

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY SIGNALS A SMART APPROACH

Forging a business path by specialising in corporate social responsibility has been a successful formula for Nikki Wright, who explains her central philosophy.

AS THE EMISSIONS TRADING

Scheme takes effect and prominent business leaders make a compelling case for New Zealand Inc to be based on clean-technology, now is the time for companies to become sustainable, or risk irrelevance.

Whatever words we use to describe it—whether it be corporate social responsibility (now usually just 'CR') or sustainability (made up of economic, social and environmental components)—the philosophy and reasoning is the same.

There is ample research-based evidence of potential business customers and end consumers making purchase decisions based on a company's CR credentials.

For those enlightened businesses in the vanguard of the shift towards CR, it is time to sharpen practises and take the next step. For those which lag behind, it is a catalyst for change.

When Wright Communications started in 2006, sustainability was a non-negotiable bedrock policy, and a point of difference in the PR market place. No other firms were CR specialists. But to gain the trust of clients with enviable CR records such as Toyota and ecostore required impeccable credentials of our own.

A token paper recycling bin in the corner of the office wasn't going to impress the chief executives of these companies—they can sniff out 'green washing' from a mile away. To be able to challenge and give credible counsel to Villa Maria Estate and Urgent Couriers on CR, we

must practise what we preach.

From certified sustainable office furniture, and use of a toner cartridge recycling service, to the Wright Communications Smart Car and the commitment of consultants to commute by public transport or car pool, environmental sustainability is embedded.

From Wright Communications' inception, the directors committed to CR by providing pro bono communications services to a chosen not-for-profit. The firm selected the Sustainable Business Network, which has so far received more than \$100,000 in work to help the SBN's goal of promoting CR among New Zealand businesses.

CR is a significant component of our full service PR offering. This is a key factor for a lot of clients who approach us—usually either referred by businesses which are strong in CR, or which have done desk research and liked what they see of Wright's credentials.

Our services include promoting clients' best-practise CR initiatives in the media through to the preparation of award winning sustainability reports and working alongside our clients' sustainability teams to assist them in developing and implementing their emissions reduction plans.

Part of our role is to encourage companies to not only have an environmental policy—everyone can do that—but to actually ensure it operates effectively.

The social component of CR (a company's values) should be a

Time to get started

The best thing a company can do to catch up with CR is to talk to businesses which are already well down the path. The easiest way to do that is join the Sustainable Business Network, or—for larger corporates—the NZ Business Council for Sustainable Development. Attend events, grab a coffee with thought-leaders such as Steve Bonnici of Urgent Couriers, and start taking action.

key consideration for employers. This includes training opportunities and workload management. The PR industry is notorious for its long hours and work pressure, which eventually takes its toll on the morale and health of even the most driven operator.

I expect Wright consultants to work hard, but ensuring our operators have an acceptable work/life balance is crucial to providing a top line professional service to clients.

Consciousness about our generation's environmental legacy is on the rise—many in the next generation of employees "want to make a difference" in their roles, and seek work with companies which practise CR.

The latest Shape NZ survey findings released in July showed 59 percent of New Zealanders are likely to leave a socially irresponsible employer. For decision makers within an organisation, the survey showed the figure is even higher—clearly CR has large impact on recruitment and retention.

From voluntary tree planting, to support of a particular charity or local community project through sponsorship or donations, companies can make a real impact on the world they operate in. This should be a non-negotiable commitment,

not just for when profits are up.

But plenty of companies have discovered those sorts of activities—no matter how visible they are—are not worth much to their reputation if their products or services are damaging to people's health or the environment.

It's a long and difficult road to repair negative consumer perception of a company's brand or products.

Innovation focused on reducing the environmental impact of its products is a key way a company can become more responsible. Toyota's Plug-in Prius, which is being trialled alongside Massey University, is a good example of CR in an emissions-conscious world.

It is important to think of a company as a consumer that can make a difference as well. By choosing suppliers or business partners which are similarly sustainable, companies can influence the overall supply chain. Wright Communications wants to be a part of an economic future where CR is at the forefront.

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Nikki Wright founded PR firm Wright Communications in 2006 and offers clients expertise in CR and sustainability communications.

