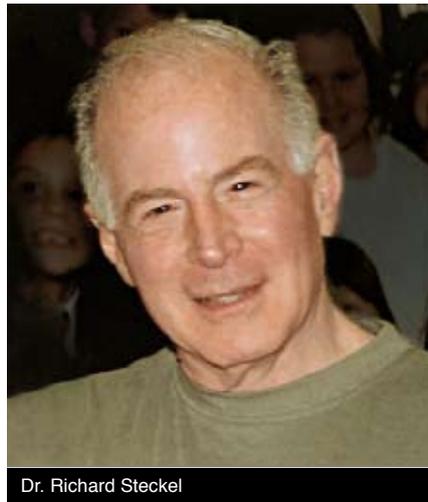


A Matter of Trust

By Richard Steckel

What do you have to gain if your customers trust you? Recent thinking suggests that “corporate believability” and consumer expectations of company behaviour have changed dramatically – and that businesses today can’t ignore the change in mindset. The U.K.-based communications consultancy Corporate Culture, for example, conducted a “belief analysis” among thousands of consumers last year and identified six dimensions of fundamental importance to the modern consumer: self-esteem and peer respect; improvement and progress; planning and saving; coping with life’s challenges; the “freedom to live now”; and, security through trusted institutions. Their overall deduction, stated simply, is: If your customers trust that you are concerned about their concerns, they remain loyal and committed to doing business with you.

This conclusion is certainly consistent with other thinkers and authors who share a similar belief that contemporary marketing is so much more than good brand strategy. The practitioner Kevin Roberts, in his book *Lovemarks*, describes the new kind of relationship that today’s customers seek—even yearn for. And the basis for trust, it seems,



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lies in the company’s ability to prove they are committed to corporate social responsibility (CSR). The consultant and author Marc Gobé describes the

Other thinkers like Charles Handy (who describes CSR as “proper selfishness”) and Michael Porter, both point to the strategic benefits that can come with CSR in today’s consumer environment. Porter’s recent work (see *Harvard Business Review*, December 2006) describes how firms align themselves with a social cause, and the kinds of issues companies should consider before committing to a cause they can link with their brand. Each company, he says, should “identify the particular set of societal problems that it is best equipped to help resolve” and believes that “when a well-run business applies its vast resources, expertise, and management talent to problems that it understands and in which it has a stake, it can have a greater impact on social good than any other institution or philanthropic organisation.”

My conclusion runs parallel. Societal shifts demand the corporate sector to stay involved in altering the world for the good of all, and do so in a way that

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phenomena by explaining that: “As the citizenry has become more charitable, they expect corporations to follow suit. Consumers support brands that ‘they can trust’ and they want those companies to be socially responsible.”

adds to the vitality of society and the benefit of their business. Their efforts need to be credible to their customers who, if they believe their sincerity, will trust and love them to bits.