



## BRINGING CSR TO LIFE: FAIR TRADE MATTERS

By [Read deButts](#)

On its most basic level, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the essence of being a good corporate citizen. It is reflective of how companies interact with their customers, the public, and the world. More specifically, it is about how they meet or exceed their ethical, legal, commercial, and public expectations/obligations.

The Fair Trade industry brings CSR to life. Fair Trade is a movement aimed at achieving better trading conditions, promoting safer working standards, encouraging environmental conservation, enabling supply-chain transparency, and empowering developing communities around the world to build strong, thriving businesses. In order to receive Fair Trade certification, artisans and farmers are carefully trained in sustainable farming methods, environmentally friendly production habits, and encouraged to engage in community outreach and education programs.

For companies, selling products that are ethically sourced or support a cause has become a necessity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A [2017 Unilever study](#) shows that one-third of all consumers choose to buy from brands they believe are doing social/environmental good. Furthermore, the Fair Trade industry isn't a fringe or niche market; it is steadily growing and, in 2015, Fair Trade products netted over \$1 billion in total revenue. Big-name brands like [Patagonia](#) and [West Elm](#) are two [examples](#) of several hundred companies that have already realized the value in supporting Fair Trade and have begun promoting their commitment.

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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I first began to grasp the impact Fair Trade has on people and communities around the world after my wife opened Trade Roots—a Fair Trade retail business. We started to travel to developing countries across the globe to meet artisans and see the direct impact Fair Trade has on communities that empower women, improve educational opportunities, and promote sustainable livelihoods.

In the last few years, I've had the good fortune to see artisan communities in places like Rwanda, Nepal, India, Guatemala and more. Whether it's visiting Rwanda's [Cards From Africa](#) or [Hand Spun Hope](#)—the on-the-ground impact socially conscious American consumers have is abundantly clear. At [Hand Spun Hope](#), for example, a post-genocide widowed women's group that knits and sells various hand-spun wool products, I watched as more than 50 women handcrafted the very same unique products I'd seen on the shelves at Trade Roots. Founded to help women learn a skill and earn money to improve their lives and the lives of their families, the work done by [Hand Spun Hope](#) has transformed into the pride of the community for these formerly ostracized women.

In my travels, I've seen how consumers react to Fair Trade products and how they feel about supporting artisan communities around the world; and after visiting those artisans, I've come to realize how valuable an asset the Fair Trade movement is to CSR initiatives and consumers alike. Fair Trade not only uplifts global communities and causes, but also it often helps maintain a way of life for indigenous populations.

Fair Trade continues to pioneer new social causes, invent novel products, and re-define globalization: vowing to serve the international community with no-strings-attached. And in keeping with OTMs commitment to strong CSR principles, we hold steadfast in our belief that the Fair Trade movement offers significant value to companies and consumers. We believe that an ever-increasing number of companies will come to understand the value and importance of Fair Trade. We are hopeful that we can play a small part in getting the message out to CSR driven companies, all while advancing Fair Trade principles in dynamic, innovative, and economical ways.