THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO COMMUNICATING
CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) & SOCIAL GOOD

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1. INTRO

by Hailey Cavill, 5 June 2016

Winter is coming and I’m eagerly awaiting Season 6 of Game of Thrones. What better way to beat the Melbourne winter blues than by snuggling up with a show full of evil kings, battles, zombies, sex, wolves, dragons and heroes! That got me thinking. While we might turn to some TV shows and movies for education, mostly we want them to entertain and inspire us, make us feel something new and take us away from the monotony and stress of our daily lives.

If this is true, it suggests that what we seek in TV and movies is perhaps what we are missing in our real lives. So I thought it would be interesting to see if there were any consistent themes in the top 10 grossing movies in Australia for the past 10 years. It turns out there are. Almost all movies involve an everyday person, just like us, who overcomes fear and challenges to battle some form of villain and become a hero. The best stories, even those we learned as children, follow this simple formula. Heroes like Cinderella. Luke Skywalker. Ironman. Mowgli. Harry Potter. Bond. Frodo. Crocodile Dundee. Red Dog. The list goes on!

Does this suggest then that we are crying out for heroes in our daily life? If we take the simple HERO versus VILLAIN formula, which camp do corporates fall into? Only a few decades ago, corporate enterprises were seen as respected pillars of society. Unfortunately, due to scandals involving unethical behaviour, environmental damage, misleading marketing, tax avoidance, abuse of power … this has shifted rapidly.

AND THERE ARE LOTS OF ROTTEN APPLES, NOT JUST A FEW.
But for every rotten apple there are countless companies and brands actively and vigorously embracing their responsibility to society and the environment. Even these companies are not perfect – but that should never stop them from being proud of their good deeds. It takes courage for companies to get comfortable with being imperfect – being human. After all, what hero is ever perfect? Think flatulent, slug-eating Shrek, arrogant Ironman Tony Stark, or the chillingly deadly James Bond.

There are amazing things happening in the corporate world that come under the banner of ‘social good’. But in my 20 years of building purposeful profitable partnerships between companies and causes, I’ve noticed that companies all too often fail to communicate the good stuff. Is it fear? The tall poppy syndrome? The opinions of too many stakeholders and critics? Or is it simply a lack of understanding as to how?

After all, if Australians are crying out for inspiring stories (they’re chewing them up in their millions on YouTube) why can’t a corporate reclaim the Hero? And if the word Hero is making you uncomfortable, how about … being a Leader? Companies show great genius for innovation, resourcefulness, marketing and revenue making. Perhaps it’s time to take the lead in solving some of society’s problems – and showing others how it’s done?
2. SNAPSHOT

Intrigued but busy? This quick-read snapshot will give you the essence of the report in a few minutes. It’s not as juicy as reading the report, however!

We’ve scrutinised a lot of research about CSR & Social Good (over 25 reports, global and local), and we’ve commissioned our own. Many of the stats are in this report.

We’ve pondered, analysed and cogitated for months to work out what it all means for CSR communicators.

This report is the result. It’s our interpretation but it’s not just our opinion - the stats don’t lie.

In a nutshell it means:

• Most companies fail to communicate CSR & Social Good (and all its glorious other names) so that it resonates with consumers. They are wasting a lot of time and money as well as the opportunity to differentiate, engage, inspire and motivate ... all good stuff for business

• Effective communication makes the difference between CSR being dismissed as a warm gesture to being embraced as an investment that provides a competitive advantage

• A wave of scandals and unethical behaviour has led to widespread mistrust of corporates

• Even those working within the corporate sector (your employees) don’t trust corporates to do the right thing

• Consumers are much savvier about marketing tricks and there are numerous platforms both on TV and online to express disappointment and outrage
• Australians – whether they are Baby Boomer or Gen Z – all share a few things in common. We’re all human, emotional beings. We process pictures much faster than words; we retain information in story form; and our brains are wired for altruism

• When it comes to sharing the struggle to balance the commercial imperatives with social and environmental concerns (CSR), companies often fear criticism, so they hide behind over-sanitised CSR reports that are simply ignored at best, or perpetuate skepticism at worst

• Using a universal and time-honoured story structure called The Hero’s Journey, companies can share their CSR journey – the highs and the lows, the struggles and the celebrations – with staff and consumers, who will resonate with it at a deep emotional level

• Corporates can change their role in society – going beyond just doing no wrong, to doing what’s right

• All they have to do is embrace their human-ness – the flaws as well as the fanfare, the struggles as well as the successes and tell their story with honesty and humility

• If capitalism is The Force, then use The Force for Good – and tell people about it

• Our Top 10 Guidelines for Communicating CSR & Social Good (we call them Talking Points) can be found in detail on p 66 but here are the key themes:
9. **WHAT WE FOUND**

We scoured the globe for research, analysing over 25 reports & commentary that contained Australian statistics and content...although we have been guided by what’s going on around the globe. Reports from companies, advertising agencies, management consultants, sustainability firms and communications agencies.

We commissioned our own new research with partners Di Marzio Research, the latest survey being April 2016.

Of course it’s inevitable that some contradictions and opposing views have emerged - that’s the nature of interpreting data. But where it matters – what consumers want from companies and brands – it all points in the same direction.

**The complete list of all the research reports can be seen in Section 15.3 on p 131.**

If you see a statistic in this upcoming section that takes your fancy, take note of the coloured reference number (either a purple roman numeral, a green number or blue letter) and that tells you which section you can find the research report - name, date, author and sample size – in Section 15.3. If you then want to read the entire report, you can do so via the Talking the Walk® Resource Centre.

We have summarised here the consistent themes that are relevant to communicators of CSR & Social Good as well as practitioners of CSR & Social Good. As this report is about communication we haven’t delved into what companies should or shouldn’t do in terms of CSR activities and actions.

These themes have formed the basis for our thinking around the guidelines in Section 12: HOW to Communicate CSR & Social Good on p 66.

9.1 **WHAT AUSTRALIANS THINK OF CORPORATES**

In April 2016 we put a fairly provocative statement to Australians about the way that companies and brands balance their pursuit for profit with social obligation, and asked them to agree or disagree.

Skepticism appears to have morphed into cynicism and the majority of Australians have a strong opinion - almost two-thirds being negative.
In April 2016 we asked Australians to agree or disagree with the statement:

“In general all they do is care about profit and they’ll do anything to get it, even damaging society and the environment in the process.”

66% of Australians agreed with the statement.

We see it everywhere, the evidence speaks for itself.

66% Australians agreed with the statement.

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12. HOW TO COMMUNICATE CSR AND SOCIAL GOOD

The evidence is clear. Australians expect and want companies and brands to address the impact that they have on society and the environment. They accept that companies must make a profit – that’s business. But they want not just conscious capitalism, but CONSCIENCE capitalism.

CONSCIENCE CAPITALISM.

There are numerous benefits: for companies that embrace CSR & Social Good, consumers are more likely to: buy your shares, products or services; want to work for you, welcome you into their community; talk positively about you … essentially help to build your reputation as a company that’s good to do business with.

They will actively boycott your company if they feel you are not behaving responsibly or ethically, causing damage, not looking after workers, using misleading language and a whole host of other misdemeanours.

But if they don’t know what you are doing – either because you are not communicating it or your message is not getting through – then a massive opportunity for growth and competitive advantage is lost.

So communication that cuts through is not just important, it’s CRUCIAL.

The world has changed rapidly in the last few years and so has the way we seek out, skip, absorb and share information and ideas. CSR & Social Good communication has to change along with it. Here are our suggestions based on everything we’ve read.

They’re not rules as such because the game is constantly changing and therefore so do the rules. We’ve called them Talking Points, because they are a good place to start - sit down with your staff and managers, and start discussing with an open and honest mind.

We recommend that you sit down with a cuppa (or something stronger) for the first read, and take a deep breath … they’re pretty radical.
“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place”

- George Bernard Shaw
Practical Talk Tip:

Identify your authentic values. Embrace your flaws. Reveal your mistakes. It won’t break you – it might just make you.

For Inspiration:

Domino’s Pizza sparked a new era of brand transparency after damning videos of poor food practices went viral, leaving the brand in tatters. Rather than hide from the criticism, they faced it head on.

They fixed the problem, sourced new ingredients, created new recipes, then ran a campaign entitled ‘Our Pizza Sucks’ showing customers talking about how bad the old pizzas were. Staff shared the secrets behind the new recipes. The video went viral, this time attracting praise for being ‘refreshingly honest’. It was a bold move that paid off - the first quarter after the campaign launched sales were up 14%.

Patagonia has embraced a whole new level of ‘radical transparency’. They go to extreme lengths to track and document their supply chain and present in wonderful videos called ‘The Footprint Chronicles’. Their ‘Traceable Down’ initiative maps the supply chain of feathers – where no bird is force fed or live-plucked.

Australian tech phenomenon Atlassian is a company built on real, attainable values. They have 6 values that they live and breathe by, including ‘open company, no bullshit’ and my favourite ‘don’t #@!% the customer!’

They’re a young company with a fantastic culture and already making great strides in CSR – it’s part of their make-up, not an add-on. Gen Y are jostling to work for them and customers can’t get enough of their products. A real Aussie success story.

Patagonia’s case study and Footprint Chronicles videos, and the Domino’s Turnaround video can be seen at the Talking the Walk® Resource Centre.

Domino’s enabled customers to post positive and negative tweets that went live in Times Square
5. PUT TOP DOG UPFRONT

But avoid a dog & pony show\(^{11}\)

The only CEOs that people want to hear from are charismatic, funny, and powerful – right? Wrong. They want a real person. So your CEO may be rather camera shy, a bit daggy, tongue-tied, chubby or scruffy. The more imperfect the better! People will relate to them.

Sure, train them up, get them across your key simplified messages so that they can speak with confidence on behalf of the company, but speak they must. Employees need to see the CEO step up for them to trust that the company is genuine.

Make sure they are optimistic and brave, like their employees and customers, even when talking of the struggles. Focus on the values (the why), the vision (the where), the desire for change (the why), and what you are going to do (the what).

Take customers and employees on the journey and keep them on the journey. Don’t just launch your big vision then go quiet for two years while you get on with it. Take them along for the ride. Show them the evidence of change, no matter how small. They need proof that you mean it. Even if you are in the dark cave battling a giant spider, they need to know you are still on the journey. They will stick with you.

The CEO needs to talk about the challenges of balancing profit with purpose, the things that the company is doing to progress in key areas that are relevant to the company and its community, and they must do it regularly. The CEO must talk about his/her personal values and challenges and why they are at the helm of the company. They must speak to and engage staff, talk to media and share with customers.

I can imagine the corporate affairs people having kittens right now – emphasising the terrible risk and such things. They’re just doing their job, but like an overprotective mother, they might end up erasing all personality and authenticity from your CEO before they reach the podium.

Millennials admire people like Elon Musk (Tesla Motors), Bill Gates, Barack Obama, Richard Branson, Warren Buffett\(^{12}\). Closer to home we have a new breed of values-driven CEO, in tech company Atlassian founders Scott Farquhar and Mike Cannon-Brookes. Easy-going, unshaven, jeans & t-shirt wearing and humble. Oh and billionaires at aged 34!

They all have an authentic voice. FIND YOURS.

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\(^{11}\) Highly promoted, overstaged performance, presentation & event designed to sway or convince opinion for political or commercial gain

\(^{12}\) World economic forum – leaders most admired by millennials
7. DO WHAT’S RIGHT

If you don’t stand for something, you end up standing for nothing

It’s no longer enough to just ‘do no harm’, or just stay within the confines of the law, corporate Australia needs to do what is right, by their staff, customers, stakeholders, community as well as strategically right.

Agree on what is right for your company to focus on and what is going to resonate with your customers and staff before crafting your messaging. If it’s right for them, then shareholders will come around. After all, you’re a servant of the customer, not a slave to the shareholder, yes?

What is right for your company isn’t necessarily right for another, even if they are in the same category as you. In order to capture consumer’s attention you need your communication to truly cut through.

Whether it’s the Fun theory\(^\text{13}\), the disruption theory, shock or inspiration, use whatever is appropriate for your company’s character. It must cut through, so keep trying different ways and avoid vanilla.

Do the right thing across the board, avoid piecemealing and discordant actions. It’s pointless giving away millions of dollars through your Foundation and then slave-

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\(^{13}\) www.thefuntheory.com

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driving your staff to breakdown, encouraging discrimination or having a dubious supply chain.

There is no room for conflicting action as this will lead to incongruent messaging, and millennials in particular will roast you. Years of good work down the drain – tick. Lack of trust – tick.

Measure the right things. Not just your CSR activity outputs but social outcomes. Measure the change in behaviour of your campaigns.

Measure the human difference you are making. Capture stats and data but turn it into something meaningful. This all makes for great stories.

Measure your CSR communications - not just column inches and vanity metrics such as likes, followers and fans.

These can be great indicators of a successful communications plan but the ultimate measure is the impact both action and communication is having on reputation, sales, staff retention and anything else that your big wigs feel is important.

If you can prove bottom line benefits, then the sky is the limit to what you will be tasked with next year! CSR will only be considered a priority if it can prove that it can add value to the bottom line.
Yet many in Australia are mind-numbingly dull, unimaginative with complex tables. We can certainly learn a lot from long term players like M&S and Unilever.

**Practical Talking Tips:**

1. Read ‘Green Giants – How smart companies turn sustainability into billion-dollar business’ by Freya Williams.


**For Inspiration:**

The story behind Apple’s environmental footprint.

Apple reports environmental impact comprehensively. We do this by focusing on our products: what happens when we design them, what happens when we make them, and what happens when you take them home and use them.

Apple have won awards for best green gadget\(^\text{17}\) but they win my vote for an easy to navigate website detailing the environmental footprint of each of their products including verification certificates, fact sheets on energy efficiency, materials, packaging, restricted substances and recycling.

Denmark’s clothing company **Bestseller** have a stunning sustainability website that is well organised and a pleasure to read.

\(^{17}\) Green Gadgets: Designing the future - Greenpeace 2014
In the UK Marks & Spencer’s decade long campaign called Plan A is a fantastic example of how to fully integrate CSR into everyday business and see immediate cost savings and increased profits.

You can see too that they have refined and perfected how they communicate their progress.

One of most engaging and beautifully presented environmental papers is from our very own Kathmandu. Easy to grasp, relevant icons, stunning photography and the essence of the brand shines through.

These environmental reports, the M&S case study and more can be found at the Talking the Walk® Resource Centre.
Cavill + Co builds purposeful, profitable partnerships between companies and charities – more than 43 of them over 20 years.

We help profit-driven organisations (corporations, social enterprises and brands) build partnerships that achieve both commercial and social outcomes - strengthening reputation, differentiating, building trust and loyalty, inspiring staff. We also help for-purpose organisations (charities) build potent partnerships that enable them to achieve their social mission faster.

Can you imagine a world without partnerships? A world without the music of Lennon & McCartney? What if two college dropouts named Steve hadn’t formed Apple in their garage?

Partnerships drive invention, business and creativity – and they can also transform society. Building purposeful, profitable partnerships is what we’re passionate about and what we’re good at. Forming a partnership may appear simple, but it often takes someone to unearth the potential, to make the partnership powerful, enduring and socially beneficial. That’s where Cavill + Co comes in.

Over 20 years we’ve built partnerships for companies including Disney Australia, News Corp Australia, Vodafone Foundation and Seek.com.au. We’ve helped numerous for purpose organisations like Oxfam Australia, Fred Hollows Foundation, Lifeline Australia and PetRescue form partnerships.

We’ve played a part in reducing toddler drownings; matching kids to mentors; training guide dogs; funding health research; changing the face of volunteering; empowering the poor; and raising awareness of issues such as binge drinking, exercising, depression and indigenous inequality.

We’re a small team – by choice – so we can offer exceptional personal service at a fair price. We’re nimble and flexible, bringing in top experts when needed without being a slave to overheads. We therefore rely greatly on external partners to help us achieve our purpose. As a creative agency, driven by a desire to do good, we bring our ideas to life with the help of partners.

Collaboration is a key theme that has come out of this report. Consumers want companies to collaborate – with them and others – to solve social problems.
This report is itself a fine example of collaboration. It is built on the work of all those agencies that produced the reports we analysed, and on the new research by Di Marzio Research, our partner for 18 years. It enjoys the vital support of the visionary people at Caltex, IAG Foundation and Konica Minolta.

And it lives thanks to the communication mastery of Fenton, a partner of 10 years, and the design magic of Ania at redwagon design, an enduring partnership of 10 years.

This gorgeous little book really does prove how effective partnerships can be. I urge you to take its insights and recommendations into your world and do something that will drastically change the way people perceive your organisation – and will transform society as well.

Hailey Cavill