

The packaging of another product, **Herr's** Whole Grain Pretzel Ribbons, proclaims that a portion of its sales will be donated to breast cancer awareness and research programs. But there's an asterisk accompanying that statement, which leads to a caveat that Herr's caps its donation at \$15,000. A spokeswoman for Herr's didn't immediately return our call seeking a comment.

Capping donations is a particularly prevalent practice among corporations, and it's one that consumers should watch for. According to Samantha King, the author of **Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy**, "Consumers could be buying a product, and if the maximum has been reached, their product purchase doesn't help."

Do you think companies are exploiting breast cancer awareness month by selling pink products?

Yes 22685
(92.8%)

No 1764
(7.2%)

Part of the confusion about how a pink-ribbon purchase may support the cause can be tied to the fact that no one owns the image or oversees its use, says Brenner of Breast Cancer Action. And because of that, it's difficult to say how much has been raised to help breast-cancer charities, although it's likely in the tens of millions of dollars, King adds.

Of course, some argue that it doesn't matter how the money is raised as long as funds are being donated to help fight the disease. Breast-cancer patient Jeanne Sather, who writes the blog **The Assertive Cancer Patient**, disagrees.

"Breast cancer is a disease. Not a marketing opportunity," she wrote in an emailed response to *Daily Finance's* questions. "It also matters that the companies, with a few exceptions, are not donating their own money, they are just passing on their customers' money. Then they are making a profit on top of that --larger than the donation in many if not most cases--and patting themselves on the backs for being good citizens. This is wrong."

Yet that hasn't stopped corporations from thinking pink. And there's a pretty big reason why that's the case. According to a **Boston Globe article about criticism of pink-branded products**, research has shown that 79% of consumers would likely be swayed to switch to a brand aligned with a cause.

Hershey Co. (**HSY**), for one, says it's both a way to be competitive and support its philanthropic initiatives. The chocolate maker recently began selling a line of Bliss chocolates with pink packaging, which states that the candy maker will donate \$300,000 this year in support of the **Young Survivors Coalition**.

"We see it not only as a competitive business strategy, but one that fits in with our corporate values," says Hershey spokeswoman Jody Cook. "We know the pink ribbon resonates well with our customer, and our main target for the Bliss brand is women and mothers, so it's a perfect fit."

Still, a purchase of Bliss chocolates won't result in a part of the sale going in support of the charity. Cook says Hershey's donation isn't tied to sales of the chocolates, and that the company is clear on its packaging about its donation. Since it's the first year Bliss products have incorporated pink-ribbon branding, the company has yet to determine how the campaign will affect sales of the chocolates, she says.

Yet while pink corporate campaigns have undoubtedly raised millions for breast cancer research and charities, the sheer number of pink-ribboned products makes cancer patients such as Sather feel exploited. Last year, Sather says, she switched grocery stores to Whole Foods (**WFMI**) simply because it didn't have "lots of pink schlock."

If consumers really want to help fight cancer, they should consider directly giving money to organizations such as **Gilda's Club**, **Team Survivor** or Breast Cancer Action, Sather says. Or offer to help a cancer patient personally, such as doing her grocery shopping, she adds.

Despite concerns raised by advocates, it's unclear when the tide of pink-labeled products will slow down. That's because buying pink may just be too simple for many consumers to resist. As Brenner of Breast Cancer Action says, "People have come to believe that if they just do what they're told by corporate America, whether buying a product or doing a walk, they'll solve the breast cancer problem and not have to think about it."

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