

Transcript

The Pet Boss™ Podcast

Episode 225: Donation Requests: Burden or Business Strategy?

March 1st, 2026

Candace: Before we get into today's episode, let me ask you something. How many donation requests have landed in your inbox lately? Maybe today, this week, this month for sure. I know that you are getting a lot of requests. It's for silent auctions, for raffles, gift baskets. Can you donate a gift card? And if you're honest.

How many of those people actually buy from you? It's easy to feel so frustrated. I'm experiencing this right now at Dante and Dory's, but what if donation requests aren't charity decisions? What if they were marketing decisions? Today we're gonna be talking about how to stop resenting them and to start leveraging them.

Let's get into it.

Thanks for tuning in again to another episode of the Pet Boss podcast. Today donation requests are a burden or business strategy. :01:00] Well, I am making this mindset shift, in real time here with my pet businesses, and I wanted to talk to you about it. You know, we've got great feedback from the last few episodes that I recorded where people are saying like, is she in our brain?

Like, this is exactly the stuff that we're thinking about. So I know that because I am now back in the brick and mortar space that I am exposed to a lot of the same stuff that you are going through, right? So regardless of if you have a retail store or a grooming salon, you're a pet sitter or even a manufacturer.

I know that donation requests come in like crazy. We even see them at Pet Boss Nation. People from all over the country send us donation requests. and
Copyright 2026, Pet Boss Nation®, LLC | hello@petbossnation.com

I was like, you haven't even looked at what it is that we do or sell, what I'm experiencing here at Dante and Doris is I'm sure what you're experiencing, and I remember all of this back with my old businesses in Chicago. those donation requests, they just come in nonstop, right? You get emails asking for things, you get dms into your, :02:00] personal Facebook and Instagram accounts.

You get dms into your business' accounts. you get people walking in, you know, all asking to, you know, can you donate a gift basket? Can you sponsor things? I mean, we had a lady walk in, this week who then stood in the store. It was about. Butterflies or something. This was like a monarch butterfly launch, and a fundraiser, which we would totally donate to, but she continued to stay in the shop and talk to the employees about butterflies for 50 minutes.

Oh my gosh. about all kinds of other stuff too. I was shocked and I was like, okay guys, we're gonna have to. Work on how we can transition ourselves out of these conversations. So I know that not only does it take a lot of your mental energy to process this stuff, to talk to all the people, asking to give them an answer, and then when you actually go to assemble it, you know, it takes time.

It takes time to put it together, whether you're putting, product or even printing a gift certificate, it still takes time. we know :03:00] though that. We should be involved in our communities, right? We do want the community to feel like we support them, but there is that pull that resistance where we are just so irritated, like, just because we have this physical business and you are on a committee to try to raise money for this cause that, you know, is important to you. Doesn't mean it's important to me, but, We also, I think, just get irritated because the people that are asking us are our customers, and potentially the people who get the item are already somebody who does shop with us.

Right? We see that a lot too, where it's like it finally goes to that auction and the person who gets it is already somebody who knows us. that stings right, that part can really sting. It feels very one sided. It does feel transactional. It's kind of like, you know, people only remember you when they need something, right?

And today I would just wanna talk about how I'm thinking about things differently, you know, in this donation request world, and also how you might reframe it, um, in :04:00] your own business because we need to shift from thinking of them as, donation requests are not charity decisions, but they are marketing decisions.

So yes, that. The auction item may have been bid on by a current customer of ours, but there were lots of opportunities for exposure to potential other people who have never heard of us before, who could either generate some great word of mouth or who may also have a pet, but maybe just didn't win the auction item.

Or maybe when they went to this auction, they only had so much money that they could donate and they chose to put it towards something else instead of this. But we still got some exposure, right? So we have to go through the process of deciding, you know, what these requests really are and how we can leverage them. So silent, auction raffles, gift baskets, gift cards, event sponsorships. Like what are these really? They are exposure opportunities, brand touchpoints for you, introductions to new :05:00]audiences. They're lead generation moments, but only if you design them in that way. If you just hand over gift cards to people and hope for the best, that's probably a loss.

But if you attach a strategy to it, it's marketing.

So instead of asking, why are they asking me, I've never seen this person before in the store. Well, maybe the person asking you doesn't have a pet. But they are on the committee that needs to, you know, find businesses and they're approaching everybody. So I think that in the beginning there's a great opportunity to just really connect with the person who's actually coming into the business and be excited about their event and get to know them. Ask them if they have a pet, ask them if they've ever shopped there. Invite even in the transaction of like them asking you for something before they leave. Ask even if you found out that they have a pet. show them some things in your business or potentially get them booked for a future appointment, you know, like, I think it's okay to have a conversation.

They're asking something of you. You can certainly ask something back. Okay. :06:00] But you know, instead of thinking like, why are they asking me? Yes, there's an opportunity with that person that is, that is your contact for all of this to create a relationship there. But also we need to now ask, is there audience, meaning the charity or whatever organization is putting on this event, is this an audience that I want access to?

Okay. And that's a completely different question. That's a great way to reframe it when it comes in. Go, Ooh, do I want access to that audience?

So here's the reframe of all of this that I lean into. Okay. To me, donation requests are a marketing expense. They are just like running Facebook ads. They are just like paying for an email software. They are just like putting billboards up. They're just like any kind of pet event sponsorship. So if I'm going to give away a hundred dollars in value, I want in return, and this is what you could create for yourself and you're in these :07:00] donations, is maybe an email capture opportunity.

Like how can I collect some of the contact? I definitely want some sort of a bounce back offer, like, you know, meaning that I want the person who's getting this basket or donation to actually come back in. So even if I'm donating a product, I still put a gift certificate in there to get them to come in even, or if they give it to somebody else.

But we can add additional coupons to sit on the table so that even if people are not able. To win the basket or aren't interested, or maybe they don't have a pet, but they know somebody who does. There are other cards sitting there at this event to promote the business and get people to come in. Maybe there's a special card you put out that has an offer for a first time customer incentive.

Like maybe it's if they've never been there before, there's a better deal or offer. You could even create a QR code turned into stickers to put onto the basket or to even give them a flyer to put :08:00] with the basket that might sit out that has a QR code on it so that everybody can like sign up.

That's that email capture opportunity. Sign up to get something that leads magnet, we've talked about lead magnets before, but to get that email, maybe to get a special coupon and offer and deal. So yes, there's this basket that can be bid on, but there's also opportunities for everybody who was at that event to get a special coupon offer.

Okay, so this is more than just, you know, getting your logo put on something or having a gift certificate sit out. But we also just wanna find out like, what would be other wins for us through this event and exposure and audience? And I say this because, we have a situation here where I was at the store, and answered the phone. A gentleman was asking if we were able to put together the donation request he put in for the volunteer fire department in a local little town nearby, because he was in Galesburg. This fire department's about 20 minutes away.

He was in Galesburg that day and was curious if it was ready. Well. We're still working on our system for this. And I said to him, you know, I'd been out :09:00] sick. This is the first I had heard of it. And I'm the one that would put it together for him. So I said, I'm happy to give it to you, but give me 30 minutes or something and, and then it'll be ready.

And he said, okay, no problem. You know, so I went ahead and I found the paperwork and I saw that it was for, um, this volunteer fire department's, like soup supper dinner thing. And I thought, okay, well we also recently. have decided that we are giving law enforcement, firefighters, nurses, teachers, and military, all 15% off all their purchases.

And, we're doing that as part of a program that we plan to go and, market to our local community in those different areas as formal like marketing packages to try to, you know, win that business away from whether it's chewy or big box, and create this loyalty for those, community within Galesburg and the surrounding areas.

Okay? So I thought, okay, this is a great opportunity. Here's this firefighter event I am going to :10:00] print out and I'm gonna design something in Canva. It was eight and a half by 11. so I could print it easily at the shop. Has

our logo on it real big, just now open. And then it said, 15% off all purchases for firefighters.

And then, you know, it's a little bit smaller print. I also told the police, you know, military nurses and teachers. Then I had our address on it and our hours, and I put a little post-it note on that piece of paper that said, you know, please lay out near the basket or in a visible area at your event, and something like that.

And then I just put that with the basket that went into a bigger bag. And, and then when the person came and picked it up, we made sure to tell them. Hey, I don't know if you know this, but we offer this discount and it would be great if you could tell your community about this too, because it still benefits all of you guys.

And so that was a little gesture that was included with that, that we could include with any of those scenarios to, hopefully bring in more people or at least raise awareness about that discount program. While making this basket, it did take me [11:00] about 30 minutes and I thought to myself, I do not have the bandwidth to be assembling these all the time.

Like, I have podcasts, I need to record, I have clients I need to meet with. I have content and training I have to create, I have inventory I have to buy, you know, for the store. I have events and marketing. I have to plan. Like I cannot assemble these baskets. So it was a great reminder that day that, hey, we haven't really developed a system or process for this to track, Hey, what's coming in?

Why do we approve what we approve? Who makes these, how long does it take? Because in a perfect world, and this is as I'm saying this out loud to you right now, as I was saying it out loud while I was making it to go, you know, there are three or four more requests over here. I know I can see 'em sitting right there.

And it'd be great if we could create an assembly line and just go ahead and bang all this out and one swoop versus, you know, doing them as people are tracking them down. So fast forward to only a few days later and now, I've told

our manager, Stephanie, that I want her to handle all of this, but that we need to create a system around it so that one we can track :12:00] really who we're giving to, and what we're giving.

And then track. When people come back in with these bounce back kind of coupons or gift certificates, track it. Because I wanna be involved, I don't mind being involved in almost every request that comes through because in this market it's a small market and we are a brand new business.

And there are so many community events. And I know that the minute we start to like being involved in some of them, we're going to get S to participate in more. But I've learned from some fellow business owners, specifically, you know, one even in town, Dave's auto body where he's everywhere.

He sponsors everything and he sponsors at the top level of anything in this community. And that is repetition, right? That is his brand staying top of mind. So when you know that you need an oil change or you need auto body work, or you need your car detailed or cleaned like he's the first person that comes to mind.

I couldn't name like any other car place here in the Galesburg area like him, because :13:00] he's everywhere. on the radio, at the community events, sponsoring the football games, whatever it is, I also know that Allison Schwartz, at all, Pets considered. They donate to everybody. Every request that comes in, they have 'em like pre-made and assembled. These baskets that are, I think she uses the base of, the can packs, the cases of cans that come in those cardboard lips.

You know, she uses that as the base for all of them. And that's generally their size. And they just like to make a bunch ahead of time and that way they're just like ready to go. You know, so we all have to, I think, see this as an opportunity to really get into our communities and leverage that opportunity and then also make it easy for us.

When I look back at Dog a Holics in Chicago, it was such a large market that really so many requests were coming in for. Yes, the person might live in my

area, but the event and the audience was more like a suburban audience or was even five miles away, 10 miles away, which in Chicago is really far, and :14:00] so.

I had to have rules and parameters around that. And that's totally okay if that's what you need to do to help yourself, like gain some structure. Like I had a rule that if it was a pet organization, I always donated. If it was, a customer, an actual customer who requested, we always donated, and then anything else that came in outside of those two things.

We evaluated, okay, what was the proximity to us? How many have we already given away? Like we might say, okay, we can only give one a week, or we might give 10 a year. You know, like we gave some parameters and just tracked it. And then at some point, you know, you can just say to people, you know, we've already extended our allocation of things that we can donate this year.

Please try again next year, you know, or for your next event. But that was kind of the framework we had for evaluating decisions there. So here's what we're doing at Dante and Dory's, and you can think about this stuff too. but this is really what we're gonna be doing to leverage. So, like I said, every donation that we put out will include a gift certificate. You know, it's probably a product that we're donating, :15:00] but a gift certificate in there.

We're doing a \$20 gift certificate we will track, like we're writing on that gift certificate. It's actually a paper gift certificate, that then we write on the back of it what the event was for the date of that event. and then that way when it comes in for redemption.

We will track that that actually turned into a customer and we will be able to print a copy of the receipt to just see how much the person actually spent. We also plan to, I don't have these created yet, but I do want to create some sort of a mini postcard that I can give as a stack of postcards that also go with this item that might be able to be put out, that could have, Again, a coupon code written on it that people can come, that we can track, how well this actually converted. I don't think I need to give again, depending on the event, we

wouldn't give them like 50 to sit out, you know, there might be 10 to 15 that we can give them to sit next to the basket and we'll see how it goes.

since I don't have those cards created right now, at least I'm :16:00] just adding a little stack of business cards, I love this idea of a QR code or some sort of a picture frame or sign that can go next to the basket that talks about, other discounts or coupons and, and things like that.

Or like I mentioned that, firefighter discount. We just wanna create additional exposure about what we have to offer other than just that individual basket. We're also asking things like, who is this event for? Right? Is this our ideal customer? How many people plan to attend this? Will we be announced from the stage at all?

Will our brand be tagged online? You know, just finding other opportunities. That the person can leverage. You know, heck, even the person who's picking up the donation basket, you could say to them, are you on social media? Like, maybe you could even just take a picture of the product and post it.

You know that you're here picking up a donation for your event and tag our business on your personal page. You know, that would be really helpful. Just think of other opportunities that you can have to get in front of audiences. And then the :17:00] third thing we're doing is we're tracking, okay, we're really gonna track where these donations are coming in from, how many things get actually redeemed.

Any emails obviously tied into this event, but we have a whole process that we've documented in a Google Doc. Everything from when the request comes in, you know, to notifying me because I need to see it first just in case. It's a good friend of ours, or maybe we wanna do more than just the minimum. And so once I give the okay of which direction to go, Stephanie, our manager, takes it from there.

She'll start to pull the product, whether it's from free, things that we've gotten over, you know, over time from manufacturers. It's things that we might wanna move and I'm not even stressing out about the fact that yes, we might give something in a basket that we don't even sell, and that's okay I'm not so

worried about the actual products that are in it being the thing that I'm gonna convert that person to. No, I'm not. I'm not even concerned about that. I want to get exposure for our brand in front of new people, :18:00] and I want that exposure to bring people into us. And if somebody comes into us looking for something that we put into an auction basket that we don't have.

It's up to us to be able to convince them to buy something else that is similar or to try something else, you know, or to book another service. Like I don't want any resistance there. I'm not gonna stress over the things that really don't matter. So I've got this product that I can give away.

Let's put it in a basket and see what happens. You know, but we're tracking this stuff. We cross off the barcode on the product so that we know that if they try to return it, it's a donation item. Even if they tried to return it, we're not gonna cause any friction when they come to return it.

We're just gonna help them find another option or solution that would work for them. Again, this will probably rarely if ever happen. We are scanning everything through the point of sale system. We have a discount reason for donation, so it all goes in under a receipt. We put the charity's name as the customer on the receipt so that we can then always track the :19:00] charity that's, you know, or over time what we're giving.

So there's a record inside the point of sale system. It takes the inventory out, I can pull a report of how many things we gave away for donation reasons from that. Then what happens is that extra receipt gets stapled to the actual paperwork for whatever the charity gave us. The organization gives us if we have it, if not, we have our own little paperwork that gets filed away so that it's like a paper copy.

We have a spreadsheet. I know there's a lot of steps here, but we have a spreadsheet that just tracks again, like what was donated, and then when these coupons or gift certificates come back, you know, we revisit that. And we can fill out and update the spreadsheet so that over time we can see what's the ROI in all of this? All right? Because if we don't measure it, we can't improve it. Okay. But this process that I've put together ensures that these donations are going out, how I see that vision of them going out. So I really

had to show like, I, I delegated this and then I saw the gift :20:00] baskets that Stephanie assembled and she did it totally differently than how I did it.

' we didn't walk through that process of actually assembling them. She's like, I want some feedback on this. Did I do it right? And I was like, well, this is perfectly fine how you did it, but let me show you how I would do it. And so we broke apart her baskets. I noticed a lot of things, like certain things that prices were exposed or not, or, there were a lot of products that were hidden from view.

so I reassembled the basket and I talked through every step of like, why this choice is being made. And I typed it into the document, our process document so that she has it to reference later. Stephanie ended up saying something like, wow, like this basket looks so much better.

Like, she is a professional. She knows what she's doing with this basket. And Isaac, who works for us, says. What I like about it is literally every single decision she's made in this basket is intentional. Like there's a reason it went where it went, and I said, you're right.

I guess there's a strategy to it, right? So this basket ends up, you :21:00] know, every single thing is visible from all around, all the edges, and the cell is super tight. 'cause I know that. Somebody who's gonna pick up this basket is gonna be transferred from one volunteer's car to another volunteer's car that maybe is gonna get thrown into a big bin of stuff that's gonna get hauled to the event.

You know, we need to do everything we can to try to ensure that this donation by the time it reaches that table is like the best. positioning as possible. Right. I think even one of the things we're going to do, I've been writing it kind of, sloppily on the receipts or on a post-it note with the donation in the bag, but coming up with like a, a one page form that again, kind of guides the charity or the organization on how we want this to be represented.

Like, please make sure that this is straightened up or that it's like taking the donation basket out of the brown bag I just gave it to you in Right. Don't just

set the brown bag on a table. I mean, I've seen it all. 'cause I go to these events and I'm like, oh my gosh, these poor businesses, if they had any idea that their brands were being represented like this, like they're not getting any :22:00] exposure.

you know, I've got very clear expectations and I'm going to make sure that that's communicated to the people that we're giving this donation to. So really I think the most important thing here is that I want you to shift thinking about these donations as, really a charity request and more of as a marketing opportunity.

And I want us to all get organized, more organized on this. Um, you know, donation requests can feel overwhelming and they feel overwhelming when there's no policy around how you did make decisions on it. There might be no budget on how you, how much you give or what you give. There's no system in place to keep yourselves organized and the owner, you know, we're all handling it ourselves.

That's like, that's no fun. So, set a monthly or quarterly donation budget. Create a request form of your own so that everybody can be kind in the same format of requests and you're getting the information that you want. Create some criteria for approval. Create those steps in a Google Doc, like how I've just shared with you today.

I'm assigning it to somebody else on your team to handle it. :23:00] 'cause once that system is built, then I'm not running it right. You're not running it. That is leadership. Okay. And you don't need to be emotionally evaluating every request. Let it go. You just need some framework and rules.

Remember, there are businesses in every community that are hyper involved. They're everywhere at every event, every sponsorship, every raffle, and guess what? They stay front and center in people's minds. It's about repetition, and that doesn't happen accidentally, right? That is a strategy. It's an intentional strategy, so you don't have to say yes to everything, but you should decide intentionally what you want to be known for.

And then if you're still a little uncomfortable with all of this, give yourself some rules. Okay? Right. Like if it still feels uncomfortable and you're like, Candace, I can't do all of that. Only donate to organizations aligned with your values or only donate if you get audience exposure.

Or only :24:00] donate a certain amount of times per quarter. Only donate to events with over a hundred plus people or something. Or decide you're only going to donate to actual customers' requests, because you could even say, we get so many requests that we only have the bandwidth to take requests from existing customers. This removes guilt, it creates clarity. Boundaries make generosity sustainable. So if you're feeling overwhelmed by donation requests. Here are your key takeaways. Stop treating them emotionally. Decide if the audience is worth it. Attach a lead generation of some sort to it. Set a budget, build a system, delegate it.

That's it. Okay? It doesn't have to drain you. It can grow you all right. Now you know that I believe that small businesses are community pillars. And that is really something to be proud of. But generosity without a :25:00] strategy can create resentment. Okay? I've experienced it myself before.

So generosity though with intention can really help create some growth for you in your business, and you get to choose which one you operate from.

Thank you for listening today. If this episode resonated with you, let us know. Give us a review. Send us an email. Send us a DM comment on the social media post about this podcast episode, and if you like these strategies I'm coming up with, you know what I teach 'em to all of our clients in our Zoom sessions or everything I've ever created before is all in the Pet Boss library.

Okay? And you get access to the full library inside Pet Boss University. Or keep your eyes out at petboss.com. We have our library launching soon where you can buy some products. Not all, but some products a la carte. So stay tuned for that. But if you wanna know how to get more help with your pet business, visit petboss.com.

and I'm all yours. All right, talk to you soon and see you at the next episode.

