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CSR Reporting: Changes Are Needed

December 14, 2009 by [Sherie Winston](#)

In my previous post, I wrote about my interview with CSR thought leader [Elaine Cohen](#) of [Beyond Business](#). The first part of that interview focused on her career path into social responsibility, some of the work that she is currently doing mentoring students and raising awareness with business leaders, and the role of communications and CSR reporting. As I had hoped, thought leaders have much to share, and Cohen did not disappoint.

Cohen is passionate about [CSR reporting](#), but also sees room for improvement. Three changes she thinks would augment reporting:



Cohen

- Tying Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to social responsibility initiatives
- Specifying what impact or results were derived from CSR actions
- More use of social media

She acknowledges that most technical reports are not written by corporate communications departments, although that trend is starting to shift in Europe. Additionally, Cohen notes the increase in PR agencies that specialize in social responsibility. *She expects increased collaboration between communications departments and business units to produce future reports that add focus on KPIs.* I agree with her that communicating, and telling a company's story, is the essence of social responsibility.

This evolution will occur as more and more organizations realize that CSR is not a separate exercise,

and that responsible business practices must be incorporated into every seam of a company's mission. Cohen explains that there is a growing realization and acceptance that it is 'not what I do' but 'how I do it' that impacts the bottom line when strategically applied.

Reporting must be balanced to be credible, asserts Cohen. If a report only includes good news or part of a company's activities, stakeholders and the public are getting only half of the picture. ***If the picture painted is so rosy, the reader should question what is being left out***, she says. Reports should also delve more deeply into a company's practices and provide analysis. It's not enough to simply list accomplishments or report actions. ***Cohen thinks that reports must go further and state what results or impact stemmed from those actions***. She thinks there will be more emphasis and integration of the triple bottom line in future reports.



The [Global Reporting Initiative](#) (GRI) is a good framework that covers a range of KPIs, says Cohen. There is flexibility within the GRI, but she expects it to be revised slightly. Cohen also expects to see more online reporting, which is more flexible still, and can be updated more frequently.

Social media, which continues to see more users daily, is also having an impact on the way CSR is communicated. [Social Media](#) allows more stakeholders to be engaged in a company's activities, whether it's reading a company blog, becoming a Facebook Fan or following an organization on Twitter. ***"Twitter has done as much for corporate responsibility as the great thought leaders through sheer accessibility,"*** says Cohen.

I couldn't agree more. That's how I first found [@elainecohen](#).

What CSR resources have you found on social media sites?

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2 Responses

1. on [February 1, 2010 at 1:21 am](#)  [John Bergdoll](#)

I agree with your comment, “If a report only includes good news or part of a company’s activities, stakeholders and the public are getting only half of the picture.”

Social media is an exciting harbinger of online sustainability and accountability reporting. Reports that come out once every one or two years are woefully out-of-step.

John Bergdoll

Follow me on: <http://twitter.com/JohnBergdoll>



2. on [February 1, 2010 at 4:17 pm](#) *Sherie Winston*

John, Thanks for your comment. I agree with you and Elaine-social media is making a difference!

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