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## What Works

### **Attention Campers** **How Girls Inc. put the power of** **Lancôme to work in support of mission**

By Matthew Schuerman

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## CAUSE MARKETING

# Attention Campers

How Girls Inc. put the power of Lancôme to work in support of mission *by Matthew Schuerman*

At first blush, a partnership between Girls Inc. and Lancôme might not seem to make strategic sense.

Girls Inc. is a national nonprofit with roots dating to the 1860s that seeks to inspire girls, ages 6 to 18, “to be strong, smart, and bold.” The organization runs a host of programs – from math and science education to pregnancy prevention, media literacy, and leadership development – at schools, churches, community centers, and housing projects nationwide. Its Bill of Rights, first adopted in 1945, lays out six inalienable rights for girls, including “Girls have the right to accept and appreciate their bodies.”

Lancôme is a cosmetics company launched in 1935 that produces makeup, skincare products, and perfume, distributing them across 140 countries. Its skincare creams, according to a company history on the Lancôme USA Web site, hold out for “the assurance of eternal beauty, the dream of all women.” Actresses Isabella Rossellini, Juliette Binoche, and Uma Thurman have modeled Lancôme products.

Indeed, when Lancôme contacted Girls Inc. in 2000 to explore possibilities for a partnership, officials at the nonprofit were wary. “It wasn’t seen as the easiest partnership to go into,” explains Shari Prince, director of cause-related marketing for the nonprofit, “because basically, it’s like, ‘Well, they sell lipstick.’” The nonprofit, on the other hand, sells positive self-image, empowerment, and a message of countering gender stereotypes.

Despite any concerns, Girls Inc. decided to go ahead with the partnership, mainly because, as Prince says, there were “so many positives that outweigh any negatives.” Nearly four years later, Lancôme has donated more than \$350,000 to Girls Inc., with a pledge of \$300,000 more over the next three years. And last year, Lancôme and Girls Inc. launched the first “corporate camp” – bringing Girls Inc. members from across the country to Lancôme USA headquarters in New York City to learn about job opportunities in corporate America. With that camp now heading into its second summer – and eliciting other corporate interest as well – it’s safe to say Girls Inc.’s decision is paying off.

## The Golden Nugget

Lancôme’s decision to approach Girls Inc. was spurred by the launch of a new perfume called Miracle, marketed with the slogan “You make it happen.” Company executives realized they were purveying a message of empowerment. Moreover, the company had recently conducted market research that found a majority of its customers were involved in social causes. Yet aside from taking part in an industrywide initiative to help female cancer patients, Lancôme had done no cause marketing on behalf of women. The company wanted to change this, and sought a partnership with an organization devoted to empowerment, leading ultimately to Girls Inc.

Girls Inc., which has 70 affiliates and provides programming for more than 350,000 girls, had more questions for Lancôme than Lancôme had for Girls Inc. The organization asked about Lancôme’s corporate philosophy; specifically, officials at the nonprofit wanted to know what sort of leadership roles women had in the company. The Girls’ Bill of Rights, after all, also states “Girls have the right to prepare for interesting work and economic independence.” Did Lancôme promote women into leadership positions? The

answer turned out to be “yes,” starting with Dalia Chammas, general manager of Lancôme USA.

Girls Inc. saw a strategic opportunity. The vast majority of its members come from poor, single-parent homes, and many have little sense of what opportunities might await in corporate America. “From our end, it was how can we take this ... powerful company, and do even more for the greater good of the community that we serve?” Prince said.

There was another big selling point as well. Girls Inc. receives nearly 80 percent of its \$10 million in annual revenue from corporate and individual donations, foundations, and government grants. (The rest comes from affiliate dues, fees, interest, and dividends.) The nonprofit had recently started a cause-related marketing department, seeking to open up a new revenue stream. And Lancôme agreed to pay at least \$100,000 a year to partner with Girls Inc.

In the first two years, Lancôme educated its employees

**“It wasn’t seen as the easiest partnership to go into, because basically, it’s like, ‘Well, they sell lipstick.’”**

# what works

Strategies, Approaches, Developments



**Corporate Camp:** The winning Girls Inc. members flew to New York City last summer to learn about opportunities for women in corporate America.

about the partnership – in part through a short video telling the story of Chammas’ 25-year rise from counter-side beauty adviser to general manager. Last spring, Lancôme created an in-store display for She Shines! Juicy Tubes lip gloss that advertised the partnership. Lancôme donated 20 percent of the proceeds from the sale of the lip gloss, roughly \$50,000, to Girls Inc. – this, in addition to the annual donation of \$100,000.

In 2003, eager to take the partnership to another next level, Lancôme and Girls Inc. developed the first corporate camp. The idea was straightforward: Girls Inc. would hold a contest for its members, asking teams of five girls to develop an idea for a new product, along with a description of the target audience and marketing plan. The girls were also asked to consider whether proceeds from sales of the product would support a cause. Winners would come to Lancôme headquarters to see firsthand what opportunities were available to women in corporate America.

The first camp took place last July, when Lancôme flew three winning teams – a total of 15 teenagers – to New York City. The winners, who beat out 10 other teams, came from Los Angeles, Houston, and Jackson County, Indiana. The products they came up with ran the gamut. The Los Angeles team, for instance, won with a concept called “Real Hip” jeans – “For girls with real curves”; the Indiana team won with a pitch for a charm belt marketed with the slogan “No set fashion for girls with a passion.”

Over five days, the girls visited Lancôme’s headquarters and New Jersey laboratories, the boardroom at Bloomingdale’s, and the offices of *Teen Vogue* and *Elle Girl* magazines; at each stop, they heard from women executives about their career paths. The girls met with Chammas, but they also heard from lab technicians and scientists, marketing experts, and financial analysts, highlighting the range of opportunities available to women in the corporate workplace.

To keep it fun, the girls shopped in SoHo and received makeovers at Bloomingdale’s. Indeed, Girls Inc. has embraced the glamorous aspects of the partnership – almost as a *fait accompli*. “The truth is, girls use makeup and women use makeup,” Prince says. “We’re not going to get away from that.”

Lancôme promotes its affiliation with Girls Inc. on its home page ([www.lancome-usa.com](http://www.lancome-usa.com)), allowing the company to reap the benefits of association. Those benefits are difficult to quantify, and may at times be subtle. But the company believes that over time, it can have an impact. “We thought [the partnership] would resonate with our customers,” explained Suzanne Davidowitz, vice president of public relations.

Girls Inc., meanwhile, has put the power of a large cosmetics company, which is in the business of purveying images of striking beauty, to work toward its social mission – which includes the notion that beauty is more than skin deep.

Lancôme is planning a second camp this summer, and has renewed its partnership for another three years. Interest is coming in from other quarters as well: Three other companies are in negotiations with Girls Inc. to become new corporate partners.

“The camp has become a golden nugget that everyone wants,” Prince says. She adds, however, that the organization is not going to run pell-mell into new partnerships unless they too can advance the nonprofit’s mission.

Says Prince, “We want to do it in a way that makes sense.” □