



Inflection Point

How Corporate Social Responsibility Sets Strategy, Marketing, and Communications

LONGVIEW
STRATEGIES

336 Baker Avenue, #24
Concord, Massachusetts 01742
Phone: (978) 225-9250
www.longviewstrategies.com

Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability have come a long way. What used to be niche practices are now fully mainstream, with companies of all sizes and across all industries embracing the value of measurable, positive impact. As the world continues to evolve to today's "new standards," businesses are increasingly integrating social responsibility as part of their strategy.

Societal changes have been significant over the past 18 months, and organizations understand that they are a major part of the global conversation. They play an essential role in advancing issues including racial justice, climate change, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I). Internal and external communications among stakeholders including employees and clients are addressing how companies are taking a stance and reinforcing their points of view.

Companies are also being drawn to insights and perspectives from investors. For example, in the [Rate the Raters 2020 Report](#) published by SustainAbility, ESG ratings, topics, and themes are being used to drive new initiatives. To tackle all stakeholder lenses, further dialogue and action is required for companies to stay ahead of the curve for CSR - including ESG ratings.

CSR provides the reputational capital to build a brand and market it effectively. It contributes to a competitive edge and differentiator that can help drive brand trust and business relationships.



Employees and human capital management



“Nine out of ten people are willing to trade a percentage of their lifetime earnings for greater meaning at work.”

- [BetterUp's 2018 Meaning and Purpose at Work](#)

Business leaders continue to seek new ways to increase productivity and enhance employee engagement within the workforce, and CSR is likely part of the solution. Good business brings healthier and happier workplaces. [Harvard Business Review](#) reported a staggering estimate in the value of integrating CSR. “We estimate that enterprise companies save an average of \$6.43M in annual turnover-related costs for every 10,000 workers, when all employees feel their work is highly meaningful.” Companies seeking new hires will likely find a competitive advantage to hire and retain new employees. This ultimately will affect the bottom line with [employee engagement](#) tied in to company performance. More engaged employees are more productive. This, in turn, creates less turnover leading to less time and money to find and train new talent. Employee retention also develops advocates as brand ambassadors who drive authentic content marketing.

More clients are asking questions about CSR. How is your business contributing to society as a whole? To attract and retain new clients, companies need to align their values to prioritize their purposeful impact to larger causes. Loyal clients and referral ambassadors will likely stay on as clients for longer when they feel their money is contributing to a greater good. This will likely distinguish your business with a competitive edge. Brands that demonstrate a commitment to CSR [outperform](#) compared to those that don't.

Stakeholders are taking an affirmative stance to advocacy based on causes they value.

Social consciousness is now a fundamental decision-making factor for many. As a result, companies are increasing their marketing efforts to highlight their purpose-driven initiatives. In a 2019 Forbes interview with Corley Kenna, Patagonia’s Director of Global Communications and Public Relations, Kenna was asked how their brand purpose impacted marketing efforts.



“ For us, it’s more important to get the environmental story out than Patagonia the brand. Before all, we emphasize storytelling and spotlight the environmental causes we care about.



How are your employees treated? What are your company values? Do you have full visibility into the issues at hand?

- Corley Kenna, Patagonia’s Director of Global Communications



Uber’s response to the Covid-19 lockdowns included their ‘Move What Matters’ campaign, which urged people to stay at home instead of using their app. The integrated campaign included their pledge to provide 10 million rides and food deliveries to healthcare workers, seniors, and people in need, an ad in partnership with Wieden+Kennedy and Prettybird, along with a video thanking people for not riding. When [speaking to Marketing Week](#), Thomas Ranese, Uber’s Vice-President of Global Marketing focused on how the campaign was created with real action in mind. This demonstrates a prime example of how a company adapts its business model to proactively respond to an international cause. Marketing needs to be partnered with an inflection point. Companies need to not only consider **how** they operate but **why** they operate. What’s the purposeful impact and legacy they seek to leave?

Strategic approach

Marketing CSR initiatives requires a careful balance to avoid sounding cliché or insincere. Avoid greenwashing and amplifying causes that do not align with your company's mission. At Longview Strategies, we place a heavy emphasis on the "strategy." Companies will likely have a greater chance of success when they take a step back, consider the overarching themes, and lay out the marketing efforts that are needed. According to [Brandwatch.com](https://www.brandwatch.com), there are five elements when developing your marketing strategy.

- 1. Highlight issues that align with your organization's mission/purpose.** Demonstrate authenticity by working towards a cause that the company is passionate about.
- 2. Select a cause that is related to your line of work.** The more aligned it is with your brand, the more genuine it will be.
- 3. It's not just about the donations.** Although financial commitments are helpful, generate cause awareness and exposure using your organization's platform. Your business model should reflect strategic initiatives and effective partnerships.
- 4. Communicate and partner with a non-profit.** Ask how your company can get involved and which initiatives would be most effective.
- 5. Highlight social and paid media.** Develop a creative campaign that is transparent and reflective of your company's stance. Encourage engagement by others and maximize the reach by selecting multiple media outlets.



How does strategy set the stage? Take [IKEA's Sustainability Strategy](#) for example. Originally published in 2018, the 'People & Planet Strategy' includes the importance of sustainability to IKEA's global and company culture. The organization's strategic approach outlines its vision to inspire, lead a sustainably focused business model, and adapt quickly to an evolving world. Baseline metrics are included with aspirational key performance indicators (KPI's) for 2030. IKEA also identifies three corresponding focus areas that tie into the overarching theme for the program. This strategy captures the essence of what a CSR plan should look like based on key marketing initiatives.

Tactical approach

After the strategy is defined, tactical initiatives will facilitate your marketing campaigns to amplify awareness. If you're unsure where to begin, [Smallbiztrends.com](https://www.smallbiztrends.com) developed its marketing checklist:



- Define your purpose.**
- Identify issues that support it.**
- Create a budget.**
- Consider PR and advertising.**
- Define metrics to be tracked.**
- Get stakeholders and employees involved.**
- Think big picture with back-to-back initiatives.**
- Reflect on the success.**

The ultimate goal is to keep the conversation going and amplify awareness to generate engagement. Over time your organization will become a key advocate driving impactful change. The tactics will likely differ depending on your industry and audience. Popular examples of marketing tactics include downloadable content such as reports, papers, fact sheets, video, social media, and email. Campaigns will likely also include a separate section or landing page on your company's website to help redirect all traffic. Set your objectives first within your strategic plan and your marketing tactics will follow.

Effectively engage stakeholders and employees

To drive momentum to your CSR efforts, foundational work is needed to ensure your organization will effectively engage with external stakeholders and employees to develop buy-in. Options are endless but there are overarching areas of your business that drive stakeholder support. These may include:

- **Workplace practices** such as compensation structure, hiring diverse talent.
- **Policies** highlighting commitment to social, environmental and economic effects.
- **Programs** including annual partnerships, volunteer time on a recurring basis.
- **Philanthropic efforts** focusing on financial donations and volunteer initiatives.

To determine which area to concentrate on first from the practices above, we recommend beginning with a materiality assessment. A [materiality assessment](#) is the process of identifying, refining, and assessing the numerous potential environmental, social, governance, and human capital issues that could affect a business and/or its stakeholders. Once identified, material issues are condensed into a short-list of topics that will inform overall company strategy and CSR initiatives.

Crafting the right questions is the most important thing when designing an assessment. Select the right stakeholders to inform the organization's decision-making process around workplace policies, programs, and philanthropic efforts. After speaking with the relevant stakeholders, you'll want to home in on efforts that have the biggest impact potential on business and society. Consider which cause you have the highest influence or control over. This will likely be where your efforts should be concentrated on from a CSR lens.

Development of CSR-focused content

Take HubSpot for example, a **top-rated** ESG company in the software and services industry. They performed a materiality assessment with internal and external stakeholders that resulted in three **areas of focus**: diversity and belonging, privacy and data protection, and energy and emissions. As a result, their renewed and continued focus on diversity and belonging is now highlighted in their **2021 Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Report**. Based on this content, HubSpot is effectively communicating the causes they are prioritizing, their current initiatives, and how they are planning to proactively promote these efforts.

Upon completing your materiality assessment, leveraging your company's communication channels to promote your CSR efforts is paramount. Internal and external stakeholders want to stay aware, actively participate, and feel connected to your brand. Reports, video, social media, email are widely used channels to amplify CSR initiatives. Your website becomes the hub to redirect your audience to your brand. Popular channels for marketing include:



- Website
- Social media
- Video interviews
- Audiocasts
- Email campaigns
- Infographics
- Reports
- Fact sheets
- Events



As part of HubSpot's marketing, its team communicated priorities and plans through a designed report featured on their website. A dedicated landing page was created to bring awareness to the report on social media.

There are additional ways to maximize your content. For example, once a report has been developed, marketing teams can segment sections of the report into bite-sized pieces of information. Leadership can be interviewed to express their first-hand account of the WHY behind the report. Employee stories and partnerships with philanthropic organizations can be included to enrich your story. Mixed media content can be shared on a company's website, social media, and through email campaigns.

Authenticity and Accountability

Companies that are proactive reinforce authentic CSR.

Consumers are willing to not only sign on but pay more when they are moved by a specific cause. When looking at key considerations for business relationships, brand trust is key.

Companies are also being held accountable in their communities. Communities and nonprofit organizations are shifting the conversation to address global challenges. With a cultural pivot comes a societal pivot by taking affirmative action on some of the most pressing obstacles.

CSR enables companies to have a larger contribution outside of their services. From donating to charities to reducing carbon footprints, leaders are integrating actionable steps to bring positive change to the communities they serve.

If a company's message doesn't match its actions, this can be perceived as inauthentic and risks public backlash. It is impossible to speak out on every issue, but before deciding which issues you want to speak out on as a leader, make sure you ask **three questions:**

1. Does this issue align with our mission and values?
2. Can our company meaningfully influence the issue?
3. Will our stakeholders (employees, customers, community, board members, investors, etc.) agree with speaking out?

54% of employees globally believe that CEOs should speak publicly on political and social issues they care about. **89%** of Americans believe that the past 18 months represent an opportunity for large companies to hit "reset" and focus on doing right by their workers, customers, communities, and the environment.

Proctor & Gamble (P&G) took a **bold stand** by discussing the journey required to move corporate citizenship forward. P&G released two short films, "The Words Matter" and "Out of the Shadows," documenting the company's willingness to confront its past to become one of the world's most inclusive companies highlighting equal opportunity workplace policies and nondiscrimination in pay.

The world's issues are too profound right now to stand by and say nothing.

Do not shy away. Get involved in the conversation.

Companies are leveraging their presence to bring impact to issues they value.

Corporate social responsibility is becoming crucial as the next move for companies irrespective of industry or size. It's not only time to get involved in the conversation but become a driving force for positive change.

“*Business cannot be successful when the society around them fails.*”

[The Leaders Institute](#)

Marketing has become the vehicle to communicate and engage with stakeholders. People are not only looking for a professional service or product, but the greater impact that a company is bringing. From environmental awareness to social advocacy, today's hot topic issues need immediate action and an affirmative stance from a corporate level.

The reasons for CSR are compelling. It's not a question of "Should we?" but rather "How will we?" From company engagement and employee retention to brand advocacy and client loyalty, marketing will become a valuable component in your business strategy.



Contact Us

To learn how Longview Strategies can help you strategize and communicate CSR initiatives, contact us:

info@longviewstrategies.com

336 Baker Avenue, #24
Concord, Massachusetts 01742
Phone: (978) 225-9250
www.longviewstrategies.com

