

CSR as a PR strategy for enhancing business-community relations

By  Leago Monareng

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Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has evolved over the past few years as more and more organisations take a larger role in actively participating in social and community projects. The BBBEE scorecard has also made provision for organisations to score points to enhance their ability to do business with various entities, such as government, by being "good" corporate citizens.



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When the King Committee produced the first King Report on Corporate Governance, in 1994, doing business took on a new meaning. Organisations quickly realised that they can't work in seclusion to the communities within which they operate.

The report continuously highlights the fact that good corporate governance and social inclusion go beyond the work performed in the workplace, making it impossible for organisations to ignore the impact of social, ethical and environmental issues on their business and the economy.

Globally, organisations employ CSR as a PR strategy to strengthen relations with immediate community members in order to boost sales and loyalty. That is why one of the specialities and applications of PR should include community relations and CSR, especially for corporate PR.



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Where are organisation getting it wrong?

Sadly, there are still organisations who don't see the ROI of PR, nor do they realise that PR plays an important role in

ensuring that the organisation's CSR initiatives and actions reflects favourably on the company's reputation.

A catch 22 maybe?

Doing business in the 21st century has become more than just the rands and cents; it includes the organisation's carbon footprint and impact it has on society, which indirectly influences the profit margins. This is where leveraging on your PR strategy could prove favourable. However, for the strategy to work, PR practitioners should create comprehensive initiatives that are aligned to the organisation's overall vision and communicate these initiatives with internal and external stakeholders.

The benefit of ensuring that customers, suppliers and the local community knows what the organisation is doing to make a positive difference to the community normally reflects in the profit margins. At the end of the day, the onus is on the organisation to ensure that their CSR and community relations programmes are aligned with not only its interest, but the community's welfare as well.

And CSR and community relations programmes must consist of actions that demonstrate the organisation's sincere recognition of its responsibility to the society in which it operates.

CSR - the secret weapon of any organisation

A rookie mistake is not including the organisation's CSR initiative in PR strategies, especially when trends show that customers prefer supporting organisations they respect, but more importantly organisations that invest in communities in which they operate.

Frequent CSR initiatives encourage customers and other stakeholders to stay involved with the business. This stimulates growth and positive changes in the broader economy by creating opportunities and value for people who make up these communities.



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Throwing money around isn't community relations

Community relations includes an organisation's interactions with community in which it conducts its business. These are social outreach programmes corporations set up to build relations and encourage a comprehension of the role and obligation a corporation has to its local community.

Most organisations enhance their community relations by taking an active interest in community problems, sponsoring and supporting youth activities, purchasing materials and supplies from local communities, investing in community education

and supporting local charity drives.

With increased openness and inclusivity, we are seeing more and more organisations utilising PR to publish more information about their CSR expenditure and projects. Articles about CSR projects and initiatives appear regularly in mainstream media, as well as special features and supplements. Organisations should embrace using such platforms to showcase in-house CSI projects that enhance community relations.

As a business, if your CSR strategy does not include publicising your CSR initiatives, you are not giving yourself enough credit and are missing out on an opportunity to enhance your image and community relations. And this is one opportunity organisations shouldn't overlook.

ABOUT LEAGO MONARENG

Leago is an intermediate - level public relations and communications consultant with over two years' working experience in the media industry. Currently a P.R Account Executive at Glasshouse Communication Management, Leago specialises in media relations, content development, event public relations and support of crisis communications.
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