

Social marketing said to be growing business trend

According to Mark Sarnar, corporate involvement with social issues has progressed beyond a mere trend and is now accepted as a form of marketing by most businesses.

In fact it is a growth sector, with Mr. Sarnar predicting major shifts in corporate behaviour over the next several years.

"Corporate thinking is really changing regarding social marketing and there are major shifts in this area which should take about three to five years to shake out," Mr. Sarnar said.

"As government is taking less responsibility for social and community programs Canadians are expecting business to take a more active role," he said.

Mr. Sarnar, president of the social marketing agency Manifest Communications, recently explained the concept to a business breakfast hosted by Halton Chair Joyce Savoline. Essentially, social marketing is a calculated program of tying social responsibility to corporate image.

Mr. Sarnar used The Body Shop as an example, saying they had built their entire corporate position around social responsibility.

In fact The Body Shop placed high on a sur-

vey of companies known for their social marketing, despite the fact that they are not a big media advertiser.

He pointed to McDonalds as another example of a company involved in social marketing. McDonalds' promotes itself through its sponsorship of Ronald McDonald Houses — housing near hospitals for families of sick children.

He also cited a survey which identified Bell Canada, Molsons, Esso, The Royal Bank, Coca Cola and Labatts as major users of social marketing strategies.

More and more partnerships between business and community groups are occurring. In these partnerships, monetary contributions are not always the most tangible assistance business renders, according to Mr. Sarnar.

He suggested social agencies understand the goals of corporations they approach for help so they can tie a marketing plan to the social interest targeted by the business.

The fact that social marketing is widely accepted has been borne out by an extensive survey, Mr. Sarnar said. More than 80 per cent of businesses surveyed said social marketing is not a fad and will be more important in the future

than it is currently.

"There are dual motives of social good and company good, Mr. Sarnar said. He noted that when asked if business or the community benefited more, respondents were evenly split, while 35 per cent refused to choose between the two.

Fully 87 per cent of companies involved in the survey said social marketing is appropriate and 69 per cent said they are currently involved or are planning involvement in such programs.

Mr. Sarnar said that several survey questions also illustrated significant gaps between what companies feel their role is and what they are actually doing. He said this is an indication there are shifts in corporate thinking which have not yet been fully realized in society.

"We've become a world that is mostly generic," he said. "The involvement in social issues can have a positive impact on consumer attitudes. People want to choose which organization they will support."

Mr. Sarnar said in 1995 about 25 per cent of people reported boycotting products because they were unhappy with the company that produced them.

There is a belief among companies that social

marketing can influence brand image, brand loyalty, regulatory issues and employee morale, he said.

"Some people are concerned about the ethics of social marketing, and, frankly they should be," Mr. Sarnar said. He explained that there is a potential for unethical use of the concept. In addition there is a potential for a public backlash in opinion of a particular program.

Most companies use their public affairs and sales departments to promote their social concerns, which are usually environment, education, social service or health related, he said.

Luc Lauwers, president of IKEA Canada, spoke about his company's social considerations. He said social marketing is more than simply generating good news stories in the local press.


Mr. Lauwers said employee involvement in IKEA social programs is key to their success. Their ideas and support mean that not always does IKEA look to influence the greatest number of customers with a given involvement.

He pointed out that IKEA's long-time overall corporate strategy springs from a mindset of "building better lives for the majority of people."

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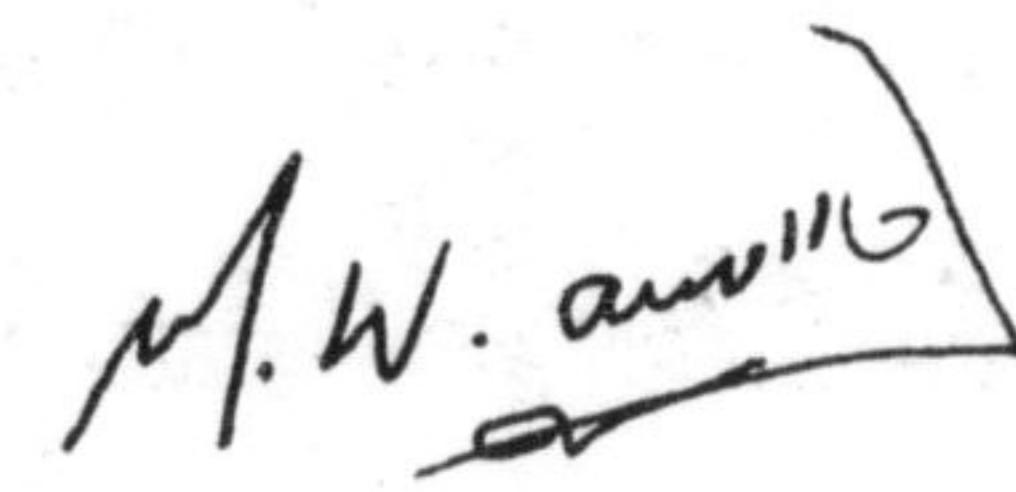
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