

Increasing Consumer Engagement Through Brand Citizenship



By *Laura Ferry, Founder/President, [Good Company](#)*

The recent gridlock in Congress has shifted the trust of the American people from government toward business. According to the [2016 Edelman Trust Barometer](#), people trust CEO's more than government to solve social problems and they're now looking to businesses to tackle social issues. Add social media to amplify this mindset and you have a shift where the onus is on companies and brands to act more responsibly. This is why companies are increasingly serious about "brand citizenship" and making corporate commitments that align and integrate corporate social responsibility. In this way, they are working to manage reputation, and leveraging marketing and social media communities to create a culture that focuses on social good.

The companies valuing brand citizenship are seeing it pay off because overall consumers appreciate their efforts and reward them by purchasing their products and services. [The 2006 Cone Millennial Cause Study](#) confirmed this trend. In fact:

- 71% are more loyal to brands and companies they believe are doing good[\[1\]](#)
- 87% bought a product associated with a cause over the last 12 months

- 91% are likely to switch brands to one associated with a cause
- 70% are willing to pay more for a product that supports a cause

These numbers explain why retail has become a beacon for charities. Donation programs associated with products and at the register are a way to connect with consumers about the social issues they care about, and 60% feel more positive about retailers when they're asked to donate.[2] This is why designers, nonprofit brands and social enterprises are bringing social issues of the day to day shopping experience to help retailers and brand build strong ties and brand loyalty with consumers.

Causes and brands at retail continue to get more creative. Lady Gaga and Elton John teamed up to create a new product line for Macy's called "Love Bravery" which will support each of their respective foundations, Gaga's [Born This Way Foundation](#) and the [Elton John AIDS Foundation](#). Twenty-five percent of the sales from items purchased will go toward these causes that are strongly resonating with the public at this moment in time and are aimed at pushing for equality as positive social change.

Retail can also be used as a platform for creating dialogue about issues resonating in the news and in the daily lives of people. Take Howard Shultz, CEO of Starbucks for example, a corporate leader who is all about creating a dialogue with the public aimed at solving social problems. Mr. Shultz took a bold, yet controversial step with the Starbucks' Race Together campaign by asking his baristas to start a dialogue about race in America. The response was mixed, and Shultz [got a lot of flap for it](#), but he and his company learned a lot about the social landscape and many consumers gave them credit for giving it a try. More recently Starbucks announced a new program aimed at feeding the needy by donating 5 million of its [unsold food products](#) and distributing them through FDC and

Feeding America's food bank channels.

[Corporate social responsibility](#) award winner, Mark Hanna, CMO of Berkshire Hathaway's fine jewelry subsidiary, Richline Group, is another c-suite executive investing heavily in doing well by doing good. He believes that investing in sustainable business practices should be an integral part of doing business across the board, "As keepers of the firm's reputation and in a world demanding trust and authenticity, it is a necessary strategic goal," he says in a recent article in *AdAge* recognizing his company for their commitment. While the firm has no plans to market their socially responsible practices through consumer programs, Hanna believes that eventually their way of doing business "is an investment in our brand."

So how can your corporate or nonprofit foster brand citizenship in the marketplace? Start by putting yourself in their shoes and hitting these points:

- Cause Alignment – make sure the nonprofit and the corporation have aligned core values and charitable goals. It has to make sense for the brands to work together and it's going to be important when mixing a mission driven culture with a shareholder driven one in partnership.
- Unilateral Commitment – both partners must bring a full organizational commitment to the table with resources supporting mutual goals. If everyone is not behind a brand citizenship effort, it's probably going show limited, if any, success or return on investment.
- Bring Resources and Ideas that work for both parties – Know your partner's business goals and come to the table with ideas that work for both of you. Share information about your constituent reach, your public relations and marketing resources and how the company can benefit from those assets, drive store or web traffic and transactions.

- Incentives – Explore ways to motivate employees to participate in the partnerships and engage them. These are your foot soldiers who can become long term assets to your charity or cause. Engage them as potential new voices for your cause and a constituent base that can be cultivated over time.

As more and more businesses follow the trend toward brand citizenship, we'll continue to see brand leaders emerge as drivers of positive social change. They'll be taking action to solve problems and inviting employees and consumers to participate in making change happen. Along with that change comes the social and political capital that helps them build long term relationships, and strengthens reputations, and build brand loyalty that can be very hard to achieve in a hyper-media culture, and social platform driven economy.

About the Author: Laura Ferry is the founder of [Good Company](#), a brand citizenship consultancy, widely recognized for establishing socially responsible joint ventures for national brands, media and nonprofits. Good Company is a member of [The Purpose Collaborative](#), a growing collective of the foremost cause-focused agencies and consultants created by one of the world's pioneers in the business with purpose space, Carol Cone.

[1] 2015 CONE COMMUNICATIONS MILLENNIAL CSR STUDY

[2] Good Scout Change at the Checkout Report, 2015