

Communication is vital to reaching corporate social responsibility goals

by *LuAnne Speeter*

Are you keeping your corporate social responsibility a secret? If so, you're missing out on achieving greater success for your programs – and for your business goals overall.

Clear communication to stakeholders is essential throughout the planning, execution and evaluation process of your CSR program. It helps ensure that you garner unified support upfront and address concerns as they arise. And, according to a study by the [Reputation Institute](#), good communications boosts public perception of a company's "citizenship" and improves its reputation – which in turn increases market value.

What should be communicated? An [Accenture Institute for High Performance](#) study of more than 800 global companies reveals that the highest-performing companies include the following efforts (among others) in their CSR programs:

- Releases announcing a central theme that tie social programs to the core business
- Reports on the economic impact of their CSR program
- Use of an external review committee for credibility and transparency

Determine at the beginning of your program to whom you want to communicate, at what stages in the process and through which vehicles or media. Consider these methods to raise visibility for your efforts:

Corporate responsibility report: A dedicated document allows you to introduce the theme – preferably in a letter by you CEO. Include your company's social mission, values and vision; corporate code of ethics; a complete description of social and environmental programs; consumer and community impact; employee participation and benchmarks; metrics and benchmarks, and more.

Web site: Many companies include a CSR link, such as "community" or "responsibility," as a drop-down under the Company or About Us navigational tab. Content could include a message from the CEO, a PDF of the CSR report and photos of employees volunteering in community programs. [Xcel Energy's site](#) features a video that addresses various aspects of its CSR program.

Annual report: If you don't have a budget to publish a separate corporate responsibility report, dedicate a section within your annual report to your efforts. Weave the social theme throughout the report in a way that's consistent with your core services and relevant to your audience.

Quarterly e-mail updates: Send e-mails to your house list apprising stakeholders on the progress you're making toward your CSR goals.

Social media: Create a CSR corner on your company blog for regular updates. Specific events may call for a dedicated Facebook page or Twitter announcements.

Press releases and more: Promote specific efforts through press releases, local newscasts and radio public interest stories.

Above all else, be honest about your CSR reporting and never "greenwash" – that is, don't make your company appear more responsible than it actually is. Your company's brand reputation, once it's earned, must be communicated before you can see real return on your investment.

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