



Sustainable Development Strategies for Social Charity Organization: A Case Study for an Animal Rescue Organization

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ABSTRACT:

KEYWORDS: Social charity, entrepreneurship, sustainable development, social organization

I. INTRODUCTION

Animal Benefit New Zealand (ABNZ) started in North Dunedin in January 2015 with the aim of controlling the overpopulation of stray cats in the area. ABNZ became a charitable trust in June 2015. By August 2015, ABNZ had de-sexed over 650 cats through its free-of-charge TNR (Trap, Neuter, Return) program. This service is not only provided by ABNZ to trap stray cats but also for extremely enthusiastic cat lovers who cannot afford the de-sexing of their pets. ABNZ has relied on donations to carry out TNR and community education. This has been done by a group of volunteers without any premises being available. All rescued cats are fostered in private homes by volunteers.

However, ABNZ are keen to think strategically and have developed a desire to be less reliant on donations and enable them to be able to plan for the future. In other words, ABNZ is seeking those strategies which will increase their chances of achieving sustainability – and critically, become profitable. The aims of this essay are to assess ABNZ's current circumstances, analyse the market needs and provide long-term survival strategies from social entrepreneurial perspectives.

Looking at ABNZ from the view of entrepreneurial theory and practice, it emerged as a nascent social entrepreneur from a public-social perspective, which led ABNZ to launch as a non-profit organisation (charitable trust) in which the social motive was tempered (Germak, Robinson, 2013). This social motive is to improve living standards of the local community by solving the stray cat issue in the North Dunedin area; however, maintaining an appropriate balance between the enterprise's social impact and financial viability is the essential dilemma of social entrepreneurship. In fact, financial sustainability is one of three interdependent pillars (finance, social and environment) or triple bottom lines (profit, people and planet) which keep an enterprise stable and, in the long run, none of these pillars can exist without the others.

The marketing, branding, growth and sustainability strategies for ABNZ were identified, based on the examination of its current situation in social entrepreneurship literature. There is some blurring and overlapping among these strategies but from a disciplinary perspective, they are all interconnected. It is hard to say a strategy definitely belongs to a syllabus and they can only be read interdisciplinarily. For example, creating an ABNZ product series is discussed as a branding strategy in this essay, but it can be a strategy for growth or marketing as well. A summary of strategies is listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of business strategies developed

Marketing strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create awareness through: Social media marketing: creating communities on Facebook, Twitter education linked marketing, weekly competition to name that week's rescue cats, photo contest and viral video, iIncrease awareness of stray cat problems. 2. Develop the customer base email list, create cat-care community 3. Build customer loyalty, pass on cat lover stories
Branding Strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Positioning: ARRNZ positioning itself as a SE with charity status that provides services to make people and cats happy 2. Tag Line: Keep calm, cuddla cats 3. Encourage responsible pet ownership 4. ABNZ series products 5. ABNZ certification and licensing 6. ABNZ publication 7. ABNZ cat services
Growth strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transition from a donation funded charity to sustainable SE while still maintain charity status 2. Give priority to social wealth creation versus economic wealth creation 3. Economic wealth is necessary to ensure the sustainability of the initiative and financial self-sufficiency
Financial Sustainable strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Donation collection – cash, cat related goods, re-sellable household goods 2. Selling donated goods – cat related goods, re-sellable household goods 3. Cat fair day 4. In-house cat sitting and grooming services 5. Selling branded/certified goods and publications
Social sustainable strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrate with other community organisations (ie. Otago Community services, council, university, community news and publications) 2. Partner with local cooperation (i.e. banks, restaurants, cafes, technology companies, etc.) 3. Utilise intelligence at the university to improve marketing and management processes 4. Utilise technologies of Otago university to improve trapping and neutering skills 5. Utilise university students for volunteer workers

II. BACKGROUND

While non-profit organizations such as ABNZ serve the community in non-replaceable ways, their heavy reliance on philanthropic donations is increasingly not sustainable (Stecker, 2014). The National Council of Non-profits (US) states that the phrase “sustainability” for charitable non-profit organisations is commonly used to describe a non-profit that is able to sustain itself over the long term, perpetuating its ability to fulfill its mission. Sustainability in the non-profit context includes the concepts of financial sustainability, as well as leadership succession planning, adaptability and strategic planning. Stecker (2014) argued that “incorporating commercial strategies and activities, such as strategically selling goods and services, embracing a fee-for-service approach, or founding a separate commercial for-profit enterprise or hybrid business, may provide new types of revenue streams that will sustain a successful non-profit in the future.”

ABNZ is a reasonably new charitable trust and it is currently facing difficulties in sustaining its ability to provide its services. The major part of ABNZ's income stream for the last 18 months has been from donations. The current fee-for-service approach in ABNZ includes “Cuddle Fix” every Wednesday during university term time and street party events. The trust has not yet extended its revenue earning offerings and has not developed a trading side to the business. The organization is obviously falling into the not sustainable categories as defined by Stecker.

Further pressure on ABNZ's ability to achieve sustainability is caused by its reliance on volunteers. This is creating an unstable situation in the organization. Statistics NZ (2013) showed that the time volunteers spent working for non-profits dropped 42 percent, from 270 million hours in 2004 to 157 million hours in 2013. “These findings reflect a global trend, with other countries also showing reductions in time spent volunteering.” Volunteers' decreasing availability for charity work in NZ and worldwide will result in long term unsustainability within ABNZ. Appendix A is a SWOT analysis to support this conclusion.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This case study, first followed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) procedure (Figure 1) to understand the organizational characteristics. Based on the interview data and the entire set of information provided by the organization, the research applied a business model canvas specifically designed for social charity business development. The final report was established after two rounds of discussion with the leader of the organization.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Knowledge: Our competitors are pushing boxes. But we know systems, networks, programming, and data management. ● Relationship selling: We get to know our customers, one by one. ● History: We've been in our town forever. We have the loyalty of customers and vendors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Price and volume: The major stores pushing boxes can afford to sell for less. ● Brand power: We can't match the competitor's full-page advertising in the Sunday paper. We don't have the national brand name.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Training: The major stores don't provide training, but as systems become more complex, training is in greater demand. ● Service: As our target market needs more service, our competitors are less likely than ever to provide it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The larger price-oriented store: When they advertise low prices in the newspaper, our customers think we are not giving them good value. ● The computer as appliance. Volume buying of computers as products in boxes. People think they need our services less.

Figure 1. SWOT procedure

IV. RESULTS

Marketing Strategy

To overcome the financial unsustainability issue of non-profit organizations, Lyons, Townsend, Sullivan, and Drago (2010) suggested that Social Enterprise (SE) activities offer non-profit organizations the opportunity to generate earned income which in turn will provide consistent cash flow to further the mission of the organization. SE activities can be used to enhance the brand/reputation of the organization. A direct benefit of SE activities for non-profit organizations such as ABNZ, can be the improvement of the management and overall business capacity of the organization.

Marketing is the process by which SEs combine a range of strategies that work together to create awareness and generate a positive image by communicating effectively with targeted groups of audiences. ABNZ's groups of audiences are different people who are directly linked with stray cat issues such as university students, financially disadvantaged people and enthusiastic animal lovers. Based on this definition, marketing provides the structure and discipline for continuously demonstrating the groups' value to the community it serves. Furthermore, organisations that embrace a formal marketing process have a distinct advantage over those organisations that prefer to take a less structured, less organised approach. A marketing plan is like a blue print, or a road map, for guidance in gaining the credibility and loyalty they need to succeed at their mission. Regardless of the size and budget of the group, those non-profit SEs that clearly and consistently share their vision with the community, enjoy the following added benefits: 1) gaining credibility while building loyalty, 2) distinguishing the organization's vision, mission and value from others, 3) enhancing the organisation's reputation as a leader in the community, 4) building membership/gaining volunteers more quickly and 5) having more opportunities to strengthen existing donor relations and build new ones.

Day (2007) recommended validating the market and market strategies by three questions: Is it real? Can we win? Is it worth doing? Firstly, the stray cat problem does exist in Dunedin, especially in the North Dunedin area. For the past decade, the Otago SPCA has spent about \$15,000 a year of council grant money on trapping and euthanising feral cats in the campus area (Munro, 2012). Dunedin council environmental health and animal control team leader Ros MacGill, said that her staff responded to complaints as they arose, but that there was no funding for an active control program. Even though the council is talking about the feral cat issue, the problem of stray cats or unsocialised cats is closely related to it.

Secondly, on one hand, the problem can be fixed through Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and education which is what ABNZ is aiming for. Research from Alley Cat Allies (2012) shows that TNR is successfully

practised in hundreds of communities in the US in every landscape and setting. Cats are humanely trapped and taken to a veterinarian to be neutered and vaccinated. After recovery, the cats are returned to their home – their colony – outdoors. Kittens and cats who are friendly and socialized to people may be adopted into homes. TNR is the humane and effective approach for stray and feral cats. Studies show that TNR improves the lives of feral cats, improves their relationships with the people who live near them and decreases the size of colonies over time. On the other hand, ABNZ needs to have income streams or financial sustainability to continually undertake its social-value-added activities. The suggestion is that operating ABNZ as a SE with charitable status will assist it in overcoming its probable financial unsustainability.

Finally, ABNZ’s activities have obvious social value and are worth doing. Non-pet cats kill wildlife, are unhealthy and potentially spread and carry disease, both feline and human. Countrywide, New Zealand has an estimated 2.5 million feral cats, but it is difficult to estimate the number of stray cats (Weber, 2016). Controlling the amount of unsocialised cats through TNR will improve the environment of the neighbourhood. It will improve cats’ lives by 1) relieving the constant stresses of mating and pregnancy, 2) mating behaviors such as roaming, yowling, spraying and fighting will cease, 3) cats’ physical health will improve, 4) cats are vaccinated against rabies and 5) cats live longer, healthier lives (Alley Cat Allies, 2012).

Developing messages that connect ABNZ and its audiences is the key for a successful marketing strategy implementation. The value proposition of ABNZ is defined as “better community through better cat treatment” (Table 2). This value proposition features two senses: 1) the real need is coming from the community and the neighbourhoods will be beneficiaries, it is the responsibility of the whole community; 2) cats should be treated well in a community, the traditional way of euthanising feral cats needs to be stopped. Then, ABNZ’s vision is to compassionately and responsibly create a more humane world for animals and by doing so improve neighbourhood environments. It foresees the capacity to envisage future market trends and plan accordingly. ABNZ’s mission is to engage the hearts, hands and minds of the community to help stray cats, then improve the quality of life in the community. It is a clear expression of their reason for existence. ABNZ’s core values are: 1) be good to animals. Act kindly and think progressively to improve the lives of animals, 2) partner with people. Harness the creativity and passion of people through collaboration and teamwork, and 3) lead responsibly with compassion. Inspire trust through leadership that balances the head and heart. Service recipient recognition is to discover to whom the ABNZ could provide the services. Constituencies should share the same vision and mission with ABNZ. When the needs are based upon constituents’ concerns and interests, there will be energy and resources to achieve shared goals. Activities must be consistent with ABNZ’s shared core values or there will be little chance of achieving satisfactory results. The ABNZ service recipients are:

- a) Geographical – Dunedin;
- b) Demographic – oldies, students, low-socioeconomic groups;
- c) Psychographics – enthusiastic cat lovers;
- d) Customer behavior – sensitive to the cost, sympathetic about cats.

Table 2. Business Model canvas analysis

Purpose Improve community standard by TNR and community education. Keep Dunedin cat problem under control.				
Problem Too many stray/feral cats No organization is working with unsocialised cats	Solution Transition from a donation funded charity to sustainable social enterprise while still maintaining charity status; Give priority to social wealth creation versus economic wealth creation.	Unique Value Proposition Better community through better cat treatment	Unfair Advantage Council and government regulations and policies IRD tax policy for trading income for social enterprise Volunteers availabilities, qualities and skills	Customer Segments Geography – Dunedin Demographic– oldies, students, low-socioeconomic groups Psychographics – Enthusiastic cat lovers Customer behaviour – Sensitive to the cost, sympathetic about cats.
	Key Metrics Donation collection – cash, cat related goods, re-sellable household goods Selling donated goods – cat related goods, re-sellable household goods Cat fair day In-house cat sitting and grooming service Selling branded/certified goods and publications		Channels Social media marketing: creating communities on Facebook and Twitter Education linked marketing Weekly competition to name that week’s rescue cats Photo contest and viral video	

<p>Cost Structure Premises renting Paid employees Administration expenses Operation cost</p>	<p>Financial Sustainability Donation collection – cash, cat related goods, re-sellable household goods Selling donated goods – cat related goods, re-sellable household goods Cat fair day In-house cat sitting and grooming service Selling branded/certified goods and publications</p>
	<p>Impact Community living standards will be improved (better community) Cats' life styles will be lifted (better cat treatment)</p>

Three important strategic marketing plans are 1) creating awareness, 2) developing the customer base and 3) building customer loyalty. Firstly, creating awareness will be achieved by social media marketing, creating communities on Facebook and Twitter, education linked marketing, weekly competitions to name that week's rescue cats and photo contests and viral videos to increase the awareness of stray cat problems. Secondly, developing the customer base will be realized by creating an email list and cat-caring communities. Finally, building customer loyalty will be accomplished by passing on cat life-changing stories to the whole community. Stories help audiences quickly become engaged with the ABNZ brand.

In addition to these three main strategic plans, the following elements such as media (press releases, interviews, editorial briefings, etc.); newsletters (e-version and print-version, frequency, etc.); events; websites (content rich, regular updates, design, etc.); person-to-person (speaking points, develop communication skills, etc.); and collateral materials (logo, slogan, letterhead, brochures, posters, etc.) also need to be considered.

Branding Strategy

ABNZ has to position itself as a SE with charitable status that provides services to make cats' lives and the community better. It is recommended that four strategic activities to brand ABNZ in a SE way are adopted in addition to its current activities. The following four branding strategies are put into place based on Stecker's (2014) recommended five viable business models for non-profit organisations.

Firstly, creating a range of ABNZ products is a practical technique to build up an income stream quickly. These products can include small donated or trading products such as hats, socks, scarfs and other inexpensive goods. These can be externally sourced from appropriate manufacturers. The important process is to add the ABNZ mark or logo onto the products to mobilise the brand. It is essential to keep the products affordable, small and giftable when sourcing these products from manufactures. The main purpose of creating the range of products is to build the brand by ensuring that ABNZ images are displayed on the products.

Secondly, licensing and providing certification to cat-related products on the market is a technique to promote the ABNZ brand efficiently. There are many cats' accessories (bowls, toys, traps, bags, etc.) which can be licensed by ABNZ to producers who want to be endorsed in the Dunedin market, and later, as the brand develops, nationally. ABNZ should only sell the products that are certified by itself. Licensing the ABNZ brand to be used on some products is another effective tactic to promote the brand and gain income. This value co-creation commitment will create a win-win environment for ABNZ and cat accessory producers.

Thirdly, building up a range of ABNZ publications is a practical approach to not only create an income stream, but also achieve the mission of educating the public. The publications portfolio includes calendars, cards, cat books for children and adults. From a content perspective, it can include, but not be limited to, cat caring, playing with cats, cat emergency, neighborhood cats and others. Educational content such as looking after the community needs to be embedded into the publications at the same time.

Finally, ABNZ can provide cat services such as in-house cat sitting, in-house cat grooming, de-sexing, rehoming and other services to the community. An excellent example in the UK was to introduce a phone service: pet lovers can request a motivational call from their cat expert on receipt of a request with details of the pet and owner. Through this service, the service provider gathers data for free and data is capital, particularly in this big data era and this data can then be monetised.

Growth Strategy

Both marketing and branding strategies discussed above are based on the concept of SE. Operating ABNZ as a SE with charitable status is a key growth strategy. Figure 2. is a proposed sustainable ABNZ business operation model. SE is a different way of doing business from accepted commercial norms and is both vibrant and developing. A SE is a business that trades for a social purpose. The social aims of the business are of equal importance to its commercial activities. Like any business, a SE focuses on generating an income through the sale of goods and services to a market to produce added value and profits. A SE uses its profits to enhance its social, community and environmental aims.

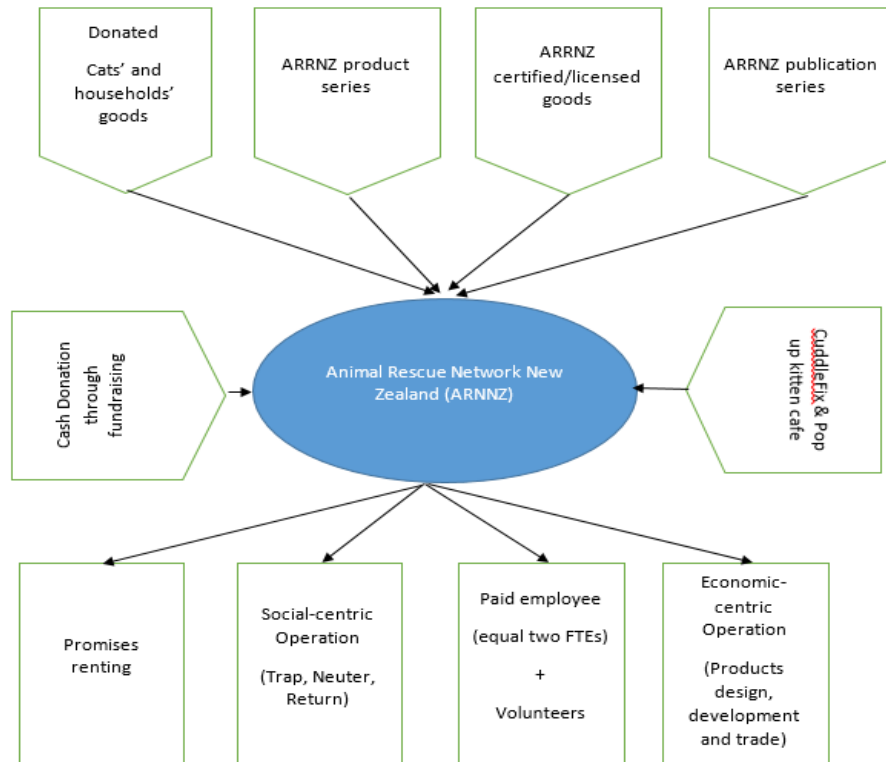


Figure 2. Proposed sustainable ABNZ business operation model

Maintaining an appropriate balance between social impact and financial viability is absolutely necessary in social entrepreneurship. The main difference from conventional entrepreneurs is the priority given to social wealth creation versus economic wealth creation (Gray, 2016). So ABNZ should continuously focus on trapping, neutering and re-homing kittens as this is the social impact and benefit that it is targeting. In addition to social wealth, economic wealth is ‘necessary to ensure the sustainability of the initiative and financial self-sufficiency’ (Mair & Marti 2006), therefore ABNZ also needs to be financially independent, enabling its survival in the marketplace.

Many financial growth strategies were discussed in the branding strategy section above. These strategies include selling donated and trading cat related goods, trading donated re-salable household goods in the immediate term; creating and trading ABNZ product series in short and long term; selling branded/certified goods and publications and in-house cat sitting and grooming services in short and long term. ABNZ also needs to carry on with its current activities including donation collection, cat fair day, cuddlefix and street parties. Maintaining a positive current cash flow is the foundation for its survival and SE activities will be the groundwork for long term sustainability.

In addition to financial sustainability growth, social sustainability growth is equally important to ABNZ. They need to interact with social capital extensively: 1) integrate with other community organisations (i.e. Otago Community services, council, university, community news and publication); 2) partner in cooperation with local enterprises (i.e. banks, restaurants, cafe, technology companies, etc.); 3) utilise intelligence at the university to improve marketing and management processes; 4) utilise technologies of Otago university to improve trapping and neutering skills and 5) utilise university students as volunteer workers. There are a few obvious advantages from interacting with local social capital: Firstly, with large corporate bodies, which are keen to quantify their CSR efforts; Secondly, with the community and social partners, who provide employment and training for disadvantaged people and a route to relatively risk free growth; and thirdly, with government and social institutions, which provide special concessions and support. The strong economic foundations of the model provide sustainability for the environmental and social objectives of the organization (Dixon & Clifford, 2007).

The stray/feral cat problem will exist long term. With ABNZ’s effort, the problem will be at a controllable level in Dunedin, particularly in the university area. According to social entrepreneurial theory, the need will last for a long period of time. In other words, the foundation of the business requirements is the feature of “sustainability”. Meantime, the issues providing assistance to low-socioeconomic families and enthusiastic cat lovers will still need to be addressed. It is unnecessary for ABNZ to diversify their focus.

In addition to the need from the current service recipients (TNR) is the general need for cat related products. Hurwood's (2015) figure shows that the South Island was found to be above average in its love of pets, with 47% of both Canterbury and the rest of South Island owning a cat compared to the 45% average in NZ, and 34% and 36% respectively owning a dog, compared to the 31% average in NZ. All suggested products, services and publications as the business focus of the SE venture will have supportive long term markets. These long term market opportunities will assist the financial sustainability of ABNZ.

Another important element for ABNZ's sustainability is the usage of local social capital. Local communities including city council, businesses and non-profit organisations can be worked with interactively for the long term because ABNZ is the only local charity looking after unsocialised cats. More importantly, all these local communities are sharing one goal: the development of a better community, which helps ABNZ to achieve its goal of social sustainability.

Risk assessment

A SE venture requires ABNZ to conduct thorough research and plan for potential challenges as well as apply good business practices. As in any activity, there is an element of risk. Potential challenges to ABNZ when engaging in SE activities include, but are not limited to, mission creep, IRD limitation on earnings, government regulations changing and the availability of volunteers in the organization. SWOT analysis in Table 1 details these risks.

Table 1. Result of SWOT assessments

Strengths	Opportunities
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Passion of the organisation 2. Quality volunteers 3. Strong relationship with vets 4. University of Otago is inside of community 5. No other organisations in Dunedin working with unsocialised cats. Door to door services 6. Interactive call services 7. Provide superior customer services 8. Provide complete cat goods 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Problems exist in north Dunedin 2. Problems exist in low-socioeconomic groups 3. Similar issues exist in communities globally 4. The problem will exist long term 5. Build a solid customer base 6. More pet ownership
Weaknesses	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Public misunderstands organisation mission 2. Lack of financial resources and purely rely on donations 3. No brand image (i.e. cat car) 4. No premises 5. Small client base 6. Currently no brand recognition 7. Lack of product designer, writer and trained groomers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No secured financial sustainability 2. Government regulation for cats' treatment 3. People release trapped cats 4. Limited rehoming opportunities 5. Unsecured volunteer workers 6. Economic downturn 7. Competitors from other pet salons

The relationship a SE venture has to the mission of the ABNZ is critical. The mission of the ABNZ reinforces the reason for the charitable status existence. Ideally, the SE venture should grow at the same rate as the organization thus avoiding mission creep. If an organization starts to lose its direction, and all of the organization's resources are involved with the SE venture, the organization is no longer fulfilling its mission. Mission creep can be subtle and grow over a period of time. SE activity should not take away from the mission of the organization; rather it should enhance it.

IRD limits excessive earnings from SE activities related to the non-profit's purpose and taxes on earnings unrelated to the non-profit's purpose. The percentage of earnings a charity can gain through a SE is not carved in stone. The relationship of the SE venture to the mission of the ABNZ can impact on the range of allowable earnings explicitly or implicitly. Secondary research through the IRD website revealed that charitable organisations are liable for income tax if they 1) operate without written rules, constitution or trust deed; 2) operate under a set of rules, a constitution or a trust deed that does not meet the requirements for an income tax exemption; 3) use business income for charitable purposes outside New Zealand and 4) are not registered by Charities Services.

Government and council regulations or policies changing is definitely a risk to ABNZ. These changes can be, for example, regulating that the stray/feral cat problems are landlords' (house owners) responsibilities, then ABNZ will lose the community needs. The Government can also change the law about animal treatment that will impact on ABNZ's current operation. Another potential business risk is that one day Dunedin council takes all responsibility for the stray/feral cat problem.

V. CONCLUSION

This research successfully classified the social organization development strategies into three groups: marketing, branding, and growth strategies. Sustainable development analysis and risk management were also included in the study.

It probably was only a matter of time before social entrepreneurs disrupted the non-profit sector (Stecker, 2014). Therefore, for ABNZ to be running as a SE whilst retaining charitable status is best for short and long term sustainability. As designed, it will take both trading for-profit and tax policy advantages for distribution for the benefit of the social needs in its mission.

ABNZ should continuously focus on solving the stray/feral cat problem through TNR and community education in Dunedin. The customer segments include oldies, students, low-socioeconomic and cost sensitive groups of people. ABNZ need to pass its value proposition “better community through better cat treatment” to the community.

The balanced financial sustainability can be achieved by 1) creating and selling ABNZ products, 2) licensing, certifying and selling cat products, 3) building up a ABNZ publications portfolio and selling them either online or on site, 4) selling donated goods and 5) keep collecting donations through events. Obviously, ABNZ needs to rent premises for these activities but the cost will be recovered from trading.

ABNZ also needs to develop and use the social capital within local communities. The local community will provide all the different required resources to ABNZ including management knowledge, technology, volunteers, vets, donations and others. The community issues are linked to each other; they can only be solved with the cooperation of whole community.

To close the discussion, based on the analysis of all this strategies and assessments, the essay concludes that the long term sustainability of ABNZ can be achieved with some risks.

Although this research was conducted a few years back, the research method and results are still valid to social organization developments since the problems they are facing have not changed. It theoretically contributes to social entrepreneurship literature and has implications for institutional agencies. The research has direct help to higher degree research students and can also be a case study example for education providers.

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