impactful that, “Even when they may return to the regular lines of business in the future, their cultures will remain inextricably tied to their role in helping the community [and standing up for social change],” (Newton, 2020, para 4).

With often limited resources and funding, non-profits are leveraging partnerships to move their causes forward. Spelling Bee of Canada (SBOC) focuses efforts each year on building relationships with partners and collaborating with community to raise awareness of their cause activities. Pivoting during the pandemic, SBOC moved to online delivery of their Spelling Bees and nurtured a broadcast partnership with CBC Sports. They also shifted to develop volunteer-led community programs like Yoga Bee and a Spell-a-Thon. The shared value of the importance of literacy and reading to the development of youth laid the foundation for lasting partnerships –both with the SBOC volunteers and the community event participants.

Many businesses adapting to operating during a COVID-19 pandemic, chose to dedicate part of their efforts on giving back to community. Often led by company founders, these decisions aligned with the core business and the philanthropic sentiment has become woven into the company fabric. One community outreach initiative was initiated by Arlinda Demiri, the CEO of Scholarly Elite Tutoring, an award-winning small business in Barrie, Ontario. Early in the Coronavirus pandemic Demiri identified that a large, even global, community of students and parents were suddenly in need. Demiri launched a community outreach initiative called FreeMathHelp.ca to provide academic support to the community during the school closures.

Investing in opportunities, partnerships and relationships that align with the corporations’ core values and bring meaning across stakeholder groups must be intentional decisions. While long-term, Scholarly Elite Tutoring may attract potential customers as a result their community FreeMathHelp.ca program, being a good corporate citizen was always at the heart of it.

Aligning a corporation authentically and purposefully with a social cause of movement is another area of Corporate Social Responsibility. In 2016, Ben and Jerry’s publicly profiled their solidarity with Black Lives Matter movement, using their platform to bring focus to the organization, the cause and the community impacts (Ben & Jerry’s, 2016). In 2020, with Black Lives Matter at the fore of the world’s focus, second only to the novel Coronavirus pan-

demically, Ben and Jerry's leveraged their owned media channels to give voice to the movement and their commitment to Dismantling white Supremacy (Ben & Jerry's, 2020). There was no drive to earn media behind their actions, however their corporate clout and strong messages got the attention of both media and their stakeholders.

While the philanthropic partnerships and alignments with social change movements described in this article all started under different circumstances, they have a community benefit at their core. That foundation drives earned media and can ultimately move audiences to care about their community and to get involved (Clarke & Ayer, 2010). For those organizations embracing philanthropic or activities within the corporate social responsibility framework, even small actions make a big difference when they are authentic and appropriately aligned with a moment, a movement or a cause.

Impact of Earned Media

Measuring the effectiveness of public relations programming before, during and after programs, to evaluate and facilitate future improvements is a tenet of effective public relations (Michaelson & Stacks; 2014; Smith, 2013; Tata & Prasad, 2015). Earned media delivers impact in a way that owned, shared, and paid media cannot. This outcome is important to the success of most, if not all, corporate philanthropic partnerships and relationships (Lawson, 2017; Newton, 2017; Smith, 2013; Vincx, 2016). A variety of organizational outcomes related to strategic objectives and goals are influenced by earned media, but measuring these outcomes is neither straightforward nor consistently done by corporations and not-for-profits.

The difficulty organizations have in measuring the impact of earned media, was evident in the research, and more research needs to be completed in this area (Liket & Maas, 2015). During personal interviews, both Willers (2017) and Reistetter (2017) stated that their companies struggled with valid measurement of their efforts. RBC and Purolator each employ several private companies to measure their campaigns effectiveness through earned traditional and social media (Reistetter, 2017; Willers, 2017).

Earned media coverage influences audience awareness and recall, resulting in advocacy or other actions (Corrigall-Brown, 2016; Jeong, 2011; Tam, 2015). Corrigall-Brown (2016, pp. 72), found that "media attention can enable organizations to mobilize public support for a specific action in the short

term and bring new supporters into the fold, strengthening the movement's base and increasing its capacity for future action." This holds true, according to Peter Sundborg (2017) of the Barrie Food Bank, as several things happen when they earn media. Awareness of the Barrie Food Bank's mission "No One Should Go Hungry", increases for both donors and clients, and that results in an increased number of donations and food bank clients. As a result of the earned media clients have either just learned about the food bank, or have finally come to terms with their need for the food bank's support (Sundborg, 2017). Sundborg's awareness of the impact of earned media is not representative of most not-for-profits. Lawson (2017) experienced that not-for-profit organizations did not measure earned media nor its impact and expressed interest in finding a low-cost simple way to measure these results.

Brand reputations and the relationships between an organization and its stakeholders are elevated and shaped by earned media (Doorley & Garcia, 2011; Jeong, 2011; Lawson, 2017; Reistetter, 2017; Tata & Prasad, 2015). For example, Oxford Learning Barrie, partnered with the Spelling Bee of Canada on a Regional Spelling Bee. Through their generous financial contribution, enhanced with employee volunteerism and in-kind donations, Oxford Learning's partnership provided leverage for the not-for-profit to earn media. As a result, both partners strengthened their relationships with the local media, schools, spelling bee participants and their families, other event sponsors, and their existing customers, staff and volunteers (Newton, 2017).

In addition to these important reputational impacts, sales increases can be attributed to earned media as discussed in the literature (Bao & Chang, 2014; Burger, 2017; Matthews, 2017). Another impact observed when organizations receive earned media around their corporate philanthropy and partnerships, is that other companies are motivated to try community partnering themselves. (Du, X., Pei, H., Du, Y., & Zeng, Q., 2016). When there are clear correlations to business strategy and meeting corporate objectives, a corporate strategy around philanthropic partnership is easier to embrace. That more evaluation and measurement of earned media related to philanthropic activities is not taking place, may be limiting potential partnerships everywhere.

Conclusion

With organizations moving towards corporate philanthropic partnerships and relationships, understanding how to influence their audiences is

important to earned media success. While it cannot be controlled, earned media is a critical communication component, that can be leveraged with the right approach. Organizations are using specific tactics to get the attention of both traditional and social media, and it is working. Audiences are embracing this content, the cause and the organizations, as the good work they do gets profiled through earned media. There are many reasons and countless opportunities for corporations to partner with not-for-profits, but as a public relations strategy, corporate philanthropy can yield earned media that builds relationships and drives results.

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