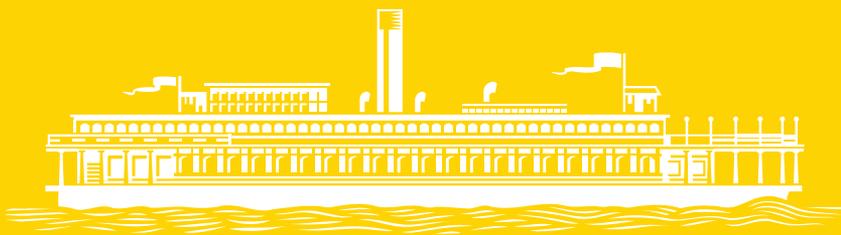


Beyond responsibility

by Kerri Williams

The *Hub*

March / April 2014



Landor

This PDF is designed to be printed
double-sided to help you conserve paper.

© 2014 Landor Associates.
All rights reserved.

Landor Associates is the world's
preeminent brand consulting firm,
specializing in creative strategy, design,
innovation, and naming. Landor is part
of WPP, one of the largest global
communications services companies.
Visit us at Landor.com.

Beyond responsibility

The modern idea of corporate social responsibility emerged in the 1970s in response to widespread associations between big business and competition, greed, and malevolence. Infusing integrity and conscientiousness into the soul of a company caught fire, and the term “CSR” became a widely recognized sign of good brand behavior.

Today, the original intent of CSR remains as relevant as ever and business is uniquely positioned to tackle its challenges with talent, scale, and resources. The question is whether the time has come to bring traditional CSR to the next level.

All signs point to yes. Traditional corporate social responsibility is no longer visionary but essential to avoid negative brand perceptions. The more recent principle behind brand purpose could have, and very well should have, transformed the notion of CSR. Brand purpose suggests looking at an organization from the inside out to develop a brand platform based on ideals and actions rather than positioning. It holds that a brand can have greater

impact if its promise extends beyond products and profits to include beliefs.

For some reason, brand purpose has rarely been fully realized in the CSR business environment. Leaders loved the idea of adopting an ideal to drive a brand’s story, but have failed to fulfill this ideal through their actions. Instead, by infusing brand purpose into traditional CSR, brands have created a gray area of soft social impact. Grand statements to make a difference, like “Creating a better world,” become a mismatch with infrequent, episodic acts of aid and kindness.

When CSR’s traditional identity is evaluated against three principles of great brands—the ability to inspire behavior, to complement business strategy, and to tell a concise story—simple analysis makes it clear that CSR is in need of an update.

First, the best brands always inspire behavior and action. Nike is one of the best-known brands to reflect this principle, moving beyond apparel to inspire physical activity by addressing the athletic ecosystem with campaigns, workout apps, and

Kerri Williams is client services director in the New York office of Landor Associates.

This article was first published in the *Hub* (March/April 2014).
hubmagazine.com

Seek ways to weave accountability into employee initiatives, product development, and operations so that every win for the business becomes a win for someone in need.

wearable technology. Does CSR inspire and motivate in a similar fashion? Corporate social responsibility has begun to sound more like ordinance than manifesto: “Be responsible.” “Clean your room.” Would any marketer ever aspire to claim the next big innovation as “responsible”? Who wants to identify with responsibility when one can stimulate economic advancement in developing countries, slow climate change, or influence lives? Somehow along the road, CSR became static and reactive instead of dynamic and proactive.

Second, the strongest brands complement the strategic direction of the business. Whether a theme park, animated film, or retail store, products from the Disney brand are synonymous with family-friendly entertainment. In contrast, many companies make the mistake of separating CSR from everyday strategy, planning, and operations. Initiatives are created and tracked by teams siloed from the heart of the business. Instead of treating CSR as an integral extension of the company’s brand, it’s treated like a lonely island.

Third, the most memorable brands tell a concise and coherent story. The world of BMW is highly focused on the idea of a superior driving experience. Unfortunately, in comparison, CSR is given no boundaries. Mandates tell every story instead of one or two key stories. Sustainability? Check. Diversity? Sure. Donations? Of course. What does CSR genuinely mean to your company? The most relevant areas of social impact differ from industry to industry, yet the same familiar terminology is adopted, regardless. Instead of touting the usual nomenclature, brands need to speak of focus and commitments.

The diagnosis is clear. The time has come to turn the page on the traditional CSR story to a chapter where all types of innovative social initiatives (not just sustainability) become grounded in business practice and have the chance to organically sprout from brand DNA. A more authentic CSR approach asks companies for depth over breadth and real action—to weave solutions into the earliest stages of not only brand strategy, but also business strategy and operations, to make them part of the everyday just like research, manufacturing, and marketing.

Benefits to the company are just as significant to those outside the company. In today’s transparent world, a consumer’s relationship with a brand is treated similarly to a relationship between persons. Younger generations are looking for signs of depth and compassion. They seek to buy, engage, and work for companies that genuinely prioritize social impact as much as investor returns. Therefore, it is no surprise to see millennials making purchase choices based not only on product attributes, but also company reputation.

Ultimately, every brand needs to think about continuous growth in regards to social impact. A combination of long-term vision planning and divisional social audits can help identify new ways to build the next generation of responsibility and accountability into every sector. The 5 Cs, one common tool of the marketer, can also be used as a framework alongside social audits to identify the most brand-authentic opportunities inside an organization for individual, local, and global impact.



1. Customer

Take the opportunity to explore and align with causes that affect the hearts and minds of those who purchase products and services from your brand. As a manufacturer and retailer whose brand embraces outdoor lifestyle, Patagonia not only provides apparel and accessories to serve those who camp, hike, surf, and ski, it also fosters conversations among customers, conservationists, politicians, and experts through environmental campaigns.

Each annual campaign is charged with placing the spotlight on a variety of worthwhile issues needing advocacy. Previous campaigns have included Vote the Environment and Freedom to Roam. Patagonia's current campaign, Responsible Economy, explores ways for companies to grow without wasting the earth's resources and driving endless consumption. The campaign has numerous touchpoints including conversation, essays, real-world examples, and an open examination of Patagonia's own operations.

2. Context

The earth is a dynamic place. Natural disasters, legislation, invention, and even social commentary can alter consumer beliefs. Similarly, they should also alter an organization's approach to responsibility and accountability. As a brand declaration, Google "organizes the world's information and makes it universally accessible and useful." At the same time, anyone who has ever sprinted to locate an outlet in the face of a drained battery recognizes that Google and the greater tech industry's products heavily rely on energy for access and use.

Google Green creates a web "better for the environment" by investing in renewable energy and focusing on energy efficiency projects. Google Green's initiatives include the purchase of electricity from renewable energy providers and the formation of shuttle bus and bike-to-work programs. Additionally, by utilizing cloud services and optimizing data center and server efficiency, Google has been able to provide one month of products (such as Search, Gmail, Chrome, Drive, and YouTube) to an active user in a manner that emits the same energy as driving a single mile.

Clearly, Google is proof that the right investments can lead to significant savings and that building a better environment and competitive business do not need to be mutually exclusive endeavors.

3. Company

Seek ways to weave accountability into employee initiatives, product development, and operations so that every win for the business becomes a win for someone in need. Eyeglass retailer Warby Parker lets customers look good and feel good. The notion of "buy a pair, give a pair" is a significant part of Warby Parker's marketing story, promising to donate a pair of glasses for every customer purchase.

The company then goes one step further by aligning with nonprofits that provide donations to microbusiness owners in developing countries in the form of zero-cost inventory. This model magnifies economic assistance by allowing an individual to launch a small business to support his or her family. At the same time, community members are sold accessibly priced glasses, which in turn grants

Each item from Target's Feed USA collection features a number that corresponds with how many meals it provides someone in need.





ABOVE Google stocks its Mountain View campus with community bikes to make it easy for employees to travel between buildings.

Image used under Creative Commons license from Flickr user Roman Boed

RIGHT One of Patagonia's most recent environmental initiatives was the production of *DamNation*, a documentary about dam removal efforts.

people the vision they need to perform better and earn a higher wage.

4. Competitors

Analyze the efforts of those in the same industry and seek white spaces to offer challenges and opportunities no other brand has attempted to face. Although sodas have recently received a fair share of harsh health criticism, the Coca-Cola Company has been one of the first in the beverage industry to build a global presence with the Coca-Cola brand in countries large and small, providing economic opportunity in developing markets since the 1920s.

Coca-Cola has looked to build business in ways that align with the realities of the local market. The company has regularly provided individuals from small countries with jobs, equipment, and training to become local distributors. In Coca-Cola's 2002 Pushcart Project in Vietnam, the company partnered with the Vietnamese Women's Union to provide a number of new, custom-built pushcarts with drinks and snacks to sell directly in city streets. By supplying equipment, discount products, and training, Coca-Cola empowered these women to own and run successful microbusinesses.

5. Collaborators

Finally, examine the supply chain to identify opportunities surrounding material sourcing, suppliers, manufacturing performance, and retailer relationships that extend beyond time, costs, and margins. Over the years, Target has been able to move initiatives beyond the corporate level to the

store level with vendor and promotional decisions that demonstrate a greater commitment to the well-being of others. This direction first came to light through an array of health-related products and services, but finally made its way to fashion last year.

Through partnerships with Alexander McQueen, Phillip Lim, and Missoni, Target has earned brand equity as a fashion-oriented mass retailer. Last summer, Target put a new twist on its latest designer fashion partnerships by collaborating with Feeding America to create the Feed USA + Target collection, selling clothing, home goods, and other lifestyle products. Each product was designed to feature a number representative of the quantity of meals provided as a result of the item's purchase. This helped to portray and publicize impact in a very tangible manner.

By defining an approach to responsibility and accountability that has brand authenticity and strong connections to everyday business, a company can create synergies between society's needs and internal resources and operations to move the needle from incremental improvement to transformational impact.

Are your initiatives as unique as your brand or could they be mistaken for those that other companies are proclaiming? The time is now to make an honest appraisal, uncover new opportunities, and rally your organization with a position on CSR that naturally extends from your company's essence: what you value, who you are, what you do, and how you do it. By committing to better the world, a brand may also build a better business. ■



Landor.com

Bangkok

Beijing

Cape Town

Chicago

Cincinnati

Dubai

Geneva

Hamburg

Hanoi

Hong Kong

Jakarta

Kuala Lumpur

London

Melbourne

Mexico City

Milan

Moscow

Mumbai

New York

Paris

San Francisco

Seoul

Shanghai

Singapore

Sydney

Tokyo

hello@landor.com

