

Warning: Think before you pink

By Jessica Fargen | Sunday, October 4, 2009 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Local Coverage

As tens of thousands of marchers take to Hub streets today to raise money for breast cancer research, advocates are warning big-hearted consumers that popular pink-ribbon purchases may contribute more to corporate marketing than to the fight against the disease.

"It must be really good for business because so many businesses are picking up on the pink ribbon thing - which is making money, but not making a huge difference in the breast cancer world," said Kasha Ho, program director of California-based Breast Cancer Action, which operates the watchdog site thinkbeforeyoupink.org.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month is marked today by the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walk, which raises money for the American Cancer Society, and by pink-ribboned products flooding the market.

"A lot of these pink promotion products make you jump through certain hoops or the amount of the donation is very little," said Ho, who advises buyers to investigate before buying a pink product. For example:

- A national frozen-food company used to market its meals with pink ribbons, but no money from the purchase went to breast cancer research, Ho said. Customers had to visit the company Web site and buy a pink lunch tote. The company then donated \$5 to Komen.
- For every Yoplait Yogurt lid mailed in before Dec. 31, Yoplait donates 10 cents to Susan G. Komen For the Cure. Ho pointed out if you sent three lids a day for four months, your donation would be only \$36. However, the cumulative effect is impressive, a Yoplait spokeswoman said: During the past 11 years, the company has donated more than \$22 million to breast cancer causes.
- Similarly, through Cook for the Cure, KitchenAid donates 10 percent of sales of its pink product line, which can be as little as \$5 per item. A KitchenAid spokeswoman said the promotion has generated \$8 million in donations from KitchenAid to Komen.

"The public wants to help," said Margo Golden of Boston, who has breast cancer and is president of the board of directors of the Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition. "I'm grateful they want to help, but they are almost being taken advantage of."

Experts suggest donating directly to cancer research organizations rather than through corporations.

"If you want to make a donation, choose your favorite breast cancer organization and it might be more effective," Ho said.

Deborah Shields, executive director of the Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition, said she is "truly astounded" each October at the explosion of pink products. She warned customers to be aware of marketing, but acknowledged that the cause can benefit from more publicity.

"What's good is it brings awareness and attention to the disease - but on the other hand there are ways to do it without pink ribbons everywhere," she said.

There will be an estimated 192,000 new cases of invasive breast cancer diagnosed this year in the United States, and about 40,170 deaths from the disease, according to the National Cancer Institute.

Buying in to the cause

Pink KitchenAid Artisan Series Stand Mixer

COST: \$349, suggested retail

CAMPAIGN: Cook for the Cure

WHERE IT GOES: \$50 donation to Susan G. Komen for the Cure. For all other pink KitchenAid products, 10 percent of the purchase price goes to Susan G. Komen, according to a KitchenAid spokeswoman. You must register the purchase online for the organization to get the money. KitchenAid donates a minimum of \$500,000, with no cap on donations.



Photo by Patrick Whittemore

New Balance pink anniversary 993 running shoe

COST: Suggested retail, \$140

CAMPAIGN: Lace up for the Cure

WHERE THE MONEY GOES: Fifteen percent of the wholesale cost of any shoes in the collection goes to Susan G. Komen. The company would not reveal wholesale prices, only saying that donations range from \$4 to \$11 per shoe. New Balance donates a minimum of \$500,000 and up to \$1 million a year.

Yoplait Yogurt

COST: 60 cents (approximate)

CAMPAIGN: Save Lids to Save Lives

HOW IT WORKS: For every yogurt lid you send before Dec. 31, Yoplait donates 10 cents to Susan G. Komen. Yoplait donates a minimum of \$500,000 and up to \$1.5 million.

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