

# Importance of formulating business-aligned CSI initiatives

By [Mbali Sekautu](#) 29 Dec 2016

Corporate social investment initiatives (CSI) are projects that businesses undertake to benefit over and above the business and its normal activities. Although CSI initiatives are external to a business' normal activities, for them to have an optimal effect, they need to align to the business vision, purpose and promise.



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According to a recent article in *Forbes* magazine, there are a number of elements that successful CSI initiatives have in common. These include a clear theory of change, quality and depth of information, concentrated effort and expert partnerships.

For the purposes of this article, the most critical element for success with any CSI initiative is the existence of a business-based social purpose. This article examines how and why it is important for a CSI initiative programme (whether leveraged or created by a brand) to align to the business.

## **Tenet #1: Business alignment means optimised investment**

Best practice within the field of CSI consistently shows that when an initiative feels like a direct extension of the business, there is a higher likelihood of a corresponding abundance of investment on the part of the business. Be it invested time or resources, there will seldom be a shortage because it is already a natural fit with the business. CSI initiatives that align to the business objectives are less likely to feel like 'extra' work or an 'extra' cost. In other words, the knowledge and passion will already be there.

Paul Klein, founder of a Toronto-based advisory firm captures the essence of this sentiment, noting that: "It is ideal for businesses to commit to an initiative that they are passionate about and one that can be aligned to the integral values of the business; otherwise they will find themselves misplacing valuable resources and compromising on the effectiveness of their ultimate CSI goals."

## **Tenet #2: Business alignment helps to amplify the brand message**

A CSI programme that is aligned to business objectives is also more likely to build the broader brand

message as a communication property in its own right. One example of a brand that has formulated an initiative that speaks to its offering (and has a direct link to the business) is that of SAB.

As South Africa's premier brewer and a leading distributor of alcoholic beverages in the country, SAB ensures that the message of responsible consumption is constantly promoted in its communication. The businesses responsible drinking initiative is a way in which it acknowledges its responsibility in influencing social change when it comes to responsible alcohol consumption. Through this, SAB actively leads social change through co-regulation (with government) to combat irresponsible consumption, and through investment in impactful programmes that tackle consumer behaviour (such as underage drinking) as well as trader behaviour.

### **Tenet #3: Business alignment adds credence to the initiative**

When there is a clear link to the business' values and platform, a CSI initiative has the power to bolster credibility by serving as a proof point to stakeholders. A great example of this is the Pick n Pay Foundation. A core value of the Pick n Pay brand is 'sustainable living' – whether related to communities or to the environment. In this regard, the Pick n Pay Foundation serves as a means of bringing the community component of this value to life.

The foundation was created with the vision of enabling South Africans to improve their lives by providing for themselves and their communities. Thus, one of its key objectives is to make measurable contributions to the various communities within which the Pick n Pay brand operates, adding meaning and purpose to the initiative. For instance, the foundation has helped to benefit emerging farmers, who might otherwise have struggled to penetrate the market. This has had a significant impact on both Pick n Pay and the beneficiaries of the initiative; that is, through a broader supplier network for Pick n Pay and an uplift in the quality of life for otherwise marginalised entrepreneurs – a true 'win-win' scenario.

### **Tenet #4: Business alignment has a halo effect for 'people' brands**

In discussing the subject of CSI in relation to brands and businesses, it is important to remember that there are also many benefits for so-called 'people' brands in this regard, and not only corporate brands. A good local example is the Motsepe Foundation, founded by successful South African businessman Patrice Motsepe. In addition to having his hands primarily in the mining sector, Motsepe also owns South African soccer club Mamelodi Sundowns.

Against this backdrop, and inspired by his personal successes and passions in life, Motsepe and his wife (Dr Precious Motsepe), founded the Motsepe Foundation – with the goal of providing funding and support for philanthropic projects and initiatives that improve social and economic conditions for all South Africans. This is encapsulated in the foundation's core philosophy and vision of "A nation in which everyone realises their potential and ultimately contributes to the building of South Africa and other African nations".

The link in this regard is self-evident: Motsepe and his wife have realised their own potential and are living. They are exemplary of exactly what it means and the Motsepe Foundation is thus driven by their desire for others to be afforded the same opportunity, facilitated through empowerment. At the same time, the initiative – by means of a halo effect – helps to reinforce the Motsepes' personal values within the broader community. Simply put, the initiative is not only business-aligned, but also a relevant means of strengthening the image and reputation of the 'Motsepe brand', beyond the foundation itself.

The fundamentals of the business, or in the case of Patrice Motsepe, the brand, are essential in ensuring that the CSI initiative is sustainable as it will be a direct reflection. Like the Pick n Pay Foundation, the initiative can further reinforce the business' purpose in a seamless manner.

In closing, it is essential that brands formulate a business-aligned CSI strategy before adopting any CSI initiative or cause, as this will help to clarify the programme's objectives and also measure its effectiveness. This also helps to identify the extent to which the initiative 'fits' the business as well as the ways in which it can contribute to (or reinforce) other marketing tools.

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