

We were impressed with Aveda's environmentally sound practices and their commitment to set an example for environmental leadership and accountability. We also noted their dedication to fair labour practices and fair treatment of indigenous people. We concluded that Aveda is not focused solely on the manufacturing of products and services, but is a company that has taken deliberate steps in the way they do business to be socially and environmentally accountable. They are not throwing money at us to compensate for bad behaviour. They are not greenwashing, or riding the 'all-natural, some of the time' wave. We are convinced from our due diligence that Aveda, from its founder, strives to integrate socially and environmentally responsible practices into many parts of the value chain.

What about other corporate partners?

We don't typically have a line of corporations knocking on our door but we did repeat this process again in 2007. In this case, we agreed that because of human rights-related issues, we could not engage. And the guidelines are irrelevant when it comes to certain industries that we simply rule out completely – extractives, agro-business, timber, etc.

A good fit

The link with Aveda has enabled Greengrants to attract new enthusiasts and revenue to the environmental movement in Europe by opening untapped channels: Aveda salons and spas. Because we are both a grantmaking adviser and an intermediary for Aveda, we'd like to think we've helped them to improve the quality of their grantmaking – with less going on projects and more on resource mobilization and empowerment in the communities they support.

On the surface, Greengrants and Aveda are unlikely collaborators – a beauty company and a grassroots environmental grantmaker. But as we got to know Aveda, we found we were two organizations striving for the same goal – a more just world. We see them as an example to other companies because they prove that businesses can adopt legitimate and fair practices and remain profitable.

Last year, Aveda raised approximately \$700,000 for Greengrants through candle sales and customer donations from salons and spas. This translated into 186 projects in 15 countries such as India, Brazil and Bulgaria – communities where we make grants, and where they source plants and flowers. In 2008, Aveda continues to focus on clean water and we continue as its global partner.

To partner or not to partner

A bad economy, the growth of non-profits, and the unequal distribution of wealth have together generated a fiercely competitive marketplace for raising money. It's tempting for any organization to be seduced by corporate money to meet annual fundraising goals.

Being able to make a clear-headed assessment is critical. We are satisfied with the decision to partner with Aveda – they are not buying a green reputation by donating to us. Rather, from the company's inception it got its business practices right, and as part of that they support Greengrants. @

For more information www.greengrants.org

Comment

Kavita Ramdas



Kelly Purdy and Marcie Smith give us a great example of how social benefit organizations (more commonly referred to as non-profits) and corporate actors can develop respectful and mutually rewarding partnerships. By making clear the values and philosophy underlying both organizations and by doing the same due diligence on a 'potential corporate partner' as it might do before

deciding to award a grant, Global Greengrants seems to have found a way to build an effective partnership with Aveda that achieves the shared goal of a 'juster and greener planet'.

One area that remains unclear has to do with the parent company, Estée Lauder. The authors mention that GGF sought to explore whether Estée Lauder's corporate policies would override Aveda's more socially and environmentally responsible principles, but they don't tell us what they learned or how the smaller Aveda has or has not been able to 'influence' the behaviour of its 'parent company'. That might give us insights into using strategic partnerships to more broadly shape the 'sector' as a whole, be it the cosmetic industry or any other.

At the Global Fund for Women it comes naturally to us to focus a 'gender lens' on the industry in question. Beauty products are routinely sold using certain 'images or representations' of women, often bordering on the offensive, or infantilizing women, or grossly over-sexualized. We might ask if we can find ways to be mindful of what messages are being subtly or overtly conveyed about the role and position of women, regardless of how environmentally 'green' the actual products are.

Lastly, I thought more broadly about the underlying assumptions we make in modern industrialized and globalized societies about our consumption patterns. What is our responsibility as 'social benefit actors' to challenge ourselves and our peers in our partnerships with companies about the messages we send when we say 'Buy this candle' or 'buy a "red" product' or a 'special bracelet' about the overall level of consumption in societies that already produce, consume and discard far too much 'stuff'. Too few of us are inclined to focus on the 'reduce' part of the famous slogan, 'reduce, reuse and recycle'.

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