

DOING Good Only Gets You So Far: 15 Points on CSR Reporting—With Elaine Cohen

7:00 AM CATEGORIES: [EVALUATION](#), [INTERVIEWS](#), [PODCAST](#) BY [ADMIN](#) 7 COMMENTS



If you like this post, subscribe via [email](#) or [RSS](#).



0



I write Cause Capitalism to arm companies and entrepreneurs with the reasons, examples and tactics to integrate a social mission into their business. Many of the start-ups and sole proprietors that I speak with are just beginning to look for ways to add a social element as they launch their business. It's challenge enough for them to figure out the best way to do this amid traditional start-up concerns. They've yet to think about the reporting that comes in tandem with these programs. Why report at all? Isn't it enough that they intend to do good?



I invited [Elaine Cohen](#), a specialist in CSR and sustainability reporting and assurance, to speak to these questions and walk us through the benefits, methods and tone of CSR reporting. Elaine is the CEO at [BeyondBusiness](#), a CSR strategy development and execution firm in Israel. She makes reporting come to life (truly!) on [CSR-Reporting](#) and [CorporateRegister.com](#).

Below are some key points from our conversation. It's well worth a listen as Elaine goes into more detail than I'll recount here (70 mins).

The anatomy of CSR

- CSR rests on two platforms: Ethics (what values your business is committed to) and Governance Structure (how the company board is shaped and run).
- The 4 basic impact areas that a small business can think about:
 - A. Marketplace: where is the company adding to and detracting from the marketplace?
 - B. Workplace: does the organization reward diversity, openness, transparency?
 - C. Community: does the business invest back into the community where it works?
 - D. Environmental: does the company recycle, reuse, reduce?

Where to start?

- Sustainability is a journey. Ultimately, it needs to be embedded throughout your company. If you've greened your supply chain but continue to produce exorbitant waste, you have an unsustainable (and bulls-eyed) business.
- Begin with being compliant. In the least, you can't garner criticism. Once you're



I'm Olivia Khalili. I created Cause Capitalism to show you how to grow your business by incorporating a social mission.

I've worked extensively with both nonprofits and for-profits. I found that when you combine the two, you grow your profits, impassion all your stakeholders and do good in the world. [Read more.](#)

NEVER MISS A POST



[Subscribe by email](#)

PRESENTATIONS



CATEGORIES

- [Build a Purpose-driven Business \(25\)](#)
- [Business Models \(46\)](#)
- [Businesses \(63\)](#)
- [Cause Marketing \(48\)](#)
- [Commercial & Nonprofit Partnerships \(53\)](#)
- [Conscious Business \(3\)](#)
- [Consumer Behavior \(33\)](#)
- [Corporate Social Responsibility \(70\)](#)
- [Employee Involvement \(35\)](#)
- [Evaluation \(6\)](#)
- [Events \(27\)](#)
- [funding \(7\)](#)

compliant, anything you do to be sustainable will move you forward.

- Then, choose an area in which you feel you can have the most impact and focus on that first (marketplace, workplace, community, environment).
- As you create your CSR program, think about what impact you desire and how you will measure it. Many companies don't build this into their initial plan, leaving them to scramble for metrics and data at the end.
- As you devise your metrics and benchmarks, remember it's *not what you've done* (the number of meals you've served) but *the impact of your action* (how many kids can attend a full day of school because they are well-fed).

Why should I report?

- Benefits of creating a CSR (sustainability) report:
 - a. Focuses the mind of the business because the report is an external commitment. Companies are more judicious about what they commit to and what they disclose, knowing this information will be public. This creates internal debate that leads to creativity, solutions and growth.
 - b. Creates a singular organizational voice because the report is created across sectors—marketing, communications, HR, product, legal, etc.
 - c. Helps stakeholders decide if they want to work for your company, invest in it, buy from it or sell to it.

Who creates the report and how is it done?

- CSR reporting can be done by anyone: functional heads, CEOs, HR, marketing. It depends on the organization, its structure and the CSR program.
- The best time to publish a report is when you have something to report. Typically, this is 1-2 years from the initial development of the program.
- CSR reports should speak to multiple stakeholders—your employees, consumers, shareholders, suppliers.
- When creating a report, focus on the program's outcomes (what impact it had), not outputs (what the program did).
- In one word, the tone of a CSR report should be *humble*. It's okay for your company to share what it's good at but important to also express what the company is learning. Three more words: State it subtly.
- Resources to get you started: in addition to BeyondBusiness, the [Global Reporting Initiative](#) provides a report framework and the [ISO 2600](#) and [Domini Social Investments](#) list parameters for sustainability.

I produced a wonderful report. Am I done?

- Afraid not. The real works begin after the report is finished. At this point, your task is to create interest around the company's goals and accomplishments among your employees, consumers, etc.

[Share](#) [Tweet](#) [Email](#) [Share](#)   

Tags: [CSR Report](#), [Global Reporting Initiative](#), [sustainability criteria](#)

- Interviews (72)
- Micro-lending (9)
- Podcast (57)
- Products (24)
- Rants & Raves (58)
- SRI (9)
- Tools (18)
- Trends (40)
- Uncategorized (15)
- Web/Tech (29)

7 Comments

LEAVE A COMMENT



elaine cohen

January 20, 2010 at 11:59 am #

Hi Olivia, thank you so much for this interview and for your excellent distillation of the key points. I am sure you wrote it better than I said it. Thank you again, Elaine



John Bergdoll

February 1, 2010 at 4:06 am #

Hi Elaine,
I wholeheartedly agree with you when you say, 'It's okay for your company to share what it's good at but important to also express what the company is learning.' Mistakes are part of a learning curve. Sustainability is a journey and sustainability reporting is as well. When I read Sustainability reports the missing piece is the "lessons learned."

Great interview, Olivia.

John Bergdoll

Follow me: <http://twitter.com/JohnBergdoll>



admin

February 1, 2010 at 11:35 am #

John, thanks for your thoughts. Let me know if there are other topic areas you would like to see here.



John Bergdoll

June 19, 2010 at 10:41 pm #

Hi Elaine and Olivia,
I just wanted to let you know I listened to the interview for a second time and still derived much value from it. Thanks again.

John Bergdoll

Follow me: <http://twitter.com/JohnBergdoll>



admin

June 23, 2010 at 7:18 pm #

John,
I really appreciate you taking the time to let us know that the interview was useful. Elaine is a treasure chest of knowledge! Keep us posted on any CSR reporting that you're involved in.

Trackbacks/Pingbacks

1. **The Empty Suit: 5 Cause Marketing Mistakes to Avoid** - January 25, 2010

[...] C'mon, this is "A" in the ABCs of cause marketing. What they should have done: As Elaine Cohen explains, defining an initiative or goal invokes creativity within the company, growth and progress. Not only [...]

2. **Foursquare and CauseWorld Lead to Better Cause Marketing–with Joe Waters** - March 4, 2010

[...] Cohen also offers important insight into why and how to measure your company's social [...]

Leave a Reply

NAME (REQUIRED)

MAIL (REQUIRED)

WEBSITE

