

EVENTS/CAUSES

Mercedes-Benz chooses social-action charities for anniversary celebration

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By KAYLA HUTZLER



German automaker Mercedes-Benz is highlighting

the company's 125-year anniversary by partnering with local charities and organizations to accomplish an ultimate goal of 125 social actions.

The automaker partnered with New City Kids, volunteering time and donating money to benefit children in Jersey City, NJ. However, the jury is out on the concept of 125 acts of charity to mark a brand anniversary, according to one expert.

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“When you have something as abstract and disjointed as the number 125 as the only connection, it’s really difficult for the audience to connect the dots and see the relevance and see the benefits of the sponsorship,” said Rob Frankel, branding expert at branding

consultancy Frankel and Anderson, Los Angeles.

“It doesn’t make sense,” he said. “It looks more like a celebration of the number 125 and the problem is that it’s not connected to the Mercedes-Benz brand strategy and so there is no real rhyme or reason for these 125 events.”

Mr. Frankel is not affiliated with Mercedes-Benz, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Mercedes-Benz did not respond by press deadline.

Mercedes bench

Mercedes-Benz employees recently donated their time and money to help create a better environment for children living in Jersey City.

The employees created a community garden and installed a mural at the **New City Kids** facility. They also built an outdoor shed, put shelves in the basement and helped to paint, clean and organize the inner-city location.

In addition to volunteering their time, Mercedes-Benz and its employees donated about \$20,000 in funds and supplies to the organization.

Members of New City Kids are also going to have the opportunity to take a field-trip to the Mercedes-Benz USA corporate headquarters in Montvale, NJ, as part of an educational experience in the near future.

For the project, the car manufacturer also partnered with two local organizations, Bergen Communities United and the Jersey City Episcopal community development corporation.

The revamping of the facilities comes just in time as the New City Kids organization hosts a summer camp for children that began July 5.

On the brandwagon

The New City Kids initiative is the first of many volunteering and donation-based activities that Mercedes-Benz has taken part in this year.

For example, last month, it teamed up with loyal enthusiasts in California to celebrate the Gull Wing group’s anniversary, and donated 125 scholarships to the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department’s educational summer camp ([see story](#)).

In April, the company teamed up with polo equipment and manufacturer La Martina to create polo shirts to benefit the Big Brothers Big Sisters group of Miami.

This also follows a growing trend of increased corporate responsibility among luxury brands.

For instance, Kiehl's is celebrating its 160-year anniversary by donating \$160,000 to educational, environmental and HIV-research programs ([see story](#)).

However, simply picking a charity and donating money is not enough for brands that truly want to enter into the social corporate responsibility field, per Mr. Frankel.

The chosen charities also do not help brand marketing effort unless they somehow align with the brand's core values and appear to be an organic fit.

"Brands have to create these programs after thinking about who they are and what is a natural fit so that people understand and accept why they are involved in this," Mr. Frankel said.

"I would like to see major brands recognize that these types of programs shouldn't be hooked into fads," he said. "It is a brand's responsibility to lead and not to follow."

"But unfortunately just about every brand out there is following the trend right now."

Final Take

Kayla Hutzler, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York