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Article:

Corporate Social Responsibility For Business Owners

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"Corporate social responsibility is a hard-edged business decision. Not because it is a nice thing to do or because people are forcing us to do it... because it is good for our business" - **Niall Fitzgerald, Former CEO, Unilever**

"People are going to want, and be able, to find out about the citizenship of a brand, whether it is doing the right things socially, economically and environmentally." - **Mike Clasper President of Business Development, Proctor and Gamble (Europe)**

During the 1960's and 1970's business contact and consumer contact was achieved via the television, cinema and magazine advertisements.

The 1980's and 1990's saw the start and growth of cable and satellite television, which allowed business contact and consumer messaging to be segmented due to the variety of channels and the demographics associated with those channels.

In 1990's the internet exploded and created not only a window for business contact, but also new dot com business models. The opportunity for business social networking became a part of everyday marketing and small business networking opportunities flourished whilst the corporate network interacted with end users like never before.

The internet has had a major effect on business in terms of speed of information also. The corporate network is now highly visible to all in terms of its culture and actions, the small business networking scene are able to scrutinize their competition and their clients in terms of their ethical dealings as well as their profitability.

Corporate Social Responsibility or CSR as it is commonly known has become a major business decision as it looks at what is known as the triple bottom line; social, environmental and profits. The 21st century has seen financial markets topple and greed ooze out of politician's pockets and bankers bank accounts.

The 21st century has also seen the consumer make decisions about their purchasing habits based on ethics; we only have to look at the Fair-Trade Mark to see that FMCG products are easily differentiated via this stamp of ethical trading. The 21st century has seen a rise in the environmental consciousness of citizens and they are letting their governments know how unhappy they are with the state of our planet, the greed of the privileged and social deprivation that is still apparent in our world.

Companies who are looking to develop CSR can do so without it costing the earth. Here are some tips to help you incorporate CSR into your business dealings and your communications. Business contact can be made using ethical means and can give you competitive advantage.

1. Do not greenwash. Greenwashing is when a company pays lip service to CSR in order to try and gain some sort of ethical perception of their company and brand or brands. CSR is about you as a whole and not a small gesture used for marketing purposes. Your customers will see right through greenwashing and once you lose their trust, it is very difficult to get back. Remember that business is about people, and no one likes to be hoodwinked.
2. Look at your supply chain and ask them to give you evidence of their environmental policies, and their equal opportunities policies. You are their customer and you have every right to ask. If they have no evidence of their responsibilities other than what is legally required, then consider sourcing another

supplier. This single act will enable you to say to your audience “we strive to buy from those companies that offer evidence of their corporate social responsibility.”

3. Giving to charity is great; there is no doubt about this. However, if you have staff then there is also a great benefit to them and you if you actually do an activity for charity in order to raise money. It is a consideration also to ensure that the charity you chose is congruent to your brand as this helps to strengthen your commitment to your responsibility as a small business network or a corporate network.
4. Advertise where CSR and ethics are apparent. Source agencies, PR companies and marketing consultancies that are able to ensure that your messages are reaching the right audience, the green conscious and ethical consumer.
5. When working on your communications strategies, ensure that CSR is a key strategic area for your consideration. Ensure it is not lost in the delivery of your communication but that is a major unique part of your company or brand in question.
6. Do not be vague or broad about your CSR activities, be specific and know what your activities and engagements are. A claim that is poorly defined can be misunderstood by your audience. For example, “All natural” as a statement is vague; arsenic and formaldehyde are all naturally occurring and poisonous.
7. Write a CSR statement. If you are not sure how to do this, then get in a consultant who can help. CSR statements are not yet a request within a tender or bidding process, however there is a possibility that this will occur.

Larger companies who need to demonstrate their CSR will have a CSR statement for their corporate network and will submit it in for tenders regardless, as this statement adds real value to their stance as a corporate citizen. If you are a member of the small business networking scene, then it is advisable to develop a CSR statement because a rule of thumb is that if the big guns are doing it, they will ask their supply chain to do it also. This act in itself demonstrates their CSR dedication.

By looking at who you are purchasing from, how you interact with your staff, who you support and help during your course of business, consciously reduce your environmental impact and strive to become good corporate citizen; you will have all the information and evidence you need to develop your CSR statement.

Be honest, open, socially and environmentally conscious when making business decisions and you will build CSR into the very core of your business and brands. You will then be able to demonstrate and communicate your stance as a Corporate Socially Responsible company.

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