

Good CSR and PR

How CSR can benefit brand image

Christopher Satterthwaite, Chief Executive of Chime Communications plc and Chairman of the Marketing Society, recalls his involvement in a memorable cause related marketing campaign.

In 1991 I worked for a sales promotion company and we discovered something called, 'cause related marketing'. Texaco tasked us to find a cause about which their customers cared and to which they could make a significant contribution. We researched various issues, but the one which resonated with customers was road safety. Texaco had over 2,000 service stations in those days and the fact that road accidents took place in the proximity of their stations seemed to make it relevant to customers that perhaps Texaco could do something to help.

The late and much missed Richard Little, who was then Manager of Advertising and Promotion, was very taken by the research and suggested that if we were going to do something with road safety, we should do it properly or not at all. This led to the birth of a television campaign under the slogan, 'Children should be seen and not hurt', which raised the issue of child road safety with all drivers and invited them to Texaco stations to receive reflective stickers to give to children up and down the country. We gave away 10 million stickers, enough for all the children in the UK, and the campaign cost around £6,000,000 per annum.

The results of the campaign were extraordinary. Texaco's corporate reputation scores improved dramatically. There was an increase in sales during the period child road safety was promoted. Most of all, I remember a senior civil servant addressing the Texaco sales force with the following words, "During the period of your campaign, the Department of Transport spent £1,000,000 on child safety road campaigns. You spent £6,000,000. When we look at the incidence of child fatalities during the period of both campaigns across a three-month period, we can see that 20 less children were killed on the roads than in the previous year. I can't promise you that all of those saved lives were completely down to your campaign, but what I can tell you is, that my judgement is that your campaign saved the lives of the majority of those 20 children."

It was a very measured and effective way of expressing the impact of the campaign and you could have heard a pin drop in what was generally a fairly vocal audience. As the sales force and employees left the conference hall, they walked a bit taller. They started telling stories of the impact they knew the campaign had in relation to each of their sales patches. Many of them had undertaken school visits with people from ROSPA and built local relationships between Texaco and schools in the neighbourhood.

There is a sad aside to this story, which I always think is completely my fault. Next year, a new chief executive arrived at Texaco and we explained how successful the campaign had been and he asked me in that case how long should they run it for? Rather flippantly, I replied, "For a minimum of 25 years Sir." It was the wrong answer and the programme dwindled away. However, great thinking does endure, as last year Texaco revived their commitment to road safety, with a brilliant new campaign.

Since 1991, the corporate responsibility agenda has clearly become both deeper and wider. Single issue promotion that is not backed up by an organisation that understands its overall responsibilities to its shareholders, its staff, its customers and the broader community would not be a credible positioning. However, I think there is still a lot to learn from the Texaco example and in many ways I don't think there is a better creative example of cause related marketing since 1991. This makes me wonder if in furthering the corporate responsibility agenda and providing a degree of professionalism in its delivery, corporate responsibility has lost some of its competitive capability?

In his book, 'The Living Company', Arie de Geus proposed that there are four main reasons why companies survive. They are open to the outside world; they have a cohesive identity, they are tolerant and they are careful with their money.

Since 1991 the social agenda has developed considerably and any business that is not 'open to the outside world', is not just insulated from reality, but is also endangering its existence – according to Arie. As our consumer society has developed into the new millennium, there is increasing evidence that consumers are concerned about the consequences of their consumption. If Texaco could marshal a £6,000,000 budget behind their road safety corporate campaign in 1991, why is it that more companies have not made corporate responsibility an overt part of their competitive advantage?

I think there are two main reasons. Firstly, not enough people understand that if your company or brand is not in tune with the social issues of the time, then you're actually endangering the survival of your business. There is both a threat and an opportunity. Ignore the social issues of the time; cocoon yourself away from social developments and your business will choke on its own ashes. Embrace the social issues of the day, do your bit, communicate your role in doing so and you can attain a fair portion of competitive advantage in the hearts and minds of your customers. Secondly, I think the corporate responsibility sector has become more professional and in doing so, perhaps more risk averse. Quite rightly, supply chains are scrutinised; labour rates benchmarked; carbon intensity measured; but no organisation is ever 100% perfect – and none will ever be so. When James Murdoch committed Sky to becoming carbon neutral, I don't believe he had measured every aspect of Sky's carbon footprint, but he'd analysed enough of it to know that his commitment was possible and that over time the Sky organisation wouldn't just be carbon neutral, but also committed to a step by step process of reducing its carbon footprint and encouraging its customers and suppliers to

do so as well. That's good enough for me and certainly good enough for Sky subscribers who appreciate Sky's example.

Now that corporate responsibility is a professional business discipline, my plea would be to rediscover some of the creativity first seen in those far off days of cause related marketing. Consumers and stakeholders don't expect companies to be perfect, just as none of us expect our friends to be perfect. 'There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in', sings Leonard Cohen. Cracks of light are illuminating and my hope is that the light of creativity may shine again on corporate responsibility adopted by companies as brilliantly when Texaco proposed that, 'children should be seen and not hurt'.

Bio

Christopher Satterthwaite began his commercial career as a graduate trainee at H.J Heinz. Since his grounding on the client side, he has been part of three different kinds of marketing communication agencies: IMP, HHCL & Partners and Bell Pottinger. He is also Chairman of the Marketing Society and a Non-Executive Director of Centaur Media.

Pull out Quote:

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