

Sylvie Chantecaille with her daughters Alex (left) and Olivia, in their New York office



No one has ever become poor by giving,' wrote Anne Frank in her wartime diary. Everybody knows that donating money to charity is commendable; increasingly, however, it's being acknowledged that it can also bring business advantages. More people are buying into brands with a benevolent element than ever before, in search of that elusive sense of spiritual wellbeing that an act of altruism brings.

Having received an MBA from Harvard Business School, and worked as a strategy advisor to various luxury-goods firms, including Burberry and LVMH, Mireia Llusia-Lindh was keen to place philanthropy at the heart of Milli Millu – which she founded in 2010 – in part because she knew it was a sound commercial decision.

'Customers are expecting more and more that a company will not just have a great product but demonstrate social responsibility,' she says. So for every Milli Millu bag purchased, it funds a set of life-saving vaccines for a child in need, as part of its A Bag, A Life initiative. Llusia-Lindh also works with SOS Children's Villages, an international charity that provides homes for orphans. 'As well as it being something that's close to my heart, it helps in terms of marketing, in showing the customer what kind of company we are.'

Meanwhile, the cosmetics company Chantecaille has released an annual limited-edition palette for the past decade, eagerly anticipated by its loyal clientele, each one focusing on a different issue of global sustainability. Over the years, a veritable zoo of animals has paraded across those exquisite palettes – a trumpeting elephant, a

RIPPLE EFFECT

Why philanthropy can have a positive impact on business, as well as making a meaningful difference in the world

By CATRIONA GRAY

and the Lion Palette, a mirrored case featuring a quartet of tawny shades, each one imprinted with the noble head of the king of beasts. This is an irresistible object in itself, but how much more so when the purchase comes with an added feel-good factor...

'Our customers are deeply invested in making a difference with us, and they're always eager to hear what the next beneficiary is – which we love,' says Chantecaille. 'We've created a special community that magnifies our passion for positive change. The palettes are the highlight of our season, and are very anticipated and welcomed by our customers. They're not a profit-making venture, but they are the most exciting.'

striped tiger, a silver wolf – their images stamped into the cosmetics.

The scheme started when the company's founder Sylvie Chantecaille noticed the declining number of monarch butterflies in her East Hampton garden and realised that she could use her business to help. 'It opened my eyes to the exciting possibility that there was a way to use my day job for a cause I was so passionate about.'

Chantecaille's latest cause is the Lion Guardians foundation in Kenya, which has inspired the Cheek Pride



And of course, while they may not add tangibly to the bottom line, they undoubtedly spread positive brand awareness. In a similar vein, Swarovski consistently donates to a number of causes, and has a history of building upon partnerships with cultural institutions such as the Palace of Versailles, the V&A and the Design Museum in Kensington. 'It is crucial that companies engage with philanthropy,' says Nadja Swarovski, chair of the Swarovski Foundation. 'Businesses need to be ambassadors of values.'

One of the charities Swarovski supports is Women for Women International, which helps marginalised women in countries affected by war and conflict. Its executive director Brita Fernandez Schmidt is well aware of the value of products with a charitable edge: she cites Monica Vinader's #SheInspiresMe friendship bracelet – the initial run sold out – and Charlotte Tilbury's HotLips lipsticks as recent success stories. 'From the social-media engagement, we could see how much buzz there was around the product because it was giving something back,' says Schmidt. 'To me, this shows that philanthropy is good business as well as good ethics.'

Indeed, it's the driving force behind brands such as Beulah London, as its founder Natasha Rufus Isaacs explains: 'Our vision is to produce beautiful products that also have a strong social impact. We want to create a movement where people are inspired to buy goods that have a purpose and drive social change, and we want Beulah to be at the forefront of this. The product has to stand on its

own as a luxurious item – the charitable element is an added plus.'

A similar ethos is apparent in the projects set up by Carole Bamford, the founder of the organic food brand Daylesford, and Bamford, the artisanal womenswear label. 'Our philanthropic work involves keeping skills and crafts alive both in the UK and abroad,' she says. 'This is often through commissioning traditional textile techniques, using wool from rare-breed sheep, working with hand-knitters, supporting artists. Within Daylesford, we concentrate on educating young people in cooking, growing and farming. Our latest project is Agri-cology, an online hub that helps farmers to become more profitable and more sustainable.' By keeping these skills alive and fostering new initiatives, the company is weaving a worthy element into its very fabric, an arrangement that's a positive experience for both parties.

'Quite simply, we find many of our customers like to know they are making a difference in the world,' says Bamford. 'It forms a cycle of positivity that makes both the giver and the receiver feel a part of something greater.' And what could be more enriching than that? □

THE WOMEN GIVING BACK

Below, from left: Brita Fernandez Schmidt of Women for Women International. Natasha Rufus Isaacs and Lavinia Brennan of Beulah London



Below, from left: Carole Bamford of Daylesford. The Milli Millu founder Mireia Llusia-Lindh. Nadja Swarovski

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