



CORPORATE
STORYTELLING
AND YOUR
CSR STRATEGY



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PART OF BEING SUSTAINABLE IS **SUSTAINING** PEOPLE'S **INTEREST**

As the world's top brands rush to adopt new marketing methods better suited to digital media, most companies are continuing to utilize the same dry, dull approaches to convey their efforts in corporate social responsibility and sustainability:

- An **annual report** buried deep in some back page of a corporate website
- **Boring statistics** and percentages proving a reduced eco footprint since last quarter
- Enough **jargon** to guarantee alienating everyone outside of seasoned – though still yawning – professionals

Your triple bottom line
doesn't need to be a **FLATLINE**...
why not give it a **PLOTLINE?**

This report is a free tutorial on how to utilize cutting-edge marketing techniques in combination with new and emerging media to promote your corporate citizenship and enhance your reputation for sustainable business practices.

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WHO IS THE

NEW CONSUMER?

- She is **smarter**, more **tech savvy** and more **socially** conscious than any previous generation
- He makes full use of **new media** to connect with his peers and make certain his preferred brands are both **socially and environmentally** responsible
- They are **highly skeptical** of old world media and advertising methods

Your reputation as a corporate citizen is no longer an exclusive area of concern for academics and special interest groups.

The new consumer is not looking to experts to learn about your reputation. Instead they talk with one another to help make informed, socially responsible decisions. Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and microblogs assure that these decisions are expedient, and more often than not, permanent.

“58% of consumers will cease to follow a company or brand online if it acts irresponsibly toward its consumers.”

– 2010 Cone Consumer New Media Study

In the coming years brand reputation will be decided with new media and social technology. Here the stakes are higher than they have ever been before. A recent study by Cone LLC shows

that the average new media user only “demonstrates affinity” (such as “liking” a corporation on Facebook, or following one on Twitter) for an average of 4.6 companies.

The new consumer isn’t following a brand based solely on their preferred styles or tastes. Identifying a need or igniting demand for a product or service is no longer enough to win consumer affinity. People are following companies that are addressing social and environmental problems and that share **their values**. Economic, social and environmental issues all play a part in the new reality of the post-recession economy. The new consumer is paying attention to – as well as helping to create and establish – your brand’s **storyline**.

“What matters to your customer has to now matter to your business.”

– Sean Wood, Founder of Freeworld Media

CREATING **SHARED** **VALUE** THROUGH STORYTELLING

Under the old, industrial model of capitalism companies didn't pay too much attention to their social reputation. Employees and consumers could tell any stories they'd like while corporations went about extracting labor and natural resources from murmuring communities. End of story.

Then communities got a whole lot louder.

“Capitalism’s got to do better, and to get there capitalists have to aspire to matter.”

– Umair Haque, Author of The New Capitalist Manifesto

Today new businesses give back to where they operate and show on a personal level how their brand **creates value** in people's lives.

Learning how to create shared value is not a strategy, but a necessity for any business looking to thrive in a market driven by new media. End of story.

“Shared value is not social responsibility, philanthropy, or even sustainability, but a new way to **achieve economic success.”**

– Michael Porter, Harvard Professor and six-time McKinsey Award Winner

There is no hard advice or easy answers on offer about how to create shared value, only some facts:

- Either your company believes it has a responsibility to society, the environment, its employees and its consumers, or it doesn't
- Either your organization thinks capitalism as it is currently practiced is in need of some serious amendments, or it doesn't
- The new consumer is savvy and knows if and when you are faking it

If your company has joined the ranks of the corporate renegades, trendsetters and thought leaders working to rethink traditional notions of prosperity, then it's time to learn the best practices for conveying your shared values. To effectively begin telling your brand's story, **you need your socially responsible message woven into your social media conversations.**

“Every piece of content you write has to either solve a problem your audience cares about or it has to entertain them. Preferably both.”

– Sonia Simone, Senior Editor at CopyBlogger

STATS VS **STORIES**

“Tell me a fact and I’ll learn. Tell me a truth and I’ll believe. But tell me a **story** and it will live in my heart forever.”

– Indian Proverb

The purpose of this report isn’t to call into question the necessity of corporate reporting, but when it comes to establishing your brand’s reputation and communicating your shared value to stakeholders, it’s going to take a whole lot more than even the most well-crafted, highly researched, beautifully illustrated, and well-publicized report can offer.

“There are **more ways to report** than ever before, but many companies are missing opportunities to communicate. In an age when most people get information from the Internet, a surprising number of Fortune 100 companies (33) aren’t taking advantage of the web.”

– The Methodologie Annual Review of 2009 Corporate Reports

Exhibit A:

Without looking it up online, what was Office Depot’s Carbon footprint for 2010?

Neither you nor I have any idea.

What I do know is that through their Foundation’s Dream Up Career Exploration Program, Office Depot encouraged over 10,000 Middle Schoolers to stay in school and gave many students an opportunity to live their Dream Job for a Day.

As a result of knowing this, I also know where I’m buying my next swivel chair.

“We make sense of our world and our place in it through stories. Stories provide **stimulation** – knowledge to act. Stories provide **inspiration** – motivation to act. Credible ideas make people believe. Emotional ideas make people act.”

– Brian Lewis, VP of eMarketing Association

KEYS TO **EFFECTIVE** CSR **STORYTELLING**

Conveying the story of your organization's CSR and sustainability efforts carries its own unique challenges. Keep these three rules in mind while devising a storytelling strategy:

1. USE SIMPLE WORDS: Not every socially conscious consumer is an expert on corporate acronyms, green buzz-words, and sustainability slang. Throwing dozens of these phrases at your audience does not necessarily clarify anything. Avoid sentences such as the following: *"In 2010 Company X utilized the GRI to report their CSR, showcasing their outstanding portfolio of SRIs along with several new LEED certs which helped in large part to reduce CEs, resulting in an enviable footprint amongst A/E/Cs."*

2. AVOID CLICHÉ IMAGERY: Incorporating your CSR and sustainability initiatives into your brand does not mean relinquishing originality. Far from it. If anything, companies need to work even harder to establish a distinctive brand persona that appears original, honest, and stylish. A green font in combination with any one of these out-played images could not leave you looking any less unique or more insincere.



"Businesses acting as businesses, not as charitable donors, are the most powerful force for addressing the pressing issues we face."

– Michael Porter, Harvard Professor and six-time McKinsey Award Winner

3. KEEP YOUR STEWARDSHIP RELATED TO YOUR INDUSTRY: Stakeholders want to see that you are taking an interest in social and environmental dilemmas that relate to your industry. CSR add-on causes don't tell an authentic story as much as something that aligns more closely with your brand. Your brand is strengthened when your story meets and aligns with the values of your customer. Remember Office Depot's Dream Up program to help keep kids furthering their education? This program compliments their brand because Office Depot caters to educated professionals. So, if you're an online bookstore, support literacy. If you sell a woman's health product, support women's rights. A million dollars towards disaster relief is commendable, but it tells your audience nothing about your supply chain, the quality of life of your employees, or your environmental impact.

"We should put our heart and souls into what we do. And that means we need to differentiate ourselves. You can't do it by basing your logo on a leaf or by putting a hand cupping a seedling on the cover of your annual report. You can't do it by being yet another green business to use a tag line that says "Saving the planet one [your product here] at a time.""

– Jerry Stifelman, Creative Director of The Change, brand-strategy and design

APPROACHES TO CSR STORYTELLING

Your socially responsible message will meet with a wide and receptive audience so long as it possesses the following qualities:

- It is easy to remember and simple to share via social media
- It has a lesson
and lastly
- It is dramatic

This last component deserves to be looked at more closely. While there is certainly a wide range in tone and approach to CSR stories, most any and all could be categorized under one of the following: the **Shocking**, the **Emotional**, or the **Comic**.

SHOCKING stories often have the most lasting impact and power over an audience. Story lines that seek to shock do so through abrupt and unexpected twists, surprise endings, or unanticipated messages. They often begin in one tone, and end on a darker, contrasting note. Companies considering telling stories in this mode should keep in mind they run the risk of offending some of their audience who may find themselves too jarred or disturbed by a story's abrupt message or startling imagery.

EMOTIONAL stories are without a doubt the most common when it comes to conveying corporate stewardship. And why not? Stories relating corporate social responsibility are going to be dealing with more important and emotional subject matter than most Hollywood movies bother to profile: human rights, fair trade, labor practices and the environment. This makes telling an effective story both more simple and more difficult, as it may be very easy for a story to fall into either extreme of melodrama or kitsch.

COMIC storytelling is, unsurprisingly, very uncommon within cause marketing campaigns. Go figure, but for most people it's rather hard to find anything particularly comical about global warming, fair trade, and corporate accountability. It's this scarcity that would make any CSR storyline daring enough to be funny both incredibly viral and popular.



Appropriate subject matter for CSR storylines are infinite and only limited by the imagination and creativity driving a corporation's social and environmental initiatives. If a corporation's community involvement, contributions and stewardship are unique, then a story profiling them won't fail to be so as well. That being said, here are a few examples of common story subjects:

• **HIGHLIGHTING EMPLOYEES**

Nobody is a more reliable authority as to a corporation's ethics than its workers, and there is nobody that your stakeholders want to hear from more. These are the true experts regarding any corporation's credibility.



Anheuser-Busch ran a television campaign featuring employees from their breweries in Fort Collins, Colorado and Jacksonville Florida. In their commercials Anheuser-Busch employees described their company's accomplishments in energy conservation, recycling and wildlife preservation.

• **SHOWCASING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE**

Prove to customers that it's about more than the bottom line. Reinforcing your conscious, committed, and socially responsible behavior is another tried and true strategy.



FedEx partnered with the American Red Cross to sponsor a public awareness campaign titled Do More Than Cross Your Fingers. The campaign encourages FedEx's small business customers to ready themselves for emergency situations.

As part of the campaign, FedEx provided a downloadable checklist for small business owners to help them make certain they are prepared.

• **TELLING A STORY ABOUT YOUR SUPPLY CHAIN**

Nothing will give stakeholders a more overall sense of security as to a company's commitment to people, planet, and profit than a detailed profile of the individuals, organizations, and technology that constitute a corporate supply chain.



McDonald's 2010 Corporate Responsibility Report detailed their sustainable supply chain efforts. Their suppliers work hand-in-hand with McDonald's to focus their efforts on The 3Es: Ethical, Environmental and Economic Responsibility.

HOW STORY LINES OPERATE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Before the rise of social media, companies had a lock-down on defining their brand. Now things have changed. Businesses have far less control of their brand identity than their audience. The public can now quickly and easily publish their stories of you.

- Those that don't like you are far more likely to tell their story than those who do.
- Bad reviews are far more viral than praise.

TIPS: KEEP AN EYE ON WHAT STORIES ARE BEING TOLD BY

- Setting up alerts in Google and Twitter
- Keep an eye on sites such as Reddit, Yelp and Digg
- Keep a constant eye on your own social media sites



When you do encounter someone that is spreading negative stories about your organization, it's never worth being confrontational. If instead you deliver a solution that goes above and beyond anything that was expected, it will be passed along via social media and quickly become the new story.





patagonia[®]



PATAGONIA: THE FOOTPRINT CHRONICLES

The footprint chronicles is an initiative from outdoor clothing and gear company Patagonia that allows you to track the impact of any specific Patagonia Product all the way from its initial design through to its delivery. The Footprint Chronicles includes a 3-Part Video series that examines the challenges of global sourcing from three vantage point: social, environmental and product quality.

The initiative is interactive, well-promoted, and most importantly, highly original and relevant to Patagonia's areas of operation. This project added greatly to Patagonia's ever-growing reputation as a brand committed to CSR.

Interface **FLOR**[®]



THE INTERFACE STORY: MISSION ZERO

Interface Global has set themselves a very lofty goal, and in doing so they have created for themselves one of the most compelling and engaging CSR stories currently underway. Mission Zero tracks Interface's quest to eliminate any and all negative impact the company is having on the environment by 2020. Visitors to their website can view their progress, their challenges, and learn ways that they as stakeholders can get engaged and help Interface to achieve their goal. Mission Zero is interactive, multi-media, and most importantly, unflinchingly honest and transparent about the real difficulties of achieving zero impact.

Need Help?

There's no need for companies to feel alone while attempting to master storytelling and new media. CSRcopy has helped dozens of organizations passionately and effectively convey their CSR and sustainability stories. Freeworld Media is unrivaled when it comes to developing cause marketing efforts that are both in keeping with their client's brand and that engage social media to the absolute fullest.

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