



# CSR IS CHANGING, AND IT'S FOR THE GOOD

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There were many panel discussions on the evolving nature of CSR at SXSW Interactive among CSR professionals, nonprofits, philanthropists and entrepreneurs alike. One thing they all agree on: The intersection between the corporate world and social good is changing. CSR programs are now aligned with business strategy versus philanthropic strategy only. Instead of companies receiving praise for investing in causes, they are ridiculed if they are still standing on the sidelines. Emerging technologies are changing the ways in which people give and receive help.

What implications do these changes have for CSR programs going forward? Here are a few takeaways:

### GROWING CULTURE OF CYNICISM

The rise of CSR has resulted in an increased culture of cynicism. Consumers, especially millennials, can see right through flash-in-the-pan reputation schemes. Random giving doesn't cut it anymore. Programs that resonate most with consumers are 1) aligned with the business, 2) sustained across a period of time and 3) supported by employee action.

Several panelists mentioned examples, such as the Clorox "green washing" campaign and the Susan G. Komen "pink washing" movement, that have turned off consumers to companies that go overboard to get attention, without backing it up with action. With every CSR initiative – from small community programs to mass cause marketing campaigns – consumers will be looking out for what they deem as fake.

### LOCAL FIRST

Our culture increasingly expects companies to think big when it comes to their goals. However, among multi-million dollar commitments and aspirational goals, the tone of CSR professionals and nonprofits alike indicates the need to get back to a local focus when it comes to making a real impact. In a local CSR meet-up session, organizations like Unilever, Kendra Scott and UNICEF talked about the importance of working with local stakeholders, nonprofit partners and

employees to meet the needs of the communities in which a company operates. It's when these local collaborations work well that corporations are able to make an impact on a global scale.

When it comes to external communications, a local-first approach to storytelling – both for earned and paid media – is often most effective and helps build credibility and authenticity.

## FIRST-WORLD TECH BEING USED TO SOLVE THIRD-WORLD PROBLEMS

Technology is changing the way we think about philanthropy. In the past, programs like the Red Cross and UNICEF spent their time, energy and resources responding to crises. Today, they are investing in tech solutions to diagnose and prevent problems before they surface. For example:

- UNICEF launched a campaign last year encouraging tech entrepreneurs to use wearable technology to solve societal problems. It is known as the “[Wearable for Good](#)” challenge. Thanks to the winners, including Khushi Babi, technology originally developed for the fitness-obsessed first world is now [used in India](#) to track immunization records of children in remote villages.
- Fires, one of the most frequent causes of death in refugee camps, are now being prevented by computer chips.

## GENERATION Z

Millennials have grabbed the spotlight in recent years. On their heels comes Generation Z – the first generation born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, raised with the Internet in their pocket. Research shows they are even more passionate about companies that are giving back to society – 80 percent care about world hunger, education and childhood diseases. They are supportive of businesses making a profit by doing good. Companies must find ways to engage Generation Z now to build trust for the future – and the best way to do that may be through their phones.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Based on these points, these are a few questions for your organization to consider when either developing a new CSR campaign or building upon a successful initiative to align with the changing attitudes in society:

- Before launching a new CSR campaign, how can we ensure the positioning will pass the test for cynical consumers by being 1) aligned with the business, 2) a sustained commitment and 3) supported by employees?
- What social and cultural influencers should be used in our CSR work to better reach our target audiences?
- When working with nonprofit partners, how can we help elevate their messaging through our channels, vs. vice versa?
- How can we better target Generation Z through mobile technology?

The interest and enthusiasm at SXSW about this topic indicates CSR is not going anywhere anytime soon. While change isn't always good, in this case the increasing role of corporations in society is good for everyone.