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## The Role of CSR Storytelling in Brand & Reputation Management

Just like a good novel, a compelling corporate social responsibility (CSR) story can resonate with your company's customers and improve both brand image and reputation. A successful CSR story is derived from a compelling CSR program that has transformed a company's ideals and values into real and measurable outcomes.

This is a crucial part of managing and differentiating your company's brand and reputation. Proactively telling your story with compelling language and visuals is critical to executing powerful, effective, strategic communications. The result is an enduring association between your company's CSR program, your brand, and a favorable reputation with customers and external audiences.

Even the most beautifully crafted CSR programs can fall flat if the story is not told. Research has shown that stories are a key tool for human memory. People remember things that show a before and after scenario - a cause and effect - leaving them with an emotional shift.

Brands are about relevancy and differentiation in the marketplace; and are primarily crafted internally. On the other hand, a company's reputation is about legitimacy and is largely owned by external stakeholders. Reputations are based on the experiences, judgments and perceptions of *others*.

According to the Reputation Institute's March 2016 *Reputation Leaders Study*, the most successful companies and organizations fully integrate CSR into their strategy and brand. It is infused into everything they do. Their findings go onto show that there is a crucial link between reputation and corporate purpose. Further, companies need to focus on actively managing their reputation; and CSR (a key driver of reputation) must be integrated into the corporate purpose and strategy.

At OTM Partners, we specialize in the development and management of nationally branded communications programs with a focus on corporate social responsibility campaigns.

Blending creativity with craft, we transform challenges into opportunities and objectives into outcomes.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is our business. Our award-winning team of CSR strategists has more than two decades of experience in the communications arena, and we understand that effective CSR programs are an essential element for succeeding in the business world today.

Whether you are looking to assess your current CSR efforts or to create a national program from the ground up, OTM Partners is the right team to help you achieve your goals.

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Consumer preferences and demands have shifted. Companies need to evolve to meet those demands. However, merely checking the “CSR box” is not enough. The communication of overall CSR goals and achievements helps to build trust in the company as well as its brands. As most business leaders know, trust is an invaluable asset in today’s highly competitive global marketplace.

When CSR stories are meaningful and are directly tied to a company’s mission and industry, they can act as a powerful boost to a company’s brand. As an example, REI, an outdoor goods retailer, made headlines in 2015 for closing its stores nationwide on Black Friday. It paired this move with a social media campaign aimed at spending the day outdoors, called #OptOutside. They created a convincing story, rejecting Black Friday commercialism for its perceived opposite, enjoying nature. The event generated news coverage, much of which linked back to REI’s website. Once there, readers learned that \$5.9 million was given to non-profits, and \$60 million was invested in the “outdoor community.” The story was complete: a major retailer had chosen nature over profit—the perfect lesson for its outdoor-focused brand.

Like the REI #OptOutside example, to ensure the right story gets heard, companies must organize a consistent message – a shared storyline –and broadcast it across multiple media platforms. It is no longer enough to publicize CSR initiatives in corporate board reports alone. Good CSR storytelling is dynamic and interactive. It uses the power of storytelling to linger in the consumer’s mind, leaving an emotional impression that will remain when the memory of underlying plot points disappear.

A compelling, sharable story must be easy to follow, authentic, directly tied to a company’s mission and vision, and should have a “catch” or a “so what?” that keeps the audience interested. It should follow the essential elements of storytelling in regard to clearly defined characters, setting, plot, conflict, and resolution.

While your company’s reputation is indeed owned mainly by external stakeholders - that reputation can be bolstered by authentic, compelling, relatable and sharable CSR stories. After all, consumers want to hear your story - they want to be proud of doing business with you - they want to “share” and “like” your story. When done right, CSR storytelling can achieve not just good publicity, but the lasting loyalty of appreciative consumers. It ensures that a company enjoys the fruit of doing good, and as a result, ensures that the good works continue. In the end, good CSR storytelling benefits the company and the quadruple bottom line - People, Planet, Purpose and Profit. It is good for everybody.

Other OTM Partners Corporate Social Responsibility articles can be found at [csrknowledge.com](http://csrknowledge.com):

- ❖ *What is CSR and Why Does it Matter?*
- ❖ *Five Tenets of a Successful and Sustainable Corporate Social Responsibility Program*
- ❖ *The Business Case for Corporate Social Responsibility Programs: Four Ways CSR Programs Can Have a Positive Impact on Your Bottom Line*
- ❖ *Increasing Employee Engagement: CSR Programs that Soar*
- ❖ *The Hidden Potential of Small Business CSR*

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