

# CSR - the three letter marketing miracle

It boosts business, enthuses employees, improves image, reduces risk and inspires innovation...

Just some of the reported benefits of CSR – a topic that's been scaling the professional services agenda over recent years.

A visit to [www.csr.gov.uk](http://www.csr.gov.uk) tells you that the government wants business to deliver economic growth without creating environmental decline or social injustice.

A few still struggle with the acronym, but elsewhere there's a wave of activity - particularly amongst medium sized legal firms who see tangible benefits in embracing a socially responsible approach.

A straw poll amongst the 64 independent medium sized law firms that comprise the LawNet network suggests that increasing numbers of professionals are translating philosophy into action and deriving real benefits in adopting a balanced set of values.

Take the environment. It's easy to see the fit for retailers like Marks & Spencer, but how does it translate to the service sector?

For lawyers at George Davies in Manchester, it has meant taking a long hard look at where they can have an impact. "We've got a project group drawn from every level looking at how much we print, the levels of utilities consumed, and how staff travel. Now we're on to the next challenge - how to improve our footprint in these areas," explained managing partner Mark Hovell.

In Nottingham, Actons Solicitors have taken a different approach to supporting the environment by working with the National Forest on a tree planting programme involving staff and clients. "We planted 100 trees, which will have a positive effect on the environment and be a lasting reminder of the firm and its ethos," said Claire Bell, director responsible for CSR.

Other activity by Actons has included supporting Unleashed, a cutting edge project by artists and designers to promote Nottingham's standing on the creative design front.

"It's about demonstrating the importance of design and how it impacts our culture on a day to day basis. We could see the value in an innovative project like this, because it associated us with the leading work being done in our home city and placed us firmly in our local community."

The results for Actons have included a boost for recruitment and retention as well as a raised profile and generating goodwill with all involved, including clients and other contacts.

"It's a factor you can't ignore," adds Claire Bell. "More and more clients have added CSR to their decision-making. But it's important to ensure you find things that really work for the firm and which enthuse and involve the staff."

Back with George Davies in Manchester, they're also focusing on how to involve everyone – but unusually, they're paying the staff.

The firm has handed over £3,000 to staff, challenging them to convert it into £20,000 to be used to pay for a Prince's Trust 'into work' course for a young person. Ideas so far have included staff auctioning themselves as 'slave for the day' and a fund-raising dinner.

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For many firms, the first step into CSR is through the pro bono scheme managed by Business in the Community (BiTC). ProHelp provides free professional advice to community organisations. It's easily deliverable, whilst giving tangible value to the organisations.

It can also bring unexpected benefits. For Andrew & Co. Solicitors in Lincoln, ProHelp provides valuable networking with other professionals across a large rural county.

Other organised projects stretch the boundaries and bring different benefits. Staff at Leicester law firm Harvey Ingram are involved in BiTC Cares campaign for community involvement in deprived areas. This summer around 65 staff will overhaul the playgrounds of the local primary school.

"It doesn't just benefit the local community," explains partner Steven Baylis. "The activities are great for team building and staff development. It helps with recruitment too. People rightly expect employers to be committed to giving something back."

Ashton Morton Slack in Sheffield support the Right to Read project to increase children's literacy levels by getting staff involved with the schools. "Children meet adults from the world of work, which inspires them to think about the future," says marketing and events manager Lisa Cooke. "And staff value the soft skills they develop through volunteering."

That's echoed by Andrew & Co., who established a charity with BITC and other local businesses to provide free breakfasts to schoolchildren. "Staff develop skills which transfer back into the practice – such as team building and personal confidence," says practice director Peter Bateson.

There are often opportunities in the local economy too. Harris Cartier is a founder member of the Slough Business Community Partnership, set up to encourage co-operative working between local business, the public and voluntary sectors.

"It's having a real impact on the work of local charities and voluntary organisations, giving knowledge and expertise that would otherwise not be available to them," explained David McIntosh, director of business development.

"It's also a way of investing in the future of our own community. By helping to stimulate the local economy, we all benefit."



**Maggie Taylor of Prima PR & Marketing**  
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*Interviewees and case histories were provided by LawNet - a collaborative, non competing national network of independent, medium law firms. Currently comprising 64 firms with a combined income in excess of £250m, members benefit from collective purchasing, shared knowledge, best practice and expertise. [www.lawnet.co.uk](http://www.lawnet.co.uk)*

## Yoga, fresh fruit and a war on waste

**For lawyers at Clarkson Wright & Jakes LLP, the path towards social accountability has included yoga, fresh fruit and a war on waste.**

**In a three-pronged approach, the firm set out to tackle CSR through environment, community and people.**

Research by MORI has shown employees to be happiest when they associate themselves with organisations that have positive reputations and behave ethically – it reflects their personal values, enhances their self-image and motivates them to act as a champion for their company.

That's an aspect that CWJ have focused on in developing a well-being programme for staff. Flexible working is supported by IT systems that enable staff to work from home when they need to and to maintain a good work-life balance.

The firm has also devised a range of social activities to encourage healthy living. Fresh fruit is provided every day, nutritionists advise on diet, yoga lessons are held, and cycling to work is actively encouraged with bike storage provided.

To encourage volunteering, staff are given a day out of the office to get involved in supporting charitable activities. Many volunteer for events and day trips with Headway, a charity for people affected by brain injuries, or with the Spinal Injuries

Association. Others man the helpline each month for Action against Medical Accidents.

The charities reflect one of the firm's specialisms, as their personal injury department specialises in severe injuries and they are members of the referral panels for the chosen charities.



Join CWJ and the Spinal Injuries Association in the London, Berlin and New York marathons - [www.spinal.co.uk](http://www.spinal.co.uk)

"It gives an extra resonance to our volunteering, and builds ongoing relationships with many people we've helped with injury claims," explains partner Amanda Mehlin. "We also felt that having had the business benefit of being on the panel for many years, this was a real opportunity to give something back."

The staff-friendly initiatives have paid off in the CSR campaign, with the firm reporting more volunteers for charitable work and lots of enthusiastic support for environmental issues.

Staff from across the firm pitched in to develop the firm's environmental policy, which is paying off in changes to the way everyone works and the way that waste disposal is managed. "It's leading to better use of resources and reduced costs," says Amanda Mehlin. "Staff really threw themselves into the environmental issues and that raised the bar for the firm."

CWJ Solicitors are based in Orpington in Kent, with 17 partners and are members of LawNet.