

Corporate Social Responsibility: Today's New Normal

Compassion is part of human nature, and is often why people find time or money to help a cause they feel strongly about. For a lot of people, the cause they take on is driven by a connection that has touched their lives in some way, whether directly or through a family member or a friend. For example, a person who recently lost a pet might volunteer at the local pet shelter, or someone whose mother was diagnosed with breast cancer might chair a walk/run for cancer research.

Today, being socially responsible no longer only applies to individuals. Businesses have evolved to weave social responsibility into their company cultures. Organizations also have become more aware of the social, environmental and economic effects their operations have on their communities and are choosing to make changes that are more responsible and in line with public and employee expectations.

Welcome to the **Human Era**, the era of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

CSR is no longer a trend. The younger generations in today's workforce are **much more attuned to being socially responsible**, and they are looking for jobs at companies that have a strong presence in making a difference. This is referred to as the triple bottom line: people, planet and revenue.

So why does corporate social responsibility matter? It matters because a company's culture can attract *or repel* potential new hires. Likewise, purchasers will gravitate toward companies with CSR programs they believe in or turn away from those that are not aligned with their own values.

Why Is CSR Important for Companies?

Being socially responsible, and having it part of your **corporate culture**, attracts talent, builds your brand, improves your image, increases sales, and draws awareness to issues that matter to your company and its customers. Employees want to identify with an employer that shares their values. Customers show loyalty to companies that prioritize the same issues they do. By drawing lines in the sand for where you stand on certain social issues, you can attract committed, like-minded individuals.

CSR is scalable. That means it is not just for the big players within your industry. If you are a local business, your CSR program can be on a local level – assisting a local charity or helping local families who are in need. If you are a larger company, you can take on a national or global program, working with large, international nonprofits to build out your CSR initiative.



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Note that a CSR program goes beyond financial donations. Companies have been sending checks of all sizes to charities for many years. Taking it a step (or two) further to contribute to a cause in a more-direct way elevates the program to a whole new level. For example, [Wine to Water](#) works to supply clean drinking water to areas that would otherwise not have access. A company might choose to partner with Wine to Water to host a team-building event where employees assemble water filters to help provide a decade's worth of clean drinking water to families in need. That's something Jaffe has pioneered through the Legal Marketing Association conference for the past couple of years, and firms have responded by participating during those events and creating their own events afterward.

Examples of CSR Programs

As a company, you have a more-prominent platform than an individual in which to share your CSR efforts and results. By sharing details of your CSR program, you may draw attention to a cause that often goes unnoticed. For example, Lacoste recently swapped out its signature crocodile icon for a number of endangered animals. The campaign coincided with International Day for Biological Diversity, helping to raise awareness of this important issue. Proceeds from sales of the limited-edition polo shirts with the endangered animals went to the International Union for Conservation of Nature to support its conservation efforts. The shirts quickly sold out online. As an international brand, Lacoste's impact was significant.

An example of a company that executed a CSR campaign on a local level is Coca-Cola, with its [recycling campaign](#). The soda manufacturer took their iconic signature ribbon and transformed it into a directional arm that it placed on billboards, soda machines and transit stop shelters to lead people to recycling bins. The company might have minimized its wordmark, but the silhouette of the mark along with its brand colors keeps the company's brand awareness front and center.

Benefits of Corporate Social Responsibility for Employees

When launching a CSR program, one of the most crucial steps to take early on is to involve your employees in the decision-making process. Create an internal team to take charge and interview people in the company at all levels to choose a cause that fits your culture. Getting involved with something your employees are passionate about can increase engagement, foster a sense of community, and lead to financial success.

Engaging your employees also helps create accountability. Decisions about a CSR program that are made behind closed doors often make people suspicious. Questions about the genuinely altruistic nature of the program may arise, and there may even be questions of whether monetary donations are actually going to the charitable entity at all. To head off such controversy, make sure your CSR program is transparent to your employees.

What to Avoid When Creating a CSR Program

A CSR program does not have to be complicated, but there are a few things to consider. Avoid participating in charitable efforts that are not related to your core business focus or ethical standards. Don't blindly send money to a completely unrelated organization. Find a purpose that your company believes in and put your efforts toward a project in the local community. If you have multiple locations, consider expanding your program to all your locations – a program like supplying books and reading to children in schools in underserved areas is easily scalable.

Another important point: Your CSR program should not be solely for marketing purposes. Running a CSR campaign as a quick marketing scheme often backfires when your business doesn't follow through. Avoid a one-time act. Your program should be long-term with an ongoing effect. Employees and customers tend to react positively to companies that embrace long-term social responsibility programs.

Developing a CSR initiative is truly a win-win for everyone involved. The impact of your actions will not only appeal to socially conscious clients and employees, but can make a real difference in the world.

What CSR program is your company doing? How has it benefited your company culture? Leave a comment or send me a note. If you are looking for a program that fits your company's culture, reach out to me, Alan E. Singles, at asingles@jaffepr.com.