

Shut Up and Broadband

Broadband players can and should do more than provide broadband. They should support causes they care about.

By Bryan J. Rader / *UpStream Network*

“Shut up and broadband.”

No, I am not making a political statement. And this column certainly will not be about anything political.

Some people think that businesses should just “shut up and do what they do.” For service providers, this means just provide broadband. The thinking is that customers don’t want our opinions, views or any thoughts we may have about society. In other words, “just show us the broadband.”

But I don’t agree with this.

I hope you don’t either. I see our businesses as opportunities to be leaders, and to make a difference. Broadband providers should be comfortable supporting various causes, topics or important issues. Isn’t that what makes business so great at giving back?

“Shut up and dribble” was a statement a political news journalist made a few years ago to a famous basketball player. Don’t give your opinions; just play ball.

I get it. The one thing the broadband industry doesn’t need more of today is other people’s opinions – especially in an election cycle. But I see it a different way. I think it is amazing when companies take up important causes.

SUPPORTING IMPORTANT CAUSES

Recently, my company, UpStream Network, chose to join forces with Feeding America and purchase meals equal to the number of customers we serve. We encouraged others in the industry to do the same. Feeding America is a leading resource for food banks and is especially important during the current economic challenges. We had the support of our associates, vendors and even clients.

Isn’t it a great idea to do more than just dribble – I mean broadband? Yes, it is!

I’m impressed by many companies that do show support for specific issues or topics. For instance, they might support cancer research because someone on the management team was personally affected by this challenge. The restaurant company Wendy’s supports child adoption because the founder, Dave Thomas, was adopted. This cause became

important to him – and his team. Other successful companies support veterans’ issues, mental health or the environment.

My former company supported autism awareness and raised more than \$100,000 for Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta and many other organizations that support families with children on the spectrum. The connection to autism? My daughter. I was so proud of our team for getting involved in this important cause.

DRIVING EMPLOYEE RETENTION

Companies that do more than “dribble” are always ranked the best places to work and have the greatest employee retention rates. Why? Because their associates are engaged, involved and on a mission. Having a cause to rally around galvanizes the team.

I have met several people in our industry who deliver broadband to schools, hospitals, or low-income housing, and they do it free or below cost to support the community. How cool is that?

What does your organization do?

Last year, my team and I joined a special needs young adult center in Chicago to play kickball with a group of participants in the program. Maybe we didn’t win, but we had a lot of fun!

You see, this is what UpStream stands for, and it is more than just business. For me, it is personal.

No, I don’t want to know about your politics, and I don’t see how wading into political terrain can help any of our businesses. But we should use our voices and speak up to show our support for the things that matter to us and to our teams.

Companies that give back are the ones most customers want to buy from and the places where most future job applicants want to work.

So, join me, and let me know what your company is doing. Now is *not* the time to “shut up and broadband.” ❖

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