

## How to craft a CSR message that wins over your customers

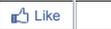
July 14, 2012 by [Bushra.Azhar](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication is a thorny management issue, mainly because there are two rather conflicting management viewpoints about how it should be approached. There are those, who believe that all it takes is an annual CSR report that lays down the many CSR victories and cleverly disguises the shortfalls, with an adequate sprinkling of smiling employees, sprouting beans and overly excited customers. Then there are those who believe that CSR communication is just like any other type of corporate communication to be tackled under the PR or corporate communication department and given the same uniform treatment as the other branding/ advertising efforts.



I fall somewhere between these two. I feel that a report is indeed one of the best ways to communicate your CSR message but only if it **respects the true purpose of a CSR report** and is not simply a greenwash. To do that, companies must pay heed to [this advice by Elaine Cohen](#) prompted by the equally awesome [Julein Goy](#). I also believe that CSR message communicated under the corporate communication department is a good idea since it ensures that the messaging is unified and there is no disconnect from the overall brand or image direction of the company.

That said, when it comes to CSR messaging, it is important to make sure that the message is tailored to different types of stakeholders and this post is about how to tailor your message so that your customers believe you and respect your efforts even if they do not always agree with your stance.

In the coming weeks, we will talk about how to create a CSR message that the other groups of stakeholders can relate to, but for now let's look at the Dos and Don'ts for crafting your CSR message so that your customers can relate to it: 

### Don't tell me what you don't do, but what you do:

While it is great for the consumer to know that your product is free of parabens and BPAs and artificial colours and sugars, what will really set you apart is when you tell them what your product or service offers that others don't. How is your product being more responsible, how are your practices a notch above the "cause no harm league" and how are you challenging the status quo in your industry when it comes to CSR and sustainability issues. Have you thought of coming up with an innovative solution that saves the planet, yet delivers great value for the customer? Have you gone beyond the industry norms in lowering the emissions or enhancing the work-life balance at your company?

### What's your story?

How does your brand work with my emotions? Does it touch me at a human level or do your

<http://www.gbsense.com/2012/07/14/csr-message-that-wins-customers/#more-706>

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### Who am I?



My name is Bushra Azhar and I am an accountant-turned-banker-turned academic-turned CSR Consultant..... and a very good one at that.

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expect me to buy it just because it's the cheapest option? If you have decided to go the fair-trade route, what made you do that? If you are investing in community initiatives, what inspirational stories do you have to share with me? If you are offering pro-bono services to small businesses in the community, showcase some of them so I know how you are changing lives. Stories touch emotions; they give people a reason to believe in your brand and help spread the word. Look at this awesome example from [Innocent](#) reflecting the power of stories (they even have a [book about their story](#)):

*"We started innocent in 1999 after selling our smoothies at a music festival. We put up a big sign asking people if they thought we should give up our jobs to make smoothies, and put a bin saying 'Yes' and a bin saying 'No' in front of the stall. Then we got people to vote with their empties. At the end of the weekend, the 'Yes' bin was full, so we resigned from our jobs the next day and got cracking"*

### Respect my Intelligence:

Your consumer has access to a lot of information out there about ingredients, products, packing etc. Don't sugar-coat things for them, say it like it is. When you have fallen short, own up! when you have made progress, describe the process and how you made it possible. Make them a part of your sustainability journey, take them on a ride with you and let them see how you struggle to put all the pieces together.

### Why should I tell others about you?

Brands that only sell products will only get talked about when there is a tangible gain for the consumer. However, brands that make an association with the consumer beyond the product, whether through an emotional connection or because they add value more than just monetary gain, have a higher probability of benefiting from Word of Mouth. In this age of social media, everyone wants to be the first one to talk about the coolest, newest, most ground-breaking idea out there and your customer will only be motivated to spread the word when he sees you add in that extra oomph!

### How does your product or service make me feel better about my purchase?

[TOMS shoes](#) has built a million dollar company around that premise, they donate a pair of shoes for every pair sold. How cool is that! If your product makes me sleep better at night because I felt that I have contributed in, whatever small way to a better world, I will not only talk about it I will keep coming back.

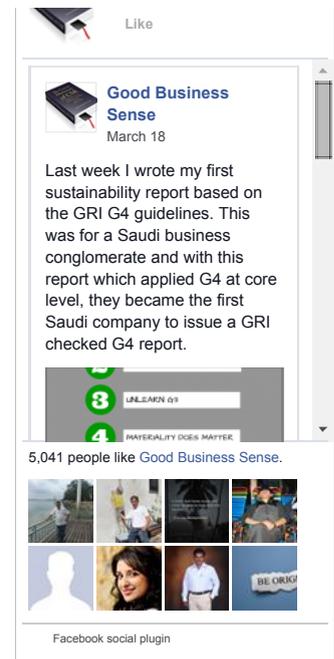
### How does your product or service make my life better?

Instead of just saying what a product or service does, also tell the consumer how he will be better off with your product or brand. Have you developed a green cleaning material that will also lower the instance of allergies? Does your hospital use no mercury in the radiology department and have switched to digital which not only minimize waiting time but is also easy on the environment?

### Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me

When you mess up, own up. By trying to brush things under the carpet, you not only risk escalating the problem but also undo all the goodwill you earned through your sustainability journey. Consider your customers as your confidante (and if you have followed the above, they already are) and come out clean.

[Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz](#) has written: Consumers "will embrace only the companies and



...has written consumers that embrace only the companies and brands they trust and with which they identify". Above are some of the ways in which companies can do just that and reap all the benefits that come with it. These dos and don'ts apply equally whether you are writing up your CSR report or developing individual product/brand messaging. Do you have any suggestions that you think should be added to the list?

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