

# Media Outreach Strategy for SoapBox Soaps



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## *Abstract*

This Capstone serves as a practical application of public communications skills through the creation of a media placement strategy for the real world client SoapBox Soaps. First, it analyzes the strategic position of SoapBox Soaps and from this analysis extrapolates a target audience and pitch strategy comprised of several storylines. Second, it uses the strategic analysis alongside extensive client interviews to inform a feature piece about the client to be published in relevant media outlets. Third, it uses the target audience to construct a media list of potential media outlets. Finally, it uses the strategic analysis and storylines from the feature story to create pitch letters targeted towards the outlets found in the media list. Through these methods, the Capstone gains media placements and attention for the client company.

## ***Strategic Plan***

### **Overview**

This semester for PR Portfolio, I worked as part of a group for the client SoapBox Soaps. SoapBox sells bars of soap, but with a social mission. For every bar purchased at \$5.00, the company donates another of the exact same type of bar to people in need, both domestically and abroad. Two American University graduates founded the company three years ago as a labor of love. Now through their hard work, they have expanded their venture into a company sold in over 200 Whole Foods stores and rapidly expanding. Simply put, the mission of SoapBox Soaps is to use soap to improve the world. The company says more than 3,000 children's lives could be saved everyday if they just had access to soap and clean water.

The PR Portofolio group's work included extending SoapBox's reach on a college campus, improving their social media presence, and providing media outreach services. The media outreach efforts primarily pursued the story angle of SoapBox Soaps' position as an organic product with a social cause. I identified early on the possibility of supplementing the media pitch strategy of the group with another angle focusing more on the role of the young American University graduates as entrepreneurs.

To conduct a supplementary media pitch, I created a project composed of several parts. To begin with, I created a competitive analysis of SoapBox Soaps current market position to identify company strengths and storylines that would be compelling to the media. I then took this information and applied it to interviews, an article, a media list, and

a series of pitch letters. The end result can earn more media attention for SoapBox Soaps and served as a practical application of the skills I learned in the PR Portfolio course.

### Strategic Analysis

The first step in creating a successful media pitch was understanding the positioning of SoapBox Soaps through a strategic analysis. I looked at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the company in addition to analyzing their target audience.

From this information I extrapolated storyline possibilities.

### SWOT Analysis

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Product is all-natural and organic</li> <li>• Company principals are young and enthusiastic about their work</li> <li>• Helping a social mission makes consumers feel good about their purchase</li> <li>• Appearance on <i>The Today Show</i> is strong hook for media</li> <li>• Aid is conducted both abroad and domestically</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Company is still small and operates on a small budget</li> <li>• Youth of principals</li> <li>• Product only shelved in certain regions of the United States</li> <li>• Limited manpower</li> <li>• Viewed more as a luxury good than a practical everyday purchase</li> <li>• Photos and videos rarely return from aid missions</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can blend messages as a great product, but also a product with a cause</li> <li>• Rapid expansions to other parts of the country</li> <li>• Increase aid tracking and show direct results from international aid</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher price than competitors like Dove cause some people to shy away</li> <li>• Has competitors in both the health and beauty and social cause spaces</li> <li>• Principals might not be taken seriously because of age and experience</li> </ul>

### Target Audience

The current target audience for SoapBox Soaps is women interested in social causes and women between 25-55 years of age. Women make the majority of the decisions related to beauty product purchases. The company also claims that women are more likely to be

involved with social causes. This target audience seems appropriate for PR and advertising purposes.

### *Possible Storylines*

From the SWOT analysis and target audience I identified three major storylines about SoapBox Soaps that could be of interest to the media: the company's social cause, the product's value in the health and beauty sector, and the entrepreneurial story.

The first storyline about the social cause would best be placed on blogs with a strong female readership like mommy blogs, in local papers and on news stations in the places where SoapBox donates to shelters and charities, and to some national publications catering primarily to women such as Women's Health magazine which also covers some health/beauty products. I chose to not focus heavily on this angle because of its prevalence in media pitches generated by the rest of the PR group.

The second storyline about the product's inherent value as primarily manufactured in the U.S. and its use of organic materials could be pitched to outlets interested in natural health/beauty products. I chose to mention this briefly in my deliverables, but ultimately decided the organic space was too crowded to have this serve as a standalone story angle.

The final storyline about young entrepreneurs could be pitched to business blogs, but also more nationally known publications such as Forbes. This story angle about young men starting their own business seemed powerful in the current economy and underserved in our PR Portfolio project. I strategically decided to focus on this angle--but not by itself. Pitching the startup side of SoapBox as the primary storyline works best when also including information about the organic product and the social cause.

**Tactics**

Knowing a storyline, I split the media strategy into two tactics: the creation of a long-form feature story about the SoapBox Soaps principals and media pitches informed by this feature and the strategic analysis.

*Feature Story*

To write the feature story, I first conducted extensive interviews with SoapBox CEO and co-founder David Simnick and SoapBox President and COO Daniel Doll. The interviews began with questions about the early stages of the company and focused at first on how they took SoapBox from an idea to placement in Whole Foods stores. After establishing a timeline, the interviews then focused more on the challenges and successes inherent in the creation of a company from just an idea before finally turning to their advice for other entrepreneurs.

After conducting interviews I wrote the feature article with two main goals: to tell the story of two young entrepreneurs starting their own company and to serve as a guide with helpful advice for other interested entrepreneurs. Informed by the strategic analysis, I also included information about the organic nature of the product and the social mission to create a more compelling read.

The end goal of this article is have it published in both media outlets focusing on business and media outlets read by SoapBox Soaps' target audience of women between 25-55 years old. Magazines with national circulation, print publications local to the D.C. area such as *The Washington Post* and blogs are all targets.

*Media List/Pitch Letters*

In addition to attempting to gain media placements through my own feature story, I also focused on pitching the media to create stories of their own. Based on the strategic analysis, I constructed a media list of relevant contacts and outlets. Because SoapBox Soaps is a local company, part of the media list centered around the major local news outlets including the local TV network affiliates and The Washington Post. I also added contacts from national publications focusing on business such as the magazines *Fast Company* and *Inc. Magazine*. Finally, I added contacts from blogs covering socially conscious companies and philanthropic topics that might be interested in the SoapBox Soaps business model.

To gain placements at each outlet on the media list, I constructed a series of pitch letters. A generic template served as the basis for all of the pitch letters. I sent this generic template to the assignment desks of non-specific media contacts. For specific contacts, I personalized a section of each letter to make the pitch more appealing. For this personalization, I researched the previous work of each author and related SoapBox Soap's story to their prior articles. Each pitch letter is attached to this Capstone presentation.

**Conclusion**

The two-pronged approach I took will earn media placements for SoapBox Soaps, whether through my own feature article or the strategic media pitching. Informed by the strategic analysis, the storyline of two young entrepreneurs trying to save the world with bars of soap will resonate with the public and help SoapBox Soaps continue to grow.

## ***Saving The World With Soap***

David Simnick stands behind a table in a Whole Foods grocery store in a pair of jeans and a screen-printed T-shirt. He calls out to browsing shoppers to give his product—a bar of organic soap—a try. He's so excited to be standing in this store promoting soap that he's practically throwing it into passing carts. Because unlike the woman a few aisles over, who is offering up samples of small cheese wedges, he isn't just here to work a shift and collect a paycheck. He's standing in this grocery store all day long to make a difference.



**SoapBox Soaps CEO David Simnick in a Whole Foods store with a customer.**

Simnick, 25, is the CEO and Co-founder of a Rockville, Maryland based start-up called SoapBox Soaps. Founded in 2009, SoapBox is part of a growing movement of companies with a social mission. For every bar of soap it sells, SoapBox donates the same type of bar to people in need around the world from Africa

to your neighborhood homeless shelter. Why soap? Simnick says that more than 3,000 lives can be saved daily by giving people the chance to prevent the spread of infection with soap and clean water.

The model is simple. SoapBox is currently available in more than 200 Whole Foods stores in the Eastern and Southern United States with more partnerships on the way. With each expansion, SoapBox has the chance to sell and thus, donate more. Eventually, SoapBox



wants to sell and donate so much soap that it can eliminate world hygiene problems and make its donation model unnecessary. Big dreams.

Watching Simnick working toward his vision behind the table, it's hard to imagine him as anything other than an entrepreneur. The long hours, most of the time arriving at the office around 8:00 AM and staying until after 10:00 PM, the freedom, and the sense of purpose seem to suit him. He admits that he's liked starting things from a young age. His first business venture was a newspaper that he wrote, published and sold door-to-door in the 4th grade. "It was terrible writing," Simnick said, "Everything was misspelled and grammatically incorrect. We printed it out on the printer paper with perforated edges. That's how we started."

From humble entrepreneurial beginnings, the idea for SoapBox came many years later and it almost didn't happen at all. After graduating from American University in Washington, D.C., Simnick took up work as a sub-contractor for USAID. He realized the job was not suited for him within a week. Seeking a challenge, he was days away from signing final papers to join the US Marine Corps, when a friend offered him a position at a start-up called Grouper Eye. The company eventually failed, and Simnick moved on to other work, but it gave him a insatiable taste of entrepreneurship.

In 2009, Simnick came up with *the* idea. He called up his boyhood friend Eric Vong and told him they were going to make a philanthropic soap company. Vong hung up the phone on him, Simnick persisted. He called him back to explain that he was serious. Soon after, Simnick made the first batch of soap in his basement from a hastily Googled recipe. Soon, he was selling it out of the back of his car.

The project started to gain steam when Simnick audited a course on Entrepreneurship at AU. In the class he met Daniel Doll, 25, now President and COO of SoapBox, who helped him write his first business plan. The pair worked on SoapBox as a labor of love in their free time, while still working full-time jobs. Simnick joined Teach for America, while Doll held a position at IBM.

They structured the company as an LLC. At first, they sold their soap exclusively online. At this point, SoapBox began to eat into personal time on nights and on weekends. It took up so much time that they began to consider quitting their full-time jobs. When SoapBox got shelved in its first Whole Foods store, Simnick and Doll took the plunge.

Asked about why he decided to trade a full-time position for uncertainty, Simnick said, "I've always believed you should find what you love to do. There are so many people who get out of college and they immediately want to start their life, and they take the first job that says yes to them. And before they know it, they're building a career out of necessity instead of want or desire. I always promised myself I would never be that person."



SoapBox CEO David Simnick

Making the dream of starting a business a reality came with challenges. According to Simnick, the most difficult thing about starting a company is that, "you don't know what you don't

know." In other words, entering an industry—in this case health and beauty—requires immense amounts of technical knowledge to perform even basic tasks.

***"I've always believed you should find what you love to do."***

How could a recent college graduate already understand the logistics of a national distribution network, or the various oil combinations possible in soap, or even that there was a need to know these things? For SoapBox Soaps, the answer came in two forms: surrounding the company with experienced advisors and quick failure. The former seems obvious. Experienced business and industry professions can lend their expertise in exchange for equity. They can alert a company to otherwise unknown pitfalls that cost time and money.



SoapBox President Daniel Doll

***"...you kind of work that much harder, to make sure that you create your own support system because nothing else is there to support you."***

The latter seems counterintuitive. Why would a company want to fail? In Simnick's view, the faster a company can fail, the faster it can do something the right way and achieve success. In his words, "You have to fail fast. You have to go out there and do it. At the end of the day, you just have to make a decision and run with it."

Lacking helpful knowledge about business management and soap was not even the first challenge SoapBox faced. Finding time to pursue the project while maintaining full-time jobs, and eventually giving up those jobs to allow more time to work on the project, was a daunting prospect for both Simnick and Doll. Worse, it also meant cutting away their financial safety net. That worry stalled the progress of SoapBox, but both principals agree that had they known what they know today, they would have started the company sooner.

And when the day finally came, cutting ties to old jobs and financial stability propelled the success of the company. "When you allow yourself the opportunity

to spend all of your time thinking about it," Doll said, " and when you engage the primal instinct to make something work when you have nothing else, you kind of work that much harder, to make sure that you create your own support system because nothing else is there to support you."

All of this hard work to overcome the challenges of building a business out of nothing has not been without reward. Doll and Simnick have received some life-changing experiences in return. For both, the chance to help people in need of basic hygiene help has been uplifting.

This enriching feeling was never greater than when the first shipment of SoapBox Soaps arrived in Kenya and Uganda. When the photos and videos returned of children using the soap to wash themselves, Simnick was amazed. His idea to provide aid to people in need, phoned to a friend late at night, was having a real impact on the world just as he envisioned.

In the future, Simnick and Doll want to continue expanding SoapBox to conduct even more of these aid missions. In the next five years, they hope to transform from a specialty product sold in upscale groceries like Whole Foods into a household name, which is sold in tens of thousands of stores.

At the same time, they want to expand their aid effort beyond just giving bars of soap in a buy one, give one model. Simnick acknowledges that these aid models can be dangerous if not administered properly because free products flooding a developing market can crush



**Above: Children in Uganda receive bars of SoapBox Soaps. Below: Children in Haiti display thank you signs.**

local competition and stunt economic development. Although SoapBox strives to only donate its products to areas that do not have the means to produce their own soap, Simnick admits their aid model is a work in progress.

Both men say they will strive to make a more perfect aid model with future liquid soap offerings. For each bottle sold, SoapBox will donate a month's supply of clean water.

Donating both soap and water allows Soapbox to provide the complementary components necessary to improve hygiene in developing countries. Doll and Simnick do not want this to be the last time they change their aid model either. They know they can always improve and find new problems to solve.

For SoapBox Soaps, the secret to eventually becoming a household name, expanding into countless stores, and saving lives worldwide is not really a secret at all. They plan on accomplishing their goals by following the advice they share with other entrepreneurs who are just starting out—it is all about drive.

"It's 95% about your hustle and the relationships you create," Doll said. "Create these relationships and find a way to be mutually beneficial to people that are going to help you out."

"Be relentless," Simnick added. "Consistently build that pie. Get more stores. Sell faster in those stores. Make better profit margins. Do more aid missions. Do better aid. Do smarter aid. That's what it's all about."

*Check out SoapBox Soaps online at [www.soapboxsoaps.com](http://www.soapboxsoaps.com) and find them on social media at [@soapboxsoaps](https://www.facebook.com/SoapBoxSoaps) and [facebook.com/SoapBoxSoaps](https://www.facebook.com/SoapBoxSoaps)*

# Media List



Organization	Name	Title	Email	Phone	Description
<b>The Washington Post</b>	Ms. Mohana Ravindranath	Business Reporter	mohana.ravindranath@washpost.com	202-334-7320	Ravindranath is a reporter for On Small Business at The Washington Post covering Technology, Startup Business, and Media
<b>WAMU-Washington, DC</b>	Ms. Tayla Burney	Producer, The Kojo Nnamdi Show	tayla@wamu.org	202-885-1226	The Kojo Nnamdi show covers a variety of topics including community news, international news, national news, politics, public affairs, science, sports, local news, entertainment, and arts.
<b>Bloomberg News</b>	Mr. Drake Bennett	Staff Writer	dbennett35@bloomberg.net	212-617-4005	Bennett covers general business topics for Bloomberg News.
<b>Forbes Magazine</b>	Ms. Adriana Lopez	Associate Editor	alopez@fobes.com	-----	Lopez covers the topics of business and entrepreneurship for Forbes Magazine with specializations in startups, technology, film, and the entrepreneurial lifestyle.

<b>WTOP-FM</b>	Mr. Neal Augenstein	Reporter	naugenstein@wtopnews.com	202-438-9134	Augenstein is best known for his lifestyle and feature reports about D.C.
<b>The Socially Conscious Blog</b>	Mr. Valencio Cardoso	Creator & Contributor	valencio@gmail.com	-----	Cardoso covers the topics of education, corporate responsibility and social media.
<b>The Case Foundation Blog</b>	Ms. Allyson Burns	VP of Communications / Blogger	allysonb@casefoundation.org	202-467-2059	Burns blogs about philanthropy, charity, and social change.
<b>Bloomberg Businessweek Magazine</b>	Mr. Patrick Clark	Reporter	pclark55@bloomberg.net	212-318-2000	Clark covers the topics of small business and entrepreneurship for Businessweek.
<b>WUSA-TV</b>	-----	Assignment Desk	wusa-assignmentdesk@wusa9.com	202-895-5999	WUSA-TV is the local CBS affiliate on channel 9 for the greater Washington, D.C. area.
<b>WTTG-TV</b>	-----	Assignment Desk	wttg.desk@foxtv.com	202-244-5151	WTTG-TV is a FOX affiliate for the Washington, D.C. market.
<b>WRC-TV</b>	-----	Assignment Desk	news4pr@nbcuni.com	202-885-4000	WRC-TV is the local NBC affiliate for the Washington, D.C. market.

<b>WAMU-FM</b>	-----	News Department	news@wamu.org	202-885-1200	WAMU-FM is an independent NPR station owned by American University with a news and talk programming format.
<b>Fast Company</b>	-----	PR Desk	pr@fastcompany.com	212-389-5444	The publication's main themes are creativity in business, health, music, media, travel, philanthropy, and sports.
<b>Inc. Magazine</b>	-----	PR Desk	pitches@inc.com	212-389-5300	Publication topics include emerging business, sales and marketing, personnel management, and technology.
<b>Fortune Magazine</b>	-----	PR Desk	fortunemail_letters@fortunemail.com	212-522-1212	Publication specializes in stories about companies, business personalities, technology, managing, Wall Street, media, marketing, and politics.
<b>Newsweek</b>	-----	Editorial	editorial@newsweekdailybeast.com	-----	Topics include business, technology and consumer coverage in addition to general news.



To:  
Assignment Desk  
WUSA-TV, Washington, D.C.  
wusa-assignmentdesk@wusa9.com



Dear Assignment Desk Editor:

More than 3,000 lives could be saved every day with something as simple as access to bars of soap and clean water. Rockville, Maryland based SoapBox Soaps is a successful startup created and run by two 25 year-old American University graduates that solves this problem by empowering consumers to change the world with everyday purchases. For every bar of soap sold, SoapBox donates an equal bar to somebody in need both domestically and abroad.

The creation of SoapBox Soaps is an inspiring story about two young men taking an idea and turning it into a successful and impactful product. Co-founder David Simnick called a friend one night in 2009 to tell him an idea about a soap company with a social mission. Fast-forward to today and SoapBox products are sold nationally in hundreds of Whole Foods stores with more partnerships and thousands more stores to come by the end of this year.

They are also expanding their charitable efforts. SoapBox already donates bars in Haiti, Ecuador, Kenya, Thailand, Uganda, and shelters in the United States. The company will soon announce a partnership with the non-profit Charity Water to donate a month of clean water to somebody in need for each bottle sold of its liquid hand soap.

If you are interested in this story about young entrepreneurs and a company with a social cause, please contact me. The founders of the company are also available for an interview. I appreciate your consideration of SoapBox Soaps.

Sincerely,

Ryan Travitz

press@soapboxsoaps.com, 919-609-3220

To:  
Ms. Adriana Lopez  
Contributor  
Forbes Magazine  
alopez@forbes.com



Dear Ms. Lopez:

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I saw your articles about women entrepreneurs and pitch competitions and thought you might be interested in hearing the perspective of two young male entrepreneurs. Like the people pitching in your article, Simnick and his partner Daniel Doll are energetic, passionate, and have a great story to tell.

If you are interested in this story about young entrepreneurs and a company with a social cause, please contact me. The founders of the company are also available for an interview. I appreciate your consideration of SoapBox Soaps.

Sincerely,

Ryan Travitz

press@soapboxsoaps.com, 919-609-3220

To:  
Ms. Allyson Burns  
VP of Communications / Blogger  
The Case Foundation Blog  
allysonb@casefoundation.org



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I saw a recent post on The Case Foundation Blog about impact investing in the economies of developing countries and thought you might be interested in how a local company is also investing in aiding these economies. I also saw a partnership announcement with the Case Foundation and American University, the alma mater of these young entrepreneurs.

If you are interested in this story about young entrepreneurs and a company with a social cause, please contact me. The founders of the company are also available for an interview. I appreciate your consideration of SoapBox Soaps.

Sincerely,

Ryan Travitz

press@soapboxsoaps.com, 919-609-3220

To:  
Ms. Mohana Ravindranath  
Business Reporter  
The Washington Post  
mohana.ravindranath@washpost.com



Dear Ms. Ravindranath:

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I saw your article on April 29th about student entrepreneurs transitioning from school to start-ups and thought you might be interested in seeing this example of youth entrepreneurship. Like the young people in your previous article, Simnick and his partner Daniel Doll are energetic, passionate and have a great pitch.

If you are interested in this story about young entrepreneurs and a company with a social cause, please contact me. The founders of the company are also available for an interview. I appreciate your consideration of SoapBox Soaps.

Sincerely,

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press@soapboxsoaps.com, 919-609-3220

To:  
Mr. Neal Augenstein  
Reporter  
WTOP  
naugenstein@wtopnews.com



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I have heard your interesting feature segments about everything from go-go dancers to frying eggs on 100 degree car dashboards and thought you would be interested in an idea for another story with a local slant.

If you are interested in this story about young entrepreneurs and a company with a social cause, please contact me. The founders of the company are also available for an interview. I appreciate your consideration of SoapBox Soaps.

Sincerely,

Ryan Travitz

press@soapboxsoaps.com, 919-609-3220

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Mr. Patrick Clark  
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Bloomberg Businessweek Magazine  
pclark55@bloomberg.net



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I saw your recent article on a California Startup with the innovative idea of putting wine in kegs and thought you might be interested in another creative startup story idea. More than just innovating for profit, SoapBox Soaps is innovating for a social cause.

If you are interested in this story about young entrepreneurs and a company with a social cause, please contact me. The founders of the company are also available for an interview. I appreciate your consideration of SoapBox Soaps.

Sincerely,

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press@soapboxsoaps.com, 919-609-3220

To:  
Ms. Tayla Burney  
Producer, The Kojo Nnamdi Show  
WAMU  
tayla@wamu.org



Dear Ms. Burney:

More than 3,000 lives could be saved every day with something as simple as access to bars of soap and clean water. Rockville, Maryland based SoapBox Soaps is a successful startup created and run by two 25 year-old American University graduates that solves this problem by empowering consumers to change the world with everyday purchases. For every bar of soap sold, SoapBox donates an equal bar to somebody in need both domestically and abroad.

The creation of SoapBox Soaps is an inspiring story about two young men taking an idea and turning it into a successful and impactful product. Co-founder David Simnick called a friend one night in 2009 to tell him an idea about a soap company with a social mission.

Fast-forward to today and SoapBox products are sold nationally in hundreds of Whole Foods stores with more partnerships and thousands more stores to come by the end of this year. Due to their rapid rise, Soapbox's soap was recently featured on NBC's *The Today Show* in a segment about great products with a social cause.

They are also expanding their charitable efforts. SoapBox already donates bars in Haiti, Ecuador, Kenya, Thailand, Uganda, and shelters in the United States. The company will soon announce a partnership with the non-profit Charity Water to donate a month of clean water to somebody in need for each bottle sold of its liquid hand soap.

I have heard segments on The Kojo Nnamdi show profiling the achievements of local Washington area residents. Most recently the profiles of Grillmaster Steve Raichlen and pediatric virologist Dr. Deborah Persaud. I think profiling a passionate young entrepreneur like SoapBox founder David Simnick fits in well with this diverse group of achievers.

If you are interested in this story about young entrepreneurs and a company with a social cause, please contact me. The founders of the company are also available for an interview. I appreciate your consideration of SoapBox Soaps.

Sincerely,

Ryan Travitz

press@soapboxsoaps.com, 919-609-3220



To:  
Mr. Valencio Cardoso  
Creator & Contributor  
The Socially Conscious Blog  
valencio@gmail.com



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I saw your recent blog post about "Charities That Warm the Heart" and thought you might be interested in hearing about an organization with another great social mission. Just like the VA Crochet and Craft team in the story, SoapBox Soaps makes sure that no person in need goes unloved.

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Sincerely,

Ryan Travitz

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