



BSR Conference 2008 | Sustainability: Leadership Required Innovating CSR Online

Breakout Session Summary

Thursday, November 7, 2008 | 2–5 p.m.

Speakers

- **Amy Skoczlas Cole**, Head of Global Citizenship Marketing and Communications, eBay Inc.
- **Erin Meezan**, Assistant Vice President, Sustainability, Interface, Inc.
- **Steve A. Rochlin**, Head, North America, AccountAbility
- **Kara Hartnett Hurst**, Managing Director, East Coast, Business for Social Responsibility

Highlights

- Web 2.0 can be a powerful tool for communicating and engaging around CSR.
- Web 2.0 levels the playing field, creating a space where small communities and individuals voices can compete with those of large corporations.
- Web 2.0 is a rapidly evolving technology that offers both opportunities and challenges, and CSR practitioners can be part of shaping its future.

Memorable Quotes

- “Web 2.0 is the rocket fuel that can help blast corporate responsibility into the DNA of a company.” —Steve Rochlin, AccountAbility
- “In terms of CSR, the internet represents scale.” —Erin Meezan, Interface, Inc.
- “The internet and Web 2.0 tools actually bring to life the dream that we have truly engaged consumers in a mainstream, meaningful way to have a positive impact on society.” —Amy Skoczlas Cole, eBay Inc.

Overview

Hartnett Hurst began the session by posing the question: How can Web 2.0 affect sustainability? Rochlin defined Web 2.0 as blogs, social networking sites, wikis, podcasts, open source frameworks, and mash ups—tools that allow us to be a responsive community. He highlighted Web 2.0’s ability to both empower people and communities and allow companies to more effectively manage impacts. Fundamentally, he said, Web 2.0 tools and technologies provide all of us a way to change companies and their value chains. Rochlin went on to predict that tension between Web 2.0’s positive uses, such as those already described, and negative uses, such as encouraging anonymous vulgar behavior and enabling





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people to waste numerous hours watching videos, will increase as we define this new world, and posed three questions: 1) How do we create incentives that will make Web 2.0 a better, more effective tool; 2) How do we organize this to be a safer place; and 3) How do we open this process to all people?

Meezan profiled Interface's new website www.missionzero.org, an environmental sustainability site that offers enriched media, profiles, and blogs, and is highly customizable by users. The site is intended to serve as a gathering place that provides education, strategic messaging, information collection, and communication with a variety of stakeholders. She raised the difficulty of pioneering the use of Web 2.0 as a corporate social responsibility (CSR) medium—experts in CSR are not often experts in Web 2.0 and vice versa.

Cole emphasized the importance of aligning a company's core business competencies and its CSR agenda. The company's online CSR platforms are focused on microcredit investment, certified sustainable goods, and nonprofit sales, and are closely related to its unique business model of providing large-scale marketplaces that enable positive outcomes as well as skill sets of large-scale user interface deployment, and creation of strong customer relationships.

In response to questions about governance, oversight, and accountability for online forums, Meezan said that when you build an online community, over-control results in accusations of non-transparency. Cole spoke of eBay's community feedback model as an effective way to regulate online, but admitted that it has its challenges. Rochlin raised the possibility of creating a bloggers' code of conduct to create a safer space for transparency and engagement.

Panel suggestions in response to an audience question about engaging "nonusers" such as older people were to eliminate extraneous sources of the information, which forces the user to use the new media in order to access the desired information, and to tailor content and services to the audience. In response to the challenge of driving traffic to a new technology or website, Rochlin spoke of the need to have clearly articulated intent with which we design these sites in order to build and enable a community.

Small discussion groups on the potential impacts of Web 2.0 identified key strengths and challenges. Web 2.0 enables community building and interpersonal relationship development, increases available information, matches the tool with the user, increases scale and mobilization, and encourages collective problem solving. However, the technologies are still in a stage of raising more questions than they answer, leaving much room for growth, development, and innovative solution creation.

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