

**Cause Marketing Partnership:  
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and Dick's Sporting Goods**

**The Corporation**

- Dick's Sporting Goods was founded in **1948 in Binghamton, New York**. With approximately 240 stores, Dick's is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest sporting goods retailer in the nation.
- The company has **no organized philanthropy**, despite the fact that they have plenty of resources.
  - Dick's has up to **two and a half million dollars** "available" for investment in the social sector.
  - The company also has **10,000 employees spread across 33 states**.

**The Partner**

- Founded in 1986, the **Rails-to-Trails Conservancy** is a non-profit organization dedicated to converting abandoned rails lines into a nationwide network of trails.
  - RTC has more than **100,000 members**,
  - and has helped create more than **12,000 miles of trails** in all 50 states

**The Cause**

- RTC is working for an important cause.
  - Rail trails help preserve **green space** and add to the region's **recreation resources**.
  - Trails also bring **health and fitness** to the region in a manner that is accessible to a broad range of ordinary people.

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**Partner Evaluation**

- Looking at [Slide 2], one reason the **two potential partners are a good fit** is because they will help each other **meet their core needs**.
  - First of all, assisting in the creation of rail trails **improves Dick's competitive context**.
    - Rail trails benefit Dick's **factor conditions**
      - by raising the **relevant experience of the local labor pool** to the products the company will be selling.
    - Support of rail trails will also benefit Dick's **demand conditions**
      - by increasing the **sophistication** and loyalty of local consumers
      - and by **increasing demand** for the recreation equipment that Dick's sells.
    - Finally, rail trails creates favorable **related and supporting industries**.
      - Increased **health and athleticism** leads to a greater demand for **health clubs, gyms, and recreation centers**, which in turn increases the demand for the products Dick's provides.
  - Secondly, "good works" enhance a **company's reputation** and therefore its future sales.

- According to the 2002 survey, 84% of Americans feel a company’s “**commitment to social issues are important**” when deciding which companies to do business with.
- On the other side, a corporate partnership would give RTC the resources necessary to **expand its offerings to local partner organizations**.
  - RTC would now be able to provide **money** to purchase land and pay for its conversion to trail,
  - as well as **manpower** to do some of the heavy lifting.
- A partnership will also increase RTC’s **visibility**, there by expanding future opportunities for the organization to do “good.”
- The two potential partners are also a good fit because they share a **mutuality of interest**.
  - Looking at [Slide 3] we can see that rail trails **promote the use of products** from 4 of the 6 core aspects of Dick’s stores: Fishing, Fitness, Footwear and Apparel.
  - [Slide 4] demonstrates that there is a **shared locality** among the partners as well.
    - Both Dick’s and RTC are organizations that have their **roots in the rustbelt**, and are slowly expanding their organizations nationwide.
    - It is worth noting that a majority of potential rail-to-trail **opportunities lie east of the Mississippi River**, which is where 90% of RTC staff and 90% of Dick’s stores are located.

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### Nature of the Partnership 31:45

- Looking at [Slide 5], each partner will **bring its own strengths** to the project.
  - In the terms of resources, RTC’s contributions will be largely **administrative**
    - in the form of **staff**, their **experience** coordinating conversion projects, and their large amount of **technical expertise** in trail renovation.
  - The RTC will also bring to the table their **extensive contacts** with local rail trail organizations.
  - Key components of the partnership from Dick’s point of view include
    - **Customer Involvement**.
      - Dick’s will provide customers with the opportunity to **donate** to the “TrailBank,” either through collection bins at registers or by the ability to round their purchases to include a contribution.
    - Dick’s will also solicit **Employee and Vendor Involvement**
      - by promoting **their participation** in trail conversion campaigns,
      - and by **matching employee contributions** to the “TrailBank.”
    - Finally, Dick’s will bring to the table their **Corporate Philanthropy**
      - by **guaranteeing donations** of at least \$25,000 a week to the “TrailBank.”
      - For weeks where donations do not meet or exceed that goal, Dick’s will contribute the difference from its corporate giving budget.

### Communications Strategy

- Both Dick’s and RTC recognize that their **core audience** is comprised of enthusiasts.
  - A communications strategy focused on enthusiasts is very easy to plan and execute, because all **desired behavior change is simple**, low cost and low involvement.
- Looking at [Slide 6], I have broken down the marketing approach into three distinct phases.

**Phase One**

- The first phase is the trail campaign **kickoff**.
  - “TrailBank” staff will always be on the lookout for **opportunities to create rail trails**, with a highlight on opportunities near Dick’s locations.
  - To launch the campaign, Dick’s will organize a **two-week long sale** where a portion of the proceeds will benefit the local “TrailBank” capital effort.

**Phase Two**

- The second phase of the campaign is the **trail launch**,
  - which comes in the form of a **run/walk race event** on dedication day, focusing on earned media.
    - From a marketing perspective, giveaways should include a **race t-shirt**, emblazoned with trail and sponsor marketing.
  - Partners should not overlook mobilizing **interested civic organizations**, including local running clubs and their publications.

**Phase Three**

- The final aspect of the communications strategy is to promote **continued trail usage**.
  - **Permanent in store displays**, dedicated to rail trails as well as other local paths and greenways, are a simple means of promoting trail usage.
    - By providing **free one-pagers** on local resources, the “TrailBank” partnership can promote use of the rail trails specifically, and a healthy athletic lifestyle in general.

**Conclusion**

- All signs point to the “TrailBank” project being beneficial to Dick’s, to RTC, and to society as a whole.
  - By participating, Dick’s Sporting Goods will garner significant **good will** within the community, increases is **potential for sales**, and create a strategic **corporate philanthropy** program that “does good” at the same time it improves its **competitive context**.
  - Likewise, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy furthers its core mission by **creating more rail trails**, while **enhancing its reputation** as the leader in the rail-to-trail movement.
  - Finally, participating local communities benefit from the preservation of **green space**, the addition of valuable **public recreation areas**, and the promotion of a **healthy and fit society**.

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