



Corporate Social Responsibility

Ready to Dig In?

Corporate Social Responsibility Programs require a powerful blend of heart and head to be effective. Here's how to help the planet and smartly build your brand. *by Angela Kryhul*



Doing the right thing for the environment has been on the radar for a while now: recycling programs, energy reduction targets, buying locally sourced products, and more. But if you believe your firm has crossed the finish line in terms of sustainability, think again. The industry is only just scratching the surface in the broader context of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the integration of economic, social and environmental goals into all business activities. While some people use the terms CSR and sustainability interchangeably, it all comes down to being proactive, doing the right thing and supporting each pillar of the triple bottom line: people, planet and profit.

The C-suite is getting the CSR message. According to the *UN Global Compact-Accenture CEO Study 2010*, 750 of the world's top CEOs believe we are moving into an era in which businesses will no longer focus purely on profit and loss, but will include the positive and negative impacts of their actions on society and the environment. This new era will see environmental, social and corporate governance issues embedded throughout a company's operations.

"CSR is not only in the building, but it has definitely arrived in the corner office," says Susan Radojevic, owner of The Peregrine Agency Ltd., a global management consulting company based in Toronto. "The public is demanding more accountability and transparency from everyone—governments as well as service and product providers."

Clearly, CSR encompasses more than just greening a meeting. CSR is huge, complex and can be overwhelming.

"When I speak about CSR, I hear many people say they are 'over' green and they don't want to hear anymore about this topic," says Amanda Gourgue, principal of Meeting Revolution, a company that helps meeting facilities become more socially responsible. "That saddens me because we are →

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not at the point where people have heard too much about CSR. People think they are experts when they have barely scratched the surface."

Strength in Numbers

Organizations are realizing that their purchasing power—for products, services and travel destinations—can be used to benefit less fortunate communities, and can even be a tool to affect positive social change.

For example, meeting planners are incorporating volunteerism into meeting and event programs. This can be as simple as building bookshelves or putting together bikes for disadvantaged kids in their own communities, or more involved such as planting community gardens or

CSR 1. a voluntary approach that a business enterprise takes to meet or exceed stakeholder expectations by integrating social, ethical, and environmental concerns together with the usual measures of revenue, profit, and legal obligation.

helping to construct a library in less-advantaged parts of the world.

Companies are becoming more determined to find synergies between their corporate CSR policies and travel incentive and reward strategies.

"The change I've seen in the last couple of years is that it's a true interest as opposed to an inquiry as to what this [CSR] is all about," says Terry Manion, vice-president, Meridian Incentive Consultants, an incentive travel and meeting planning company that has organized programs for companies such as No Frills, Home Building Centre and Unity Life.

CSR has also got meeting planners buzzing about how to redefine luxury in relation to incentives, says Andrew Walker, →

TIPS

CSR doesn't happen overnight.

Start with simple objectives and identify key performance indicators so that you know when you have reached your goals.

Take the time to get it right.

Consult with all stakeholders including employees and suppliers. Research industry standards and don't be afraid to ask for advice from industry peers.

Know your impact.

Start now to quantify your environmental impact including carbon emissions, water usage and waste disposal rate. Be prepared to provide that info on RFPs.

Be a good partner.

Planners and suppliers need to work together to achieve CSR goals.

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founder of Eco-Efficient Events (E3) and a director of the Green Meeting Industry Council (GMIC).

"One of the trends we're seeing—specifically related to luxury—is moving away from consumption and more toward experiences," says Walker. "It's a challenge because with incentives we're trying to deliver that out-of-this world experience you would not be able to get or create on your own."

Community work is a great team builder. Participants have a deeper sense of pride and personal accomplishment. It seems the wow-factor is coming back down to earth. Now, a wow can be defined as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help rebuild communities, for example, devastated by flood or earthquakes.

Measuring CSR

It's only a matter of time before measuring the effectiveness of one's CSR activities is written into supplier RFPs, according to the industry group Meeting Professionals International.

MPI recently unveiled a comprehensive Event Measurement Tool that helps planners and suppliers measure and report the environmental and social impact of events and services in a standards compliant format. Free to MPI and GMIC members and available for basic and advanced users, the tool helps manage the costs and impacts of things like water, waste, energy, paper, food and community.

The tool was designed to work with a wide array of industry standards including the APEX/ASTM Green

Meeting & Events Standards, British Standard 8901, the Global Reporting Initiative and the International Organization for Standardization 20121.

"The economic recession, for some organizations, put the environment on the backburner," says Ian Lipton, chief operating officer for Green Ride Global, which creates environmental sustainability programs for the transportation industry. "Now, those environmental questions, whether on RFPs or on an event-by-event basis, are showing up and becoming more robust."

According to Lipton, suppliers can give yes/no answers to qualitative questions such as "Do you have an environmental policy?" or "Do you purchase your food locally?" →

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CSR + TOURISM

According to a Ryerson University research project, Air Transat and Signature Vacations are showing positive efforts towards corporate responsibility, and Air Transat was noted for its improved performance in the past two years. Both assist with local development projects and donate to some environmental/social projects. Air Transat gives up to \$50,000 per year to charities in Canada and the Caribbean, and is looking at becoming carbon neutral. (As seen in Corporate Knights)

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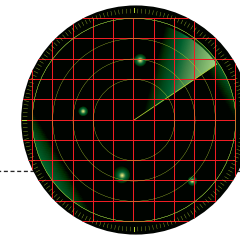
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Soon, that won't be enough, he says. "You will see more buyers asking quantitative questions such as 'What is your waste diversion rate?' or 'What are your green house gas emissions?'" he says, adding that carbon disclosure will become as important as financial disclosure.

How far-reaching is CSR? It comes back to an organization's culture, values and whether it will vote with its pocketbook. Lipton

says environmental footprint is top of mind right now, but don't be surprised when companies start avoiding travel destinations that have a history of unfair labour practices or other issues.

"It keeps coming down to the client, the planner, as having the purchasing power," Walker says. "I think it's important that planners drive the demand which puts the emphasis on suppliers to respond." →



Put This on Your Radar

• Visit MPI's **CSR** section to learn more about the new Event Measurement Tool, the COP 15 carbon footprint, CSR case studies and more.

mpiweb.org

• **ISO 20121:** The International Organization for Standardization is developing a standard for the sustainable management of events that addresses things like venue selection, operating procedures, supply chain management, procurement, communications and transportation.

iso.org

• **APEX/ASTM Green Meeting & Events Standards:** Extensive, industry-wide standards for green meetings are being developed that cover nine sectors of the industry: Accommodation, audio-visual and production, communication, destinations, exhibits, food and beverage, meeting venue, on-site offices and transportation.

apexsolution.org

• **Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Event Sector Supplement:** The organization is developing an EventOrganizers Sector Supplement, a time and cost-efficient tool to help the events sector meet demands for transparency and accountability.

globalreporting.org



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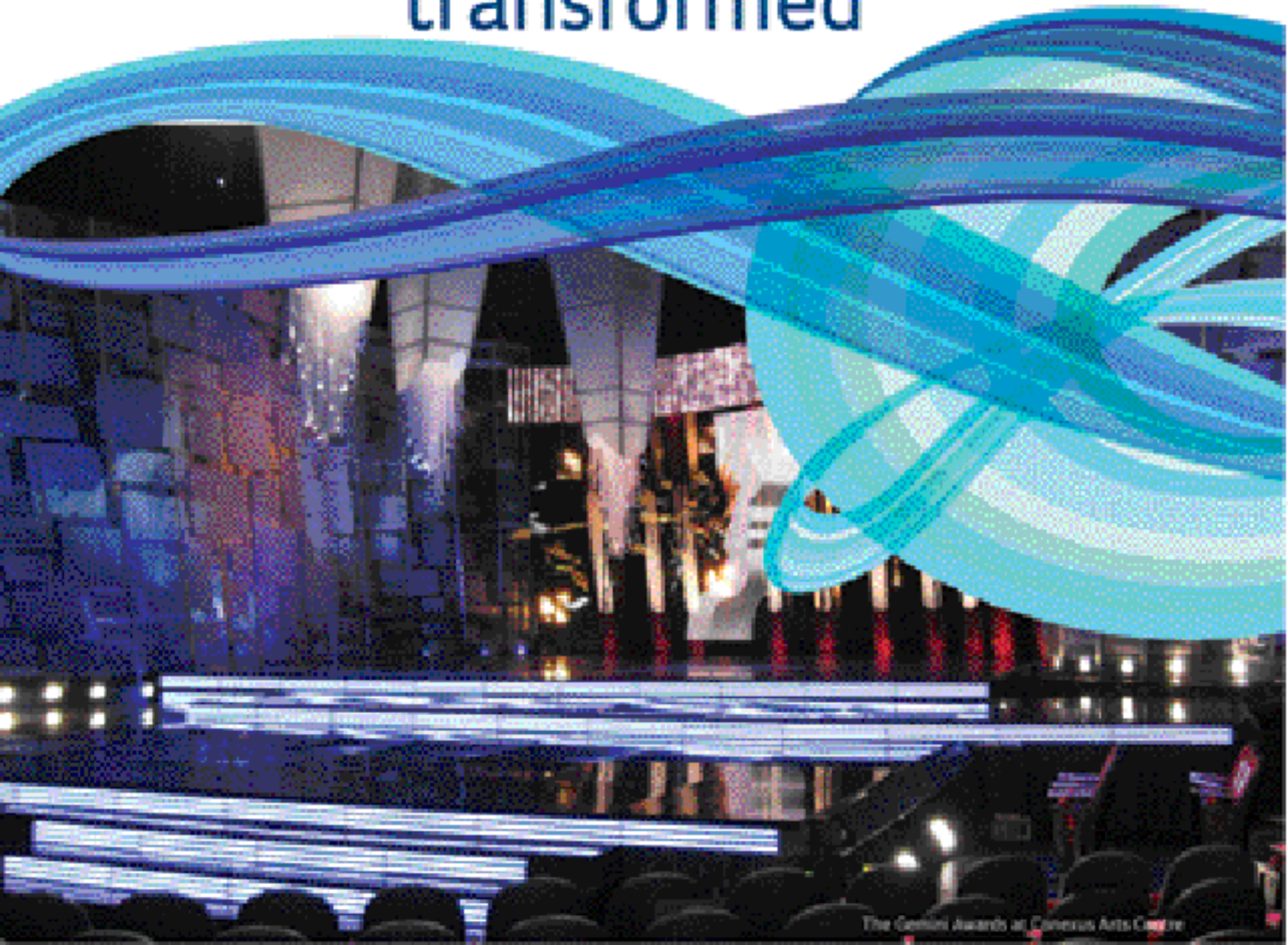


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QUOTABLE

A policy requires all suppliers to demonstrate specific efforts to improve environmental performance.

How Cirque Does CSR

Born on the streets of Quebec and now a global phenomenon, Cirque du Soleil is recognized for its progressive and proactive environmental and procurement practices.

The organization, which employs 5,000 people and presents 21 different shows worldwide, implemented a responsible procurement policy in 2008 governing Cirque-branded merchandise and the products and services the organization purchases, including transportation and accommodations. The policy requires all suppliers to demonstrate specific efforts to improve environmental performance, and it addresses questions of child labour, health and safety conditions, discrimination, hours of work and wages and benefits.

Cirque is in the midst of a pilot project with 40 suppliers that features a 50-question survey addressing CSR

activities. Cirque is learning that suppliers are at very different stages of awareness and implementation, says Sébastien Cloutier, Cirque's environmental management advisor.

Suppliers are asked what they are doing to reduce impacts on the environment, and there are questions about health, safety and training programs for employees. Suppliers are even being asked whether they have their own responsible procurement policies in place.

It's a learning process. The pilot project gives suppliers the opportunity to meet with Cirque managers and talk about how both sides can improve their CSR practices.

As part of its CSR mandate, Cirque also participates in peer networks such as *Business for Social Responsibility* and *Business in the Community*. *



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