



It Takes More than Green to Differentiate a Business

Social Responsibility Helps Build Brands

“Five years ago saying, ‘We recycle’ was progressive. But not now...To differentiate yourself, you need a culture and purpose,” says Ida Cheinman, principal and creative director of Substance151, a Baltimore-based strategic brand communications firm.

“Being socially responsible, environmentally conscious and profitable is the new survival strategy for the 21st century,” says Cheinman. And the companies that will be most successful are those that “realize that the sustainability message is not separate or distinct. To be authentic, it needs to be rolled into the overall brand effort.”

People want to do business with companies they perceive as holding values aligned with their own, notes Cheinman. “It’s essential to build a connection with your audience—whether you’re in the B2B or B2C industry,” she says. “Consumers and

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-Ida Cheinman, principal and creative director, Substance151

business leaders appreciate when the values they try to create and teach their children are embedded in the decision making of the companies they do business with.”

Socially, environmentally and financially responsible businesses have a leg up in when it comes to business development. “Federal, state and county governments, as well as large corporations, are trying to green their supply chain,” says Cheinman.

Funders also are interested in

sustainability. “Data shows that sustainable companies ultimately do better and that fact is not lost on investors,” she says.

The same holds true for employee recruitment. Cheinman notes that more than 60 percent of millennials—“the mystery generation”—view employer corporate citizenship as important. “They appreciate days off for community involvement and an employer’s support of charities,” she says.

For companies that have integrated sustainability into their mission, business strategy, operation process and employee engagement programs, Cheinman suggests they tell their story. “Not what you do but why you do it,” she says. “That deepens your connection with you audience.”

As a sustainable company, “it’s important to communicate in an environmentally responsible manner,” she says. “Use social media to the extent



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possible and, when you need to print, use responsible paper and printers. You can’t just say you’re responsible and sustainable and then send out an enormous glossy brochure. You’ve got to walk the talk.”



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