How Companies are Doing Good and Why Yours Should Too

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March 2021

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Recommended Citation
Romney, Sarah (2021) "How Companies are Doing Good and Why Yours Should Too," Marriott Student Review. Vol. 4 : Iss. 2 , Article 5.
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/marriottstudentreview/vol4/iss2/5

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The bread aisle has changed. The choice is no longer simply between white and wheat, but between twenty brands of white, twenty brands of wheat, and twenty brands of multigrain. What used to be an easy decision with one or two options has turned into an intense competition among dozens of companies.

This is true not only with grocery products but for almost any product or service available. Customers, deciding where to spend their money and devote their loyalty, are influenced by factors beyond quality and price. One of these factors is the company’s reputation. As managing attorney Nathan A. Hartman put it, “Branding is not just about aesthetics and slogans, but reputation, especially in the community.”

Instead of just “serving the customers,” many businesses are now focused on just “serving.” Focusing on service, both on the community and global levels, will not only improve the world we live in; it will also differentiate your company from your competitors and change your employees’ experience.

The Case of Deloitte

Deloitte, one of the top accounting and consulting firms in the world, is leading the way in service. This past year, they celebrated their twentieth annual Impact Day, a day when “25,000 Deloitte professionals come together in 80 cities across the country to volunteer on more than 1,000 projects—contributing 179,000 collective hours of volunteer service.”

Beyond this annual day of community service, Deloitte donates about $20 million each year to organizations and charities, and Deloitte professionals have spent an extra 750,000 collective hours over the past 10 years providing free services to nonprofit organizations.

Why would a company spend so much extra money and time on causes not directly related to their business? The motivation lies in making a difference for the customers, the employees, and the world.
The Customers

One result of a business’s involvement in service is that it distinguishes them from their competition. The values a company stands for—and what they do in the community—have become an important consideration when customers decide what brands to support. According to a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) study done by Cone Communications in 2017, “78% of Americans want companies to address important social justice issues, 87% will purchase a product because a company advocated for an issue they cared about, and 76% will refuse to purchase a company’s products or services upon learning it supported an issue contrary to their beliefs.”

A recent example of this involves Lyft and Uber, two competing ride-sharing companies. While they offer very similar services, Lyft has been increasing in popularity because of the good they are doing. In addition to their own charitable donations, Lyft started giving customers the option to round up their fares and donate the extra money to a charity of their choice. Furthermore, they offered free rides to students attending “March for Our Lives” rallies and partnered with a senior living services company to facilitate senior transportation.

In contrast, Uber recently lost a significant portion of customers as a result of their response to President Trump’s controversial immigration ban. New York taxi drivers were protesting the immigration ban by refusing to drive people to JFK airport, but Uber took advantage of this and increased their rides offered by temporarily reducing their prices. This resulted in furious customers and 200,000 people deleting their Uber apps. Clearly, customers care about what a company does and stands for.

The Employees

It isn’t just the customers that care about the positive impact a company has; employees value service opportunities as well. There are three ways that involving employees in service activities will make a difference:

1. Service attracts employees. Getting paid to volunteer is an appealing change of pace from day-to-day work. Jennifer Sands with the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank observed over 1,000 Pennsylvania companies donate to and volunteer at the food bank. She commented, “I see people having a lot of fun… They know they’re helping a good cause and it’s getting them out of the office.”
2. **Service builds employee engagement.** In a survey by the Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship, 90% of the companies reported employee engagement as one of the top benefits of an employee service program, along with providing an opportunity to put company values into action. Speaking about their employees, a company manager helping at the food bank said, “It’s important for our employees to feel that they are more than just employees. They are part of the community.” She continued, “Helping employees support the causes they are passionate about makes them feel even more passionate about the company they work for.”

3. **Service provides opportunities for employees to use and develop skills.** Some of these opportunities include leadership and skill development. For Deloitte, “Many of the junior professionals get the chance to serve in leadership roles (leading and organizing Impact Day projects) that they may not have access to otherwise.” In addition to leadership opportunities, the activities allow them to use their other professional skills for good. Many of Deloitte’s service projects require the technical skills that their employees possess, and volunteering enables them to exercise and refine those skills.

With these opportunities that service provides employees, it is evident that “those companies that commit to service find they gain as much as they give by way of a more engaged workforce that is gaining skills and making connections.”

### The World

While service will make a world of difference for your customers and employees, perhaps most significant is the difference that the service will make in the world. The opportunities for service are endless. Deloitte has participated in activities from working on inner-city farms and painting playgrounds to mentoring youth and running coding programs for students.

Big or small, companies can get involved in serving the communities around them. Use the resources and skills available at your company, get your employees involved, interact with the community, and, ultimately, make an impact.

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**Notes**

10. Stacy Wescoe, “Promoting Community Service.”
13. Stacy Wescoe, “Promoting Community Service.”
15. Deloitte.

Watercolor by Allison Havey