

Embracing CSI as a strategic business function

By Jennilee Peremore-Oliver

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We've entered the week of Nelson Mandela's birthday, which is on Sunday, 18 July. We will start to see many companies posting about their initiatives, offering 67 minutes of their time to help their communities. Although marketing teams have needed to become creative on how they support initiatives during Mandela Month due to [Covid-19](#), I am confident that we will see ingenuity come to life in the following days.



Jennilee Peremore-Oliver, communications consultant and owner of Jenniemore

For many companies, participating in the 67-minute legacy has become the norm. Some look forward to it, while others feel the peer pressure to succumb even though CSI is not something they necessarily focus on as a business. To those businesses that form part of the latter group, it's important to note that there are many business benefits to truly embracing CSI as a critical element to your business strategy, including [increased profitability](#).

However, those benefits are only possible when the business truly embraces CSI as an essential function in the business.

Too often, business leaders wake up in the week of Mandela week and ask their marketing heads what the plans are for the day.

The head of the division grumpily calls in the intern and gives them the task of coming up with something at the last minute to implement quickly. And that usually means calling up an NPO during the week of Mandela Day and asking whether they can spend 67 minutes with them. They place the NPO under

immense pressure to accommodate the business as they can't say no to the support because they need it. The company's lack of forethought indicates both to the NPO and employees who receive the last-minute invite that the company didn't carefully plan the initiative. The underlying message is that the company doesn't care about helping the community. Many marketers can relate to this playing out in their departments.



How corporate SA can make a difference this Mandela Day

12 Jul 2021



Here's my take on the business benefits of genuinely embracing CSI in your company, and not just on Mandela Day:

Improves employee morale and productivity

Not everyone has a job like that of a frontline worker, including that of doctors, nurses, ambulance personnel, or scientists, where they are directly involved in the service of helping people. Like administrators, engineers, and marketers, most other professions involve supporting a business to succeed and make profits. However, everyone wants to feel like they are doing more than merely making a living and making profits for their business – [people want to work for a purpose](#).

People want to show that because they have made their employer succeed, their employer could give back to the community in which they operate and make a difference in the lives of people who would have been left hungry, unemployed, or uneducated.

When business leaders convince employees that the business is a [good corporate citizen](#) and conducts their business operations ethically while supporting the community in which they operate, employees feel like they are also contributing to that greater purpose. By making their employer succeed, they are impacting their communities positively.

When people work for a purpose, it improves their morale. Although other internal and [human resource factors](#) also affect morale and productivity, a feeling of purpose from believing your employer is making a difference in the world certainly contributes to improved morale and productivity amongst employees.

There is a particular emphasis on the word believe, however. Employees must believe that the company partakes in CSI initiatives because it genuinely cares about its impact on society. If not, the employer will not benefit from improved morale or productivity. For employees to believe in the company's philanthropic efforts, CSI must be part of the business strategy and not a miscellaneous activity only given attention after completing all other seemingly more important business activities.



Despite pandemic, SA has rallied in charitable giving - global survey

7 Jul 2021



Attracts respected clientele

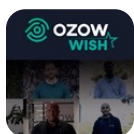
Not all business is good business.

Every business leader wants to onboard clients with impeccable reputations, or at least not questionable ones. In the current economic climate, it can be challenging for companies to turn away potential business. It can also be challenging to [identify problematic clients](#). You may only identify the red flags once it's too late and the company is already in too deep.

A business involved in meaningful and impactful initiatives that uplift their communities is putting their company values on display.

CSI makes a company's values more visible and known.

People want to do business with like-minded people. Like-minded businesspeople will eventually seek to align or associate themselves with a business that shares their values and that is held in high esteem by the community.



Ozow launches Ozow Wish campaign to help those most in need

30 Jun 2021



Improves the brand image

Like how exercising and eating healthy has a long-term and substantial impact on your overall personal health, CSI has a positive long-term effect on your business.

CSI has nothing to do with any of the superficial tactics employed by marketers to improve a brand reputation by ensuring the company logo is presented well on all collateral and seen in the right places.

With CSI, businesses must invest time and effort in their community, not merely funding, for the community to identify a company as a caring brand. CSI requires consistent daily effort to impact the brand positively. However, if implemented correctly and CSI is part of the business strategy, the business benefits are far-reaching and even greater than [traditional go-to marketing strategies](#).

Fosters community ownership of the brand

Any marketer's dream is to have their audience take ownership of the brand. Once a community embraces a brand, they start doing the work for marketers. The audience becomes ambassadors for the brand without being prompted to do so, providing [positive reviews](#) to family and friends. Recommendations are made public about the brand when people in the community see first-hand a company's impact locally. CSI turns a company's target audience into ambassadors.

Lays a positive foundation to deal with future crises

All [businesses face crises](#) at one point or another. Business leaders who invest in CSI can hope that the good they've done for their audience over the years will win their support when they need it the most and help them survive any future crisis. Some businesses don't survive crises because they have been known for disappointing their audiences and have a reputation for [unethical conduct](#). Therefore, when crises hit, the community is not as forgiving of their latest misstep.



How CSI can help tackle youth unemployment in a meaningful way

24 Jun 2021



Conclusion

The benefits of being a good corporate citizen are not up for debate any longer; now, it's more about how well you implement CSI, and whether you have successfully convinced your stakeholders that you genuinely care.

As we embark on Mandela Day this month, it is an excellent opportunity to reflect on CSI's role in your business. Assess the message you are sending to your stakeholders regarding how you implement your CSI initiatives and the kind of message you want to associate with your brand.

Unintended messages are often more powerful than the intended ones.

Become more strategic about your CSI by using it to improve the morale and productivity of your employees and attract the kind of clients you want. Make your brand values visible through your CSI projects. Help your community feel proud to be supporting your business by supporting them. Work daily to make a sustainable difference through your CSI initiatives, so that your audience will remember the good you've done and help you thrive through difficult times.

May this Mandela Day be an opportunity for businesses to honestly assess their impact on their communities and their company's greater purpose.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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