

CSR means profitability ?

People want to do good. By extension, people want their brand choices to reflect their desire to do good. Since its inception, the Internet has forced companies to reassess their corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices by increasing people's access to information about "improper" corporate behavior. Social media, which simply increases the rate at which people can publish and spread information/content, has magnified the importance of CSR. However, it is not just avoiding the "bad," but harnessing the "good" that will lead to companies doing well financially by doing good socially.

It's never been more important for brands to support the issues and causes people care about. Jack Neff's Ad Age piece, "UniLever's CMO Throws Down the Social-Media Gauntlet," quotes Unilever CMO Simon Clift as saying, "brands are now becoming conversation factors where academics, celebrities, experts and key opinion formers discuss functional, emotional and, more interestingly, social concerns. So we are learning that good behavior is a requirement because people are watching and, more importantly, talking. But what has yet to be tapped effectively is the ability of CSR to drive sales and profitability, by coupling it with marketing and PR strategy (cause marketing 2.0). It's like the age-old question, "If a tree falls in the woods, and there is no one there to hear it, does it make a sound?" But instead the question goes, "If a company does good and no one in social media is talking about it, does it make a sale?" It's not wrong for companies to want people to know how socially responsible actions impacts sales. After all, let's not forget that companies do a lot of good just by selling their products. They give people jobs, healthcare, retirements and great product innovations. Plus, if doing good can deliver greater bottom-line profitability, then the companies can do more good. And you know who works at companies, people. And people want to do good.

So we are back to the "how." Because it is not nearly as effective for companies to tell people about the good they are doing as it is for people to be told by their peers about the good a company is doing. This is where the line between PR and marketing is continuing to blur. Marketers and their agencies must ask themselves two very important questions:

1. How can I tell people about CSR initiatives in an authentic manner, then empower and involve people in the good we are doing through social media tools?
2. Are CSR programs driving sales and profitability?

The first question is addressed by figuring out what types of programs and platforms you are going to use both for initial message delivery (television, out-of-home, non-traditional, online display), as well as how you are going to support and reward people for sharing your CSR message. The second question is the trickier one. "Cause marketing" tends to fall down in many of the same places that its bastard brother, "viral marketing," falls down. So what if a million people did an action, do they have a greater affinity for a brand or product? Do they know any more about a product's particular attributes? Is it going to drive sales and profitability?

Again, this is not a bad thing for companies to want to associate with CSR initiatives and cause marketing, because if it works, companies can do more good. The problem with cause marketing, and much more so with other forms of "viral marketing," is that the brand's message is lost. What people end up sharing is so cause-focused, or (in the case of viral) so funny or edgy, that in the end it doesn't affect people's purchasing behavior because they couldn't tell you what brand was helping them, or why they'd want to buy the product.

People want to do good, but it doesn't mean they will buy a razor that's going to give them razor burn because it's made in a "green" factory. It is up to the marketer and the agency to find a balance between delivery of marketing message and sharing of CSR initiative.

We are in the first inning of the social media's impact on the evolution of CSR, but it is one hell of an exciting first inning. Major corporations have the power to help cure disease by funding research, stop genocide by changing sourcing habits, save the environment by going green, feed the hungry by providing supplies -- and so much more. And through social media, corporations can turn doing good socially into doing well financially, if they know how to reach and empower people.

> Source : Mediapost