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Webinars

Save the Date!

Join us for a [Sustainability Strategic Planning webinar](#) on October 28, 2009!

New and noteworthy

Federal Executive Order on Sustainability

President Obama signed a new [executive order](#) on October 5 mandating that federal agencies cut energy and water use, reduce waste, and set greenhouse gas emission reductions targets.

"State of Corporate Citizenship" Report

The Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship has released its [2009 State of Corporate Citizenship Report](#).

The study shows continued support among businesses for

Everywhere we turn, the term "social media" seems to dominate the sustainability conversation. This month, we take a deeper dive into this evolving world to find out whether those hours spent blogging, tweeting, responding to posts, virtual-networking, and otherwise sharing your company's content and opinions with the world are time well spent.

Strategically relevant? Financially rewarding? Read on to find out!

Special thanks to our guest editor, [Averill Doering](#), a brand and social media strategist specializing in sustainability communications and the Founder of [Cause Communication Strategies](#), for her contributions to this newsletter!

Social media and sustainability: A perfect pairing

Social media channels open up new ways of communicating and engaging with stakeholders. For example, you can:

- Reach stakeholders in a way that they prefer at a time that they are ready to engage
- Provide segmented, relevant, and timely content
- Establish two-way conversations
- Gain valuable feedback to inform core business strategy

But how well are these benefits of social media suited to sustainability strategy setting and communications?

To answer that question, it is useful to think back to the very reason behind companies' pursuit of sustainability in the first place: namely, **to drive shifts in business practice which create lasting economic, environmental and social value.** To achieve these shifts, you need to understand stakeholders' interests, needs, and concerns.

And that's where social media comes in. Social media effectively pulls back the curtain of traditional sustainability communications to reveal not only **what** has been or is being accomplished, but **who** is involved in the process, **how** programs are implemented and ultimately **why** sustainability decisions are made in the first place.

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citizenship efforts despite economic challenges. Seventy percent of respondents cited reputation as a top driver for citizenship performance.

Study Examines Intersection of Social Media and Sustainability

A [paper published by SDialogue](#) finds that engaging stakeholders through social media can create value-if approached with an intent to be authentic, credible, and transparent.

JustMeans Social Media and Sustainability Conference

On October 19, 2009, Just Means will be hosting a [Social Media and Sustainability Conference](#) in San Francisco, California. Details available [online](#).

Report reviews

Each month we evaluate a corporate responsibility report for Ethical Corporation magazine. Click on the following links to read our most recent reviews.

L'Oréal [2008 Sustainable Development Report](#)

Wal-Mart [2009 Global Sustainability Report](#)

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Getting it right: key tenets of social media

If you are ready to get started with social media, there are a few points you should keep in mind:

Listen first

As in most cases, it's critical to understand context prior to action. Before you jump into the conversation, browse relevant blogs and forums to uncover who's actively participating, the tone of discussion, and which topics drive the greatest interest or controversy.

Be transparent about your intentions

There's no faster way to get kicked out of a forum than to pose as a participant--but talk like a salesman. If you're joining a conversation as a company representative, make that fact crystal clear. The negative repercussions of misrepresentation will far outweigh any initial skepticism.

Give to get

In the virtual landscape, users often expect a lot for a little. Make that expectation work to your advantage by creating models of mutual gain. For example, Google provides search, email, and mapping services (to name a few) for free, but in return gathers extensive user information and extended page views--the perfect ingredients for powerful ad placement.

Content is king

New media platforms provide users with powerful tools to distribute content, so take the time to understand how your target audiences will use the information you provide. Whether it's entertaining, unique, or just plain useful information your audience craves... if you deliver it, it's likely to be shared.

Welcome co-creation

By embracing a culture of openness and mutual respect, you can derive the full value of social media: namely, user participation and engagement. When you're comfortable sharing, users will follow suit, and you'll open the door for developing true relationships and breakthrough innovations.

It starts and ends with people

Social media is just that--social. It's about people connecting with each other and sharing relevant information in an authentic manner. So you'll need to ensure that your social media approach encourages freedom of self-expression and treats readers as individuals rather than generalized masses.

Case study: Frito Lay

By co-sponsoring the [Green Effect](#) awards (a sustainability-focused, social media competition) along with National Geographic, Frito Lay engaged consumers in the sustainability space while simultaneously building value for its Sun Chips brand. Frito Lay's approach:

- Emphasized the greater cause of generating positive impact on planet
- Enabled consumers to take actions which are personally relevant
- Gave consumers space to discover the corporate story
- Created an underlying context for spreading the message
- Substantiated external efforts with internal accomplishments

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Strategic relevance and ROI: What's the value of social media?

As social media gains traction, some companies are harnessing its power to sharpen their approaches to operations, marketing, sales, service, and even human resources. By using stakeholder feedback generated through social media, these leaders are seeing direct improvements to their bottom line.

The best evidence we've seen to date of social media's financial value is from a Wetpaint/Altimeter Group research report on the world's 100 most valuable brands. Their results show that the brands most engaged in social media are experiencing greater financial success, with revenues growing 18 percent over the past year (vs. losses of 6 percent among the least engaged brands).

The key to the most successful interactions? Deep engagement: meaningful exchanges, ongoing conversations, and questions and responses from all parties. It may be hard work, but, according to this research, it's well worth the investment. [The full report](#), including case studies of Starbucks, Toyota, SAP, and Dell, is available online.

Your turn!

Tell us about your social media successes (or failures, so that we can all learn together).

Jump onto our blog at www.frameworkcr.com/blog or write to us at adjoy@frameworkcr.com.