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An unusual cross-collaboration reaps benefits for all 3 parties.

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The world of [business](#) is not necessarily collaborative by nature. Most company execs are not inclined to venture into new territory, forging new relationships in uncertain waters. Perhaps competitiveness and natural suspicion make them too guarded to recognize opportunities out of their comfort zone. Or maybe they're simply running too fast and too furiously to think of--or accept--ideas that are just plain "out there."

From a [public relations](#) perspective, PR pros love it when a company is perched on the edge with a new initiative, performing unexpectedly rather than doing the same old thing. Best is when a company forges a collaborative relationship among players that initially seem to have little in common until an "aha" moment brings it all into focus.

PR pros look for these opportunities and, it's hoped, recognize them when they come along. If you are not at least exploring a little unusual collaboration for your company, you may be missing the boat. The following example may give you some food for thought.

It's always good when a for-profit company connects with a nonprofit organization--the result can be very good for both. But taken a step further, the results can be even more powerful. Consider what happened when two [nonprofits](#)--from completely different sectors--and one for-profit teamed up last year:

One nonprofit came from the health sector--[Susan G. Komen for the Cure, Orange County affiliate](#)--and one came from the arts--[Pacific Symphony](#). The organizations had had no previous dealings together, although both are in Orange County, Calif. The third entity was a for-profit, [Farmers & Merchants Bank](#), headquartered just up the freeway in Long Beach.

The connection among these three organizations? Henry Walker, CEO of F&M Bank, serves on the board of Pacific Symphony and also is a "Pink Tie Guy"--an exclusive group of high-powered businessmen, just seven named each year by Komen for the Cure, who support the fight against breast cancer in their business circles. One more link sealed the deal: The same [PR firm](#) worked for Komen and F&M Bank and also had a close relationship with Pacific Symphony.

Representatives from the PR agency and the symphony held a brainstorming session to examine this unlikely trio of players and decided that--as unorthodox as it sounded--a collaborative event could increase funds for the two nonprofits and create good will for all three.

At this point, an all-hands session populated by PR and [marketing](#) folks from the PR agency, the symphony, Komen for the Cure and the bank led to what became "Music for the Cure." This collaboration succeeded in:

1. Increasing attendance at the grand finale Pacific Symphony concert of the season
2. Boosting registration and fundraising at the Komen Race for the Cure held two weeks later in Newport Beach
3. Further enhancing the public's perception of the bank, which donated hundreds of bus advertisements that rolled through Orange County for weeks to promote all three organizations in the context of the Music for the Cure event.

True, the two nonprofit organizations were strange bedfellows, and both were a little uneasy at first. But soon they agreed that their audiences were demographically similar. So why not try cross-marketing, with the help of their common ally, the bank? How wonderful for the music lovers to learn about the local fight against breast cancer and the race coming up in two weeks. And how terrific for the breast cancer survivors and advocates to learn more about the symphony, with key supporters invited to enjoy the outdoor Tchaikovsky concert as guests.

Yes, more tickets were sold to the concert. And more runners registered for the Race for the Cure. And perhaps a few more bank accounts were opened when people saw the good will F&M Bank was generating. Good as they are, these are all short-term results; the long-term results will continue for years, as all three organizations gained new, loyal followers. The real "gold" happened because all three were willing to take a chance and collaborate to turn something into much more: To make $1 + 1 + 1 =$ at least 5.

Fortunately, companies running along an entrepreneurial track are more inclined to find collaborative nuggets that can turn into real gold. And while I avoid generalizing, women [entrepreneurs](#) tend to be the best at doing this. So don't be afraid to think differently--different thinking can get you exactly where you want to go.

Hilary Kaye is the founder and president of [HKA Public Relations](#), an award-winning public relations agency known for its ability to generate credibility and visibility via a variety of established and innovative PR approaches.

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