

Press Release

The Real CSI

Idea Couture Exposes How Companies Can Embed Meaningful “Corporate Social Innovation” Into Product and Service Design

For Immediate Release

TORONTO, ON AND WASHINGTON, DC- NOVEMBER 5, 2009- Idea Couture, a strategic innovation and experience design firm has just completed a comprehensive scan of corporate social innovation practices and related cause-oriented initiatives. Covering a broad spectrum of supporting tools and services, the report identifies compelling activities, budding trends and best practices in this vibrant field.

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been around for a long time but products with a socially responsible component have recently become a prevalent force, serving as a competitive differentiator for many firms. Once a niche investment strategy, the rise of cause-related marketing has been impressive, benefiting consumers, assisting causes, as well as helping companies polish their reputation. To many companies, CSR is deeply embedded within their cultures and operational philosophies but today, consumer expectations are high and brands are increasingly aligning themselves with critical social issues and setting new standards for corporate involvement.

“We felt this research was important to conduct, as the space continues to evolve and it’s never been more exciting. Previously, many brands that have engaged with our firm had to be convinced of the virtues of these initiatives, but that is no longer the case, said Scott Friedmann, Executive Vice President of Innovation at Idea Couture. “Increasingly, they come to us with noble aspirations, seeking to discover innovative opportunities that strategically fit with their organization’s offerings and culture.”

Corporate social innovation is an essential tool in the corporate toolbox for helping customers buying into a brand, attracting the altruistic shopper, and promoting cause-oriented initiatives. Consumers however, have become increasingly wary of CSR ‘pitfalls’ such as company commitment, green-washing, and promotional gimmicks- all of which cause consumers to question corporate claims. Idea Couture’s multidisciplinary research team conducted a scan and identified a core group of critical design characteristics that combine to form meaningful platforms. These characteristics such as new standards for trust, active versus passive giving, and industry relevance identify how companies can embed meaningful corporate social innovation into product service design.

Corporate Social Innovation Characteristics - Highlights

Managing Trust

The recession has brought attention to what’s important, consumers are reexamining spending habits and intentions, and people are increasingly aligning their personal values with the brands they buy and the companies they support. Corporate social innovation is all about trust, authenticity, and good intentions. Companies looking to embed social components in product service and design need to choose social issues carefully- consumers need to see the direct link between buying a certain product and its effect on society. Most customers want to see tangible actions and if evidence emerges to the contrary, it can damage the individual’s faith in the brand and can lead them to question their beliefs about quality.

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Promote Both Active & Passive Giving

Active and passive corporate social innovation can have a significant impact on how consumers and onlookers view and identify events and related brands. Passive platforms avoid intimidating consumers with long-term obligations and passive givers can remain relatively responsible free. With active giving, more elaborate and deliberate behaviors are required to partake in the initiatives. The “hands off” passive approach, or the “hands on” active approach, must be considered in product design and can help control the nature of the platform-patron relationship in an effort to generate desired results. The best strategy though, is a combination of the two and to design products that have both.

Maintain Industry Relevance

When a brand gets involved in a social activity outside its core operating practices, it can struggle to properly integrate it. Cultural divides, gaps in the required skills, industry unfamiliarity, or several other culprits may be at hand, preventing the organization from assimilating something new into existing operations. When a brand designs a cause-oriented component, it can increase its chance of success if the cause is related to the broad solution that the brand offers.

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IDEA COUTURE

Idea Couture is a global strategic innovation and experience design firm. The company brings together interdisciplinary thinkers to fill a void in the marketplace between strategic consultants, customer insight firms and design studios. They leverage design thinking, social technologies and deep customer insights to help transform business. Idea Couture works across a broad spectrum of industries, including fast-moving consumer goods, electronics, telecommunications, healthcare, financial services, media and publishing, and luxury goods. Clients include Fortune 500 companies in the US, Canada, UK and China. The company is currently expanding its global footprints and opening offices in Shanghai and Mumbai.

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