

Chapter 102

Why Should the Business Community and Organizations Leverage Social Media to Demonstrate Their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Commitment?

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ABSTRACT

Social media is a great asset for developing a sustainable brand strategy that goes hand-in-hand with CSR. The role of social media cannot be ignored; we live in a customer-centric and highly connected world where consumers vote with their wallets, supporting companies that demonstrate concern for employee welfare, community development, environmental sustainability, and human rights. As the adage goes, “There’s power in numbers,” and social media provides companies—who actively engage—with an influential, built-in network of passionate consumers that become followers of a brand when interested in what it’s doing. By way of example, real-life case studies are presented that demonstrate the role social media platforms may play to showcase the strides that a company has made for a cause, whether this means funds donated, awareness raised, consumers reached, beneficiaries helped, communities improved, etc.

INTRODUCTION

We live in an age of increasing digitalization which places a growing dependence on mobile and digital social media communications to exchange news, ideas and share information. Many organizations are actively incorporating social media into their strategies relating to communications, sales and marketing

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to get closer to their target market, increase brand awareness and interact with an audience in fluid and dialogic communication that helps build reciprocal relationships.

Yet, in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability, social media is not yet widely accepted as a useful or trusted platform. While the delivery of CSR messages relies on mainly traditional channels such as the annual CSR report, social media provides a great platform for discussing social, economic and sustainability issues – with internal and external stakeholders.

In terms of CSR, directors and managers of organizations must run their businesses profitably yet also be accountable for the impact of their actions. The key challenge is to find sustainable solutions that address their organization's 'Triple Bottom Line (TBL)', i.e. economic, environmental, and social aspects of performance based on dialogue with internal and external stakeholders. More importantly, the public expects companies to enact good, fair business practices – supported by social media and digitalization.

Feedback through social media is immediate, permanent, and extremely public. When the public feels strongly about the performance on social or environmental issues of a company, a single unfavorable voice can quickly become viral making it difficult for even the most sheltered executive to ignore. In this sense, social platforms like Facebook and Twitter, in which the viral marketing and the word-of-mouth effect can instantly lead a company to success or failure, become essential channels in today's world of business. For this reason, today, social media is mandatory in the CSR agenda of many organizations.

Within any organization, social media should belong to everyone. Every department in a company has reasons to use social media to achieve their business goals:

- The sales team should use it to network with new prospects.
- The customer service team should use it to answer questions, immediately respond to issues and generally build loyalty.
- The product team should use it for research and informal focus groups.
- The marketing team should use it for customer acquisition.
- The advertising team should use it for market research and crowdsourcing.
- The PR team should use it for reputation management and brand awareness, and to manage an issue before it becomes a crisis.
- The finance team should use it to scope out pricing and early indications of commoditization and bearish economic market.
- The executive team should use it for thought leadership and credibility.

In each case, a multi-faceted strategy and owner - acting as an advocate, champion and sponsor - is needed to co-ordinate all activities and totally integrate social media with their business strategies in support of CSR for internal and external audiences.

In this light, the underlying objective of this research is to outline how a company should develop such a strategy to advance the business case for CSR using social media – with a few example case studies.

BACKGROUND

For decades, corporate business models have been assumed to be harmful to certain communities and public resources. Many organizations across various industry sectors are quickly realizing they must address issues about the broader effects and footprint of their operations. Thus far, the approach taken

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