

Generation Responsible: How social responsibility drives business

Today's consumers are different. Describing them as savvy or smart would be an understatement. Transparency in media practices, influenced by social media culture, has made it easier to recognize flimsy, insincere marketing tactics. Consumers have become fiercely loyal to certain brands — they interact publicly with brands through social media and consistently reward companies that give back to their communities.

There's no arguing that a transition is taking place, evidenced by the success of brands like Toms, Feed and Warby Parker — all of which include a substantial philanthropic strategy as part of their mission. Companies across industries are implementing corporate social responsibility plans and building opportunities for their employees to engage with partnering nonprofits.

In 2007, Lauren Bush Lauren, niece of former President George W. Bush, launched Feed in response to her humanitarian work. The company started by selling organic bags stamped with "FEED," but now sells a variety of other apparel and goods. With each bag sold, a portion of the proceeds goes to projects that address world hunger. And it took off.

Consumers loved that they could purchase stylish clothing and accessories while making ethical buying decisions. Feed benefited, not only through sales and partnerships with stores like Target and Gap, but because the company was able to hold true to its mission by providing nearly 85 million meals globally, according to data from the organization.

How did this shift occur? When did consumers become so socially conscious?

Recent commentary credits Millennials — those born between 1981 and 1992 — for the shift. Now in their 20s, the members of this generation are more conscious about the world around them; they take up causes and are motivated by having a higher purpose in life. While this may be true, the credit doesn't end, or even begin, with this group.