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THE TRAVEL GOODS

Association consistently reports on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), both in the “Democracy in Action” section of *Travel Goods Showcase* magazine and with the annual TGA Community Service Award. Owning a business gives people a unique opportunity to do good in the world, and we want to celebrate that. But over the last 20 years CSR has also evolved from a controversial new trend to a predictable profit driver in the global economy.

Two decades ago, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) formed in response to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. In a 1998 report (“Meeting Changing Expectations: Corporate Social Responsibility”) the WBCSD cautioned businesses to change their focus from “doing less harm” to “actually doing good.” The context was a wave of consumer boycotts, attacks on business property, and restrictive new regulations in reaction to environmental and human-rights scandals. WBCSD’s report bemoaned a lack of ability to define or study the business case for CSR in a systematic way. Twenty years later, the situation has completely changed. Numerous organizations track the business benefits of CSR, both in individual case studies and global statistics, and have compiled an enviably clear and consistent body of research.

Project ROI is an initiative of IO Sustainability, an international research and management consulting firm. In “The

Business ROI of Social Investments”

(2017) Project ROI

analyzed the value of CSR

at eight companies, including

Kellogg’s, Southwest Airlines,

Symantec, Novo Nordisk, and WWE.

Project ROI reported that a well-executed

social investment campaign increased revenue

by up to 20%, and allowed companies to charge up

to a 20% price premium. On average, corporations with

strong CSR saw a 6% boost in share price, and a reputation

boost worth up to 11% of a company’s market cap. On the

labor side, corporations experienced a 13% jump in produc-

tivity, and a 50% decrease in employee turnover. A reported

75% of millennials say they would take a pay cut to work for

a responsible company.

Another great source of statistics is Cone, a CSR-focused

subsidiary of PR giant Porter Novelli. Cone’s clients include

VISA, UPS, Target, Timberland, Ben & Jerry’s, and CVS

Health. The “2017 Cone Communications CSR Study” found

that 87% of Americans will purchase a product because a

company advocated for an issue they cared about, and 63%

of Americans hope businesses will lead social and environ-

mental change. The most important social justice issues

for consumers today are domestic job growth (94%), racial

equality (87%), women’s rights (84%), the cost of higher

education (81%), immigration (78%), climate change (76%),

gun control (65%), and LGBTQ rights (64%). And to make

the stakes even higher, 73% of consumers would stop buying



Inspired by her mother, Sunchea Phou of YaY Novelty is raising money to build a nursing home in Cambodia. The mother-daughter pair is shown with a rice donation (above). In development: a larger-size shopping bag (left) will help to fund the project.



Golf carts head out for the second annual Unabuseable golf tournament. Unabuseable, founded by Dee Dee and Tom Niedzwiecki of LuxePak, aids women escaping domestic violence. Youthful volunteers (left) prompted the newest Unabuseable project, an anti-bullying campaign.

from a company that advocated for a different side on these issues.

The Nielsen “Global Sustainability Report” includes similar findings, and one additional cautionary statistic. If a company takes a public stand on a social or environmental issue, 65% of Americans (and 76% of millennials) will do research to see if it is authentic.

Leading CSR in the Travel Goods Industry

Philanthropy in the travel goods industry falls into three main categories. The most common areas of focus are environmental stewardship and practical aid for people facing serious risk. And three inspiring organizations, Adaptive Adventures, The Passport Party Project, and Crusoe help underserved populations go on life-changing adventures.

Practical Aid for People in Serious Situations

The travel goods industry cares about people at risk for abuse, violence or dislocation. Two of our best known philanthropic programs are Eagle Creek’s Live.Work.Travel.™ and Cabeau Cares. Both employee-led volunteer programs partner with non-profit organizations to provide hands-on support during company-wide volunteer days. Cabeau chooses more NGOs serving people in need, and Eagle Creek more environmental organizations, but both companies help both types. True to the statistics reported by Project ROI,

work days at both Cabeau and Eagle Creek are wildly popular within each company, creating positive team-building experiences for employees.

YaY Novelty, 2018 TGA Community Service Award co-winner, is another well-known company in our association whose core mission is practical aid for people in need. Since winning the award this March, founder Sunchea Phou has begun planning work on her next project, a nursing home for elderly residents of Cambodia. Many Cambodian seniors have no one to care for them, as their children were killed in the Cambodian genocide that Phou herself survived. “I have scouted locations to find the area of greatest need, and begun a list of potential residents,” said Phou. “Hopefully I can build in the next year.” To fund her project, Phou is working on developing a larger shopping bag for over-the-shoulder carry. Much like the nursing home, it is a design her clients have been asking for, and we have no doubt the storied designer will see both projects through to completion.

Like Phou, Dee Dee Niedzwiecki (the CEO of LuxePak and founder of Unabuseable), is both a high-achiever and a survivor. While Phou escaped genocide, Niedzwiecki is a survivor of domestic violence. When she told her story to her husband, Tom Niedzwiecki, he immediately asked what they could do to help women and children still trapped in desperate situations. “We looked for what was not available. Most women escape from these relationships absolutely penniless. While there are programs to subsidize rent, federal assistance to cover a deposit was eliminated the year before we started

the non-profit,” explains Niedzwiecki. “We stepped in and provide the deposit, which we send directly to the landlord and ask them to return to the organization.” Unabuseable works with advocates and caseworkers, who have vetted the women fleeing abuse and can help prioritize their immediate needs. “A small amount of money can make a huge difference,” Niedzwiecki explains. “Often the women say ‘I have a broken window in my apartment’ or ‘my door got kicked in.’ The advocates call me, and we give the money to fix it so they can feel more secure.” Niedzwiecki is working on expanding her product line so she can increase the amount of money she can donate. A new LuxeWinePak is in development, which includes two crystal glasses, a wine stopper, and a corkscrew. “When people travel to wine-growing regions, we want to support them in the ‘take two, return with two’ plan.” More income means that Unabuseable will be able to move on to Niedzwiecki’s next planned project, a secure studio apartment community with on-site childcare and social services support. It will also allow more funds for Unabuseable’s newest project, a bullying-awareness campaign in local schools.

When Justice Le, an influential travel industry product developer, joined AfterGen, she and Founder Wayne Chen created a philanthropic mission for the manufacturer. “It started with our vision of an anti-bullying backpack. We created the Yes2Love foundation to both develop an anti-bullying curriculum and support existing anti-bullying organizations.” Le and Chen now have the experience of working in L.A. schools, awarding grants, and helping

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The students of the Nelson Academy in Long Beach, CA wrote, starred in and produced an anti-bullying video (also shown: Justice Le and Wayne Chen of AfterGen/Yes2Love). Anti-Bullying Backpacks and charm (right) are donated back to the students and to other pro-youth groups.



Pacsafe supports the turtle-rescue volunteers of Flora and Fauna International (FFI) as well as Indonesian-based NGO HAKA. From the Pacsafe 20th Anniversary Collection, an FFI Travelsafe 3L ECONYL® portable safe (left). 100% of profits from the collection go to the Pacsafe Turtle Fund.



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students express themselves through a summer video project. “I think it’s important that companies don’t just give money. We all need to step out of our comfort zone and get our hands dirty. We don’t know the suffering of others until we put ourselves in their environment.” Involving kids in the design of the Yes2Love backpacks gives Le and Chen an opening to talk to students about bullying. “Kids don’t feel comfortable talking to their parents, teachers or administrators, but they will talk to a stranger like me. In most cases they don’t want someone to do anything, they want someone to listen. At the end of it I always tell them they will survive.”

Yes2Love will continue to visit schools and schedule speaking events with teachers and parents. In October, Yes2Love will donate backpacks to a local community event, Say No Bullying, and is developing partnerships with other product-with-a-cause companies like SAKOS. “Though AfterGen’s anti-bullying focus is different than SAKOS’ mission to combat poverty with education,” said SAKOS Founder Chris Lee, “the alliance between the two companies promotes social responsibility.” AfterGen is excited to partner with SAKOS: “the partnership between SAKOS and AfterGen encourages a culture that celebrates and tolerates differences,” said Chen.

Other companies serving people in dangerous situations include industry newcomer ALL OF US™ which offers a luggage collection designed

with TV travel host Andrew Zimmern. The company donates 10% of sales to the International Rescue Committee. DELSEY also donates luggage to the clients of two Baltimore non-profits: House of Ruth, an organization that provides services to victims of domestic violence, and The Light House, a homelessness prevention support center.

Good Stewards of the Environment

Given the importance of natural beauty to tourism, it’s unsurprising that a large sector of the travel goods industry is focused on environmental stewardship and sustainable production practices. A well-known example is the Pacsafe Turtle Fund, winner of the 2017 TGA Community Service Award.

United By Blue, the 2018 Community Service Award co-winner, has been busy since *The Show*. PR Manager Ethan Peck reports that a national clean-up road trip finished mid-August. By the end of 2018, United By Blue will have performed a waterway clean-up in all 50 states with 4 staff members, or about 10% of United By Blue staff, working full-time on the clean-ups. “We’re partnering with 21 different small retailers on clean-ups this year, and in the future will help them facilitate more activities, like our DIY Blue Friday clean-ups (a Black Friday alternative). We have worked with REI on clean-ups held in partnership with 11 regional stores on the East Coast,” reports Peck. “These are the relationships that take the most time compared to big box retailers. But

while the big retailers are great for raising funds by moving product, it’s the small retailers that give us hands-on help with our mission.”

United By Blue’s impeccable eco-credentials have fueled their product collaborations. In 2018, United By Blue created a five product collection for Lonely Whale’s #stopsucking campaign. A Danner Boots collaboration is also in the works, with a bison leather boot, hat and beanie. “We created a bison supply chain with parts of the bison that were traditionally discarded,” reports Peck, “and we’re working to promote the use of this sustainable material.”

Sustainable product development and production practices are widespread in the travel goods industry, with many companies besides United By Blue using recycled or upcycled materials. Examples include Targus®’s 15.6” Balance™ EcoSmart® Backpack, honored with the Green Good Design 2018 Award; recycled European leather trimming on Uptothetime business cases; EPIC Travelgear’s bio-composites and organic fabrics; and Hamilton Perkins’ mix of sustainable, recycled and upcycled materials.

Travel for All

Tracey Friley of The Passport Party Project, David Sylvia of Crusoe, and Don Godshaw of Adaptive Adventures facilitate travel experiences and adventures for underserved populations, making them three of the heroes of the travel goods industry.

Tracey Friley is a National Geogra-



United By Blue volunteers (and four full-time clean-up staff members) work towards an ambitious 2018 goal: to complete a waterway clean-up in all 50 states. A bandana from the United By Blue capsule collection for non-profit Lonely Whale (above) supports their #stopsucking campaign.



Sharing the joy of international travel and expanding the travel market to underserved populations, the latest Passport Party Project helped 12 girls get their first passport and took them on a trip to Costa Rica. Along for the ride: luggage donated by Mia Toro (left), official sponsor of this year's trip.

phic Travel award winner, retailer, and social-media micro-influencer, who curates tours for adult travelers. She is also the founder of The Passport Party Project, which helps under-represented 11- to 15-year-old girls obtain a passport, and takes those that qualify on their first international trip. Speaking to *Showcase* just days before her most recent Passport Party trip (with G Adventures), Friley was brimming with enthusiasm. “Seven days from today 12 girls will fly to Houston on their own, meet me and my team and then fly to Costa Rica,” Riley explained. “Though a portion of the trip has been sponsored, I typically spend a great deal out of my own pocket,” said Friley “because I believe that strongly in planting seeds of independence and growth through travel. I want to give these girls a global mindset.”

Friley, a self-described luggage junkie, is grateful to the companies who have helped support The Passport Party Project through their donations. “Heys Luggage was the first company to gift luggage to a small group of newly-minted passport holders heading to Toronto. They also partially sponsored luggage for another group of teens I took to Paris.” This year, the official luggage sponsor is HONTUS Milano Group, who donated one piece of colorful Mia Toro luggage for each of the girls and staff as well as luggage for an online fundraising raffle. The Passport Party Project also received a luggage set from Triforce for their online fundraiser.

Friley has advice for companies contemplating luggage donations:

“When you sponsor a trip like this, you are creating lifelong relationships between a travel brand and a family, their friends and advocates. But brands shouldn’t donate only because they expect to make money. Give to a travel cause from the heart. Sales are a side effect of giving.”

David Sylvia was a small-town boy who grew up in Rhode Island, in a family that didn’t travel and never drove more than 15 minutes for anything. His life was forever changed by a 5-month study abroad program in Hong Kong that led to a career traveling to 20+ countries, specializing in brand turn-arounds and product innovation. “I was riding on the hood of a Jeep through Zimbabwe when I realized where I was,” Sylvia mused. “How the heck did I get here? I never would have made it here had I not left Rhode Island and studied abroad.” After eight years of non-stop travel, Sylvia quit his corporate job to found Crusoe, a company that sells travel itineraries and passport covers as a way to fund study-abroad scholarships. Currently the Crusoe scholarship program focuses on a cohort of smaller southern university campuses, where students often lack the mentorship to study abroad, as well as the resources.

Don Godshaw, CEO of Travelon®, is also the vice president of the board of Adaptive Adventures. A passionate lifetime skier, Godshaw suffered a spinal cord injury while skiing which left him a paraplegic. Originally introduced to Adaptive Adventures as a participant, Godshaw was so impressed by the organization that he joined the

board. Godshaw has become a major contributor to Adaptive Adventures, both through business leadership and practical contributions such as equipment and storage space. These programs have brought outdoor adventure such as cycling, climbing, kayaking, paddleboarding, skiing, waterskiing, wakeboarding, sailing, scuba diving, rafting and dragon boat racing to over 100,000 participants and their families.

Social Responsibility Everywhere

Listing the full scope of CSR within the travel goods industry is outside the scope of this article. Companies like UptotheTime, which donates 10% of profits to education and mental health non-profits, Zensah®, which recently teamed up with Olympian Kara Goucher to create the Zensah-Kara Goucher Scholarship Program, and work done to fight breast cancer by VIM & VIGR and Save the Girls deserves more than a mention. We encourage you to visit their websites and explore their philanthropic missions.

CSR is so widespread in the travel goods industry that you can stock much of your shop with great products that all have a story behind them, a story that will touch your customers, help them build an emotional relationship with the brands you carry, and improve your bottom line. And if you haven’t already, it may be time to ask yourself what else you can do. Because Corporate Social Responsibility is not only good for business. It’s good for you. 