

Community Relations

Harley-Davidson Motor Company

Challenge: To build awareness of the \$1.5 million the Harley-Davidson Foundation contributed annually to the companies with whom it does business. The foundation had kept a low profile since its inception, and as a result, community leaders believed that Harley-Davidson was not giving back to the communities in which it had manufacturing plants. Harley-Davidson is one of the strongest brands in the world, but its image as a corporate citizen in its communities needed to be strengthened.

Target: Community leaders in Milwaukee and Tomahawk, Wisconsin; York, Pennsylvania; Kansas City, Kansas; Talladega, Alabama; and Harley-Davidson management.

Solution: Focus group studies were held in each community to determine the needs of the community and the perceptions of Harley-Davidson as a corporate citizen. The studies were held with community leaders from government, education, business, nonprofit organizations and news media. A plan was developed and implemented to provide greater community awareness of Harley-Davidson Foundation grants, increase employee volunteerism and generate publicity for these community relations efforts. The focus groups have been repeated annually to measure the results of the program.

Outcome: Ratings on all community relations measures for the company improved 20 percent since the program began in 1996. The greatest improvements have been in perceptions that Harley-Davidson “cares about the community” and “makes charitable contributions.” In addition, the company received Milwaukee’s Corporate Citizen of the Year Award from the Mayor’s Awards for Business Excellence in 1997, the Partners in Philanthropy Award in 1997, the Marcus Center Corporate Citizen Award in 1998 and the Wisconsin Award in 1998 from the National Society of Fund Raising Executives, as well as awards in York, Talladega and Tomahawk.