

Innovate or die - creativity is as important as research in CSI

 By [Michael Baretta](#)

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We are in a time of unprecedented change, and we are faced with unique challenges. From economic and political uncertainty to wide scale humanitarian crises and climate change, the status quo no longer applies. Businesses must develop new strategies to survive and thrive in this new age.



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Perhaps the most powerful new strategy is socially conscious marketing. Customers are no longer content to merely consume brands - they expect an emotional connection built on that brand's authentic contribution to society or the planet. Brands that can forge this connection will reap the benefits.

Traditional corporate social investment (CSI) generally does not create a linkage between a business's philanthropic activities and its customers. It's no longer enough for businesses to do well, they need to do good and be seen to be doing good. Businesses who are unable to make this change will suffer.

The first step to preparing for this leap is for CSI practitioners to educate themselves about trends in socially conscious marketing, both within their own industries and in the economy in general. Acquiring this knowledge is the best way to spark the inspiration and creativity required by this new approach.

Armed with this inspiration, CSI practitioners can seek out the most appropriate partners in the NGO space, and forge mutually beneficial relationships. By collaborating closely with partners, brands can substantially magnify the positive effects of their CSI spending and create a compelling narrative.

Disruption

This kind of authentic storytelling is extremely disruptive to traditional marketing because it cuts right through the clutter and establishes an emotional bond with customers. People have a deep longing to be part of something greater than themselves and to make the world a better place in some small way.

When you fulfill this longing, you turn someone from a passive consumer into a passionate brand advocate. This achieves all the traditional aims of marketing - building brand loyalty, driving sales and profits - while simultaneously doing good.

This incredible opportunity is what inspired the conceptualisation of [dot]GOOD, South Africa's first (and only) for-good marketing agency. Our vision is to change the business landscape by creating a community of organisations that want to do good while doing well. While profits are a business' lifeblood, we believe a greater purpose gives it soul.

An example of this creative thinking is our partnership with the Imvula Education Empowerment Fund - a 100% black-owned, broad-based trust that facilitates the education of bright but underprivileged young people at the fund's Maharishi Institute - and a prominent fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) brands.

This platform employs previously disadvantaged youth as in store promoters and accomplishes three different aims simultaneously. It helps our clients to fulfil their B-BBEE responsibilities while driving sales and providing real-world work experience for the students. This is exactly the kind of campaign that bridges the gap between the greater good and the bottom line.

As marketers we have an unprecedented opportunity to create more of these platforms. The only thing that holds us back is the willingness to try something new. Who would have guessed that FMCG brands with no link to education would be involved in empowering hundreds of students? The solutions to the challenges facing humanity will come from the most unexpected places.

It's time for the world to embrace for-good marketing. In a time of turmoil and strife, we need to stand together to make the world a better place. Brands which join this movement can turn this existential threat into a unique opportunity. Those who are unwilling to do so will simply be left by the wayside.

ABOUT MICHAEL BARETTA

Michael Baretta is an experienced creative thinker who is deeply committed to changing the world for the better through innovative marketing and communications. Baretta is the founder of [dot]GOOD, South Africa's first and foremost for-good marketing agency.

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