

All for a good cause



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SMEs are uniquely primed to reap rewards from being socially responsible.

Forward-thinking companies big and small all over the world are embedding sustainability and social responsibility into their businesses to build benefit for business and society.

It's a golden time for SMEs to capitalise on cause-related marketing, or what now generally falls under the umbrella of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

“Consumers want to engage with brands they trust and see as doing good rather than harm,” says social entrepreneur Hailey Cavill, whose firm Cavill + Co has for over 20 years orchestrated numerous profitable and purposeful partnerships between companies and causes.

According to a new report from Cavill + Co called *Talking the Walk – the definitive guide to communicating CSR & Social Good*, 66 percent of Australians believe big corporates only care about profit and will do

anything to get it.

Even brands that are doing “good” frequently fail to effectively communicate it to everyday consumers.

“Skepticism is rising,” Cavill says. “Almost 50 percent of Australian consumers think brands spend millions of dollars on advertising telling us about CSR while providing no proof of the benefits.”

SMEs don’t have millions to spend on CSR, but they can still leverage it to stand out from competitors, engage, inspire and motivate. In fact, many are disrupting a range of categories.

Kellogg’s, long dominant in the cereals market, is being challenged by the likes of Carman’s and the ever-diversifying Thankyou Group, which was originally founded on the idea of providing a month’s worth of clean water to the developing world for every bottle of drinking water it sold.

Outdoor clothing company Patagonia is going to extreme lengths to track and document its supply chain and in Australia is currently matching every dollar donated to help fund environmental projects.

Australian tech startup phenomenon Altassian has morphed into a global Goliath based on six values its founders live and breathe, including “open company”, “no bullshit” and “don’t f*** the customer”.

“CSR is part of their makeup, not an add-on,” Cavill notes. “Gen Y is jostling to work for them and customers can’t get enough of their products.”

Humans are wired for good

But CSR is not about appealing to Gen Y, Baby Boomers or Gen Z – it’s about sharing things we all have in common.

“We’re emotional beings and process pictures faster than words, retain information in story form, and our brains are wired for altruism,” Cavill says.

Whereas old-school companies still rely on traditional advertising to push products, younger, more dynamic challenger brands are engaging with customers, not just talking at them.

“Social media demands emotive stories, which is why aligning with charities can be so powerful – they have them in bucket loads,” Cavill says.

“Consumers want authenticity, which is much easier to convey if you’re a smaller company, especially if the founder is still at the helm.”

An ace for SMEs

For SMEs, working within a community – and being seen to be part of that community by supporting it – is a real ace up the sleeve.

Even so, finding the right “fit” with a not-for-profit is important.

“The first thing is to be clear about your objective,” Cavill says. “Is it to differentiate the brand or generate new business?”

“Think about the main challenges you face and how to weave a cause or charity into the solution. If you’re one of five pizza restaurants on a strip, one way to differentiate could be by running a promotion that financially supports a local charity.”

On the other hand, if you’re a new entrant to an established market, consider a partnership that will create emotive stories and grow brand awareness via social media.

Measuring ROI is always tricky – even for larger firms – but most charities will be happy for you to borrow and leverage their brand, provided you’re prepared to commit to an up-front dollar figure. Charities know the power of their brand, and the higher the profile, the higher the cost of partnering with it.

But CSR need not – and in many cases should not – be only about money. Think outside the square for other ways to add value: specialist expertise, volunteering for events, or in-store and online promotions.

“If the fit is right, charities won’t just slap your logo onto their website – they’ll go out of their way to ensure mutual benefit,” Cavill says.