



*using the power of film to educate, entertain and inspire*

“The Devil’s Adman”  
by Philip Van Munching  
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A friend of mine just watched a consulting assignment from a successful marketer dry up. He’d been overseeing some charitable work for the company, and with the economy down; they’ve cut what they consider non-essential stuff. “Good deeds are great when you can afford them,” noted another friend, ruefully.

Here’s my question: When can we *not* afford them?

I recognize that the Dow has dropped, and that companies exist to enrich shareholders. But isn’t this exactly the time to underscore the importance of a commitment to charity? At a time when there isn’t much to cheer about, wouldn’t a corporate pledge to help others give employees something to point to with pride? Wouldn’t it bring great PR, right about now?

It’s frustrating to think that marketers, who spend their days toiling to understand human beings so they can sell things to them, are cutting back on their efforts to use those skills in more charitable ways. Marketers, more than folks in any other profession, are uniquely equipped to see the problems facing people all over the world and to find creative ways of helping.

Which brings me to my pitch.

Tonight, in refugee camps from northern Kenya to Afghanistan, tens of thousands of displaced people are watching movies projected onto portable screens. Aside from relieving the soul-crushing monotony and anxiety that come from living under poor, uncertain conditions, these refugees are learning. They’re learning about health and hygiene, conflict resolution, and literacy. They’re learning how to avoid landmines.

They’re learning all of these things thanks to FilmAid International, founded in 1999 as a response to the explosion of Kosovar refugees. It has expanded to east Africa, where the Kakuma refugee camp houses more than 80,000 people, some of whom have lived in

camps for a decade. Last year, FilmAid began a pilot program in Afghanistan, where Taliban restrictions meant not only that children displaced by the war had never seen a movie, some had never even heard *singing*. Imagine seeing *The Wizard of Oz* for the first time after living under those conditions.

It's easy to be dismissive of what FilmAid does. What importance can movies have in a refugee camp, when food, shelter, and medical care are staggering propositions in and of themselves? Plenty, according to the people who work in the camps, and for humanitarian organizations like Doctors of the World. As a member of that group was quoted in the Los Angeles *Times*, "Movies can provide a way to escape a narrow, painful daily existence." In camps that are set up to feed, house, and take care of thousands of bodies, FilmAid exists to help with undernourished hearts and minds.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that thanks to FilmAid, crime drops in the camps on screening nights. Refugees who once refused even to acknowledge health issues like HIV/AIDS are now beginning to talk about prevention. Mothers whose depression kept them from physically caring for their children are becoming better equipped emotionally to do so. These are just a few of the immediate improvements FilmAid is making in the lives of refugees.

I'll admit a frustration here, faithful reader. I have only 700 words on this page, and 7,000 wouldn't do justice to the work done by FilmAid. I have enough space left to tell you that – like so many other worthy groups – FilmAid has been left in the lurch by the recession. Corporate sponsorships haven't been forthcoming; individual donations are harder to come by. Though keeping the Kakuma program running for a year costs only about an eighth as much as one spot on the Super Bowl, there's some question as to how long FilmAid will be able to do so.

Which is where you come in, I hope. FilmAid ([www.filmaidinternational.org](http://www.filmaidinternational.org)) needs your money and your equipment. Slightly out-of-date laptops, video cameras you can part with...they'll gratefully accept it all, especially if it comes with a check attached. There are some 35 million refugees in the world tonight. They aren't in your target, you can't focus-group them, they can't even really be considered consumers. But they're people. You and your company can help them.

You can still afford good deeds.