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Wise shoppers know to look behind pink ribbon for facts

Mercury News Editorial

"Pinked" products promise to support the fight against breast cancer: "Shop for a cure" includes pet food, batteries, scissors, robot vacuums, cookies, candy, mattresses, knives, jeans, shoes, orchids, carpet, frozen dinners, yogurt, jewelry, cosmetics, clothing, cars and more.

But consumers should "think before you pink" to make sure their money is well spent in the fight against cancer. How much of the purchase price will go to charity? Which one? To do what?

"Any company can put a pink ribbon on anything," said Barbara Brenner, executive director of Breast Cancer Action, a San Francisco-based advocacy group that operates a Web site at www.thinkbeforeyoupink.org.

In some cases, companies make a very modest donation or cap the total contribution at a fixed amount. In others, consumers may spend as much to mail in lids or labels as the company will donate.

Some companies have paste-on pink ribbons to generate "awareness" of breast cancer -- October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month -- but don't give *anything* for treatment or research.

For consumers who don't have time to check up on where the money's going, "the best thing to do is to write a check directly to a local organization that's doing good work," Brenner suggested.

The Susan G. Komen Foundation (www.komen.org), the largest devoted to breast-cancer research, asks its corporate partners to disclose on the label the dollar amount to be donated, the minimum guaranteed donation and what time period is covered. That follows the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance's guidelines (www.give.org).

The Komen Foundation's 125 corporate partners are expected to donate as much as \$33 million for research from the sale of pink products, said Krissy Barker, manager of cause marketing.

If companies are making a significant contribution, they deserve the good publicity that pinking generates. But consumers should read labels and Web sites before they "shop for a cure" -- or donate.

Breast cancer remains a killer. Research and treatment need funding. Just make sure that your money is going to the right place.

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