



## BSR Conference 2008 | Sustainability: Leadership Required A Global Approach to Internal CSR Communications

Breakout Session Summary

Thursday, November 6, 2008 | 10–11:30 a.m.

### Speakers

- **Sean Gilbert**, Director, Technical Development, Global Reporting Initiative
- **Kellie A. McElhaney**, Consultant, Professor, and Executive Director, Center for Responsible Business, Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley
- **William Swope**, Vice President and General Manager, Corporate Affairs Group, Intel Corporation
- **Heidi Glunz**, Director, Corporate Social Responsibility, McDonald's Corporation (moderator)

### Highlights

- Employees are businesses' brand ambassadors—they are always talking about their companies whether or not their companies are talking to them. Communication to internal stakeholders on sustainability is therefore crucial to the overall success of corporate social responsibility (CSR).
- To create employee empowerment and ownership of CSR issues, communication to internal stakeholders needs to be about engaging with them as well.
- While communication throughout the business needs to be consistent, it is also necessary, and possible, to tailor messages to meet local needs and address local issues.

### Memorable Quotes

- “There is a critical distinction between CSR communications on core business issues, including the brand, and what kind of particular role the company needs to play in a particular place.” —Sean Gilbert, Global Reporting Initiative
- “You are already communicating constantly, so the key is to weave CSR into those conversations.” —Kellie McElhaney, University of California, Berkeley
- “What’s in it for the person you are trying to communicate to? What do they want to know? Why do they care?” —Will Swope, Intel

### Overview

Glunz began the session by asking speakers about the relative importance of internal stakeholders in CSR communications. McElhaney asserted that employees are the most





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important audience for businesses because they are the most important external communicators. Employees are much more credible than “a full page ad in the *New York Times*,” she said. Gilbert added that companies working on reporting usually describe employees as the first or second most important stakeholder group. In fact, some businesses declare that the whole point of their CSR reports is to inform internal audiences.

Swope explained that at Intel, internal CSR communications are focused on creating worldwide consistency and empowering employees to own sustainability issues. Interestingly, internal audiences tend to be the most cynical of groups that companies communicate to, and this can act as a bellwether of credibility. McElhanehy followed up by suggesting that the topic at hand was perhaps less about communicating to internal stakeholders and more about engaging with employees.

Glunz then asked the speakers if they had any lessons to share on reaching internal stakeholders. Swope answered that Intel concentrates on facilitating communication between internal audiences in a networked, rather than hub-and-spoke model. Because Intel is a global company and employees are not a homogenous group, cross-functional and geographical sharing allows employees to trade ideas on CSR and adapt them to account for cultural differences.

A participant in the audience requested examples of communications strategies that don't require large up-front investments. McElhanehy responded that companies are already communicating constantly with their employees, so the key is to weave sustainability into those messages. She cited the example of Medtronic, which uses annual sales meetings to drive CSR messages into different parts of the company.

The conversation then turned to the topic of gathering and communicating data. Swope pointed out that very few people actually get excited about data; emotions and interactions are what really drive individuals. Gilbert agreed that stories are essential in CSR communications but stressed that data is necessary to support the bigger-picture perspective of impact.

Glunz then returned to the question of balancing consistency with cultural sensitivity throughout large global corporations. Swope explained that Intel sets a corporate framework on CSR issues and uses a common set of tools but then tailors the content to meet local needs. For example, Intel has written a code of conduct specifically for Vietnam and has written country-specific CSR reports.

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