

Issue Backgrounder Part II: SWOT Analysis
Ben & Jerry's: Success Through CSR
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Issue Background Summary

In this analysis, I will examine how corporate social responsibility (CSR) impacts Ben & Jerry's positively. Through internal and external initiatives, Ben & Jerry's has seen success through its efforts in CSR due to its prominence in its business plan. In my Appendix, I will include a social media plan, social media data tracking gathered from the past two weeks, as well as an example of non-optimal social media usage that could be adjusted for the success of the company. In this analysis, I will demonstrate how Ben & Jerry's benefits from its CSR strategy, as well as potential threats to the organization that should be considered. Overall, the CSR commitments Ben & Jerry's have utilized prove meaningful CSR is beneficial for business.

SWOT Matrix

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ben & Jerry's has successfully integrated CSR practices in its business, both internally and externally. (Dennis, Neck & Goldsby, 1998, p.1).2. Ben & Jerry's treats its employees well with a livable wage and benefits to create brand ambassadors. (Dennis, Neck & Goldsby, 1998, p.2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ben & Jerry's has many commitments to different causes; inevitably, some will be brushed to the wayside. (Coombs, 2017, para. 3).2. Focus on CSR practices is seemingly the top priority in the company, which could take away from producing high-quality products; in a business organization, this is the bottom line (Lee, 2018).

Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Ben & Jerry's can use its social media presence more effectively to spread these messages to a larger audience.<li>2. Ben & Jerry's is an industry leader in CSR initiatives. (Dennis, Neck & Goldsby, 1998, p.1)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Because of Ben & Jerry's opinionated stance on many political issues, controversial views have led to public outrage and boycotts of the products (Kaye, 2016, para.6).<li>2. Due to political stance, Ben & Jerry's will inevitably alienate one group of consumers; this means that its customer base will never be as large as it could be (Lee, 2018, para.6).

Strength

Ben & Jerry's is one of the first major companies that have fully integrated CSR into its business plan (Dennis, Neck & Goldsby, 1998, p.1). Ben & Jerry's supports many local and international charities, ranging from supporting sustainability to advocating for world peace (Ben & Jerry's, 2018). Supporting nonprofits is a priority for Ben & Jerry's and the organization has integrated such initiatives into its mission, vision and value statements (Ben & Jerry's, 2018). Through having a strong activism team within its corporate structure, Ben & Jerry's is poised to be more successful as opposed to other companies (Peters, 2018). Not only does this position Ben & Jerry's as an industry leader in the realm of CSR, but it also demonstrates the company is internally committed to making these initiatives a priority. Ben & Jerry's hires employees whose values fully align with those of the organization (Dennis, Neck & Goldsby, 1998, p.2). This way,

the CSR efforts are visible from all levels of the organization. Ben & Jerry's also works to treat its employees well by providing a livable wage with benefits (Dennis, Neck & Goldsby, 1998, p.2).

These benefits prove Ben & Jerry's is committed to creating brand ambassadors and maintaining a satisfied staff. Research demonstrates when employees are treated with respect, given benefits and contribute to meaningful occupation, they are more productive at work (2017, Preston, para.3). These values demonstrate how Ben & Jerry's not only has strong external CSR, but also strong internal CSR. This is a way to ensure stakeholders that the CSR programs are not solely for marketing, but for creating a meaningful work environment for its employees. Because the employees of Ben & Jerry's are treated well, the employees are more likely to embody and carry out key messages, resulting in a consistent brand image.

Overall, Ben & Jerry's successfully incorporates CSR initiatives into all aspects of its business, and have seen positive outcomes from this strategy. Fully integrating the CSR business plan into the organization has led Ben & Jerry's to high sales, satisfied employees and a positive reputation (Ben & Jerrys, 2017).

Weakness

Ben & Jerry's dedicates themselves to numerous charitable causes and social movements (Ben & Jerrys, 2018). With these commitments, not every issue can be a priority for the company; however, not following through on claims creates an inconsistent brand image, resulting in a skeptical audience. An example is Ben & Jerry's 2015 commitment to ethically-sourcing its dairy products; however, there was doubt among local farmers that this agreement was followed (Coombs, 2017, para.3). As a company that has built its reputation mainly on investing in social causes, there is no room for error in these situations (Coombs, 2017, para.4).

The dairy incident eventually led to a march of protest from the farmers; this elicited a response from Ben & Jerry's stating the program was simply taking a longer time to implement (Coombs, 2017, para.5). Nevertheless, Ben & Jerry's received bad press from the incident. Committing to a wide variety of issues can present the organization as a leader in CSR, but if the correct measures are not followed it is inauthentic. Not only will this cause strife with its publics, but as an organization that prides themselves on being incredibly charitable, this can cause conflict with the organization's vision.

Ben & Jerry's needs to ensure that internal staff are prepared to fully commit to causes that the organization publicly endorses to display a consistency in its expressed intent and action. Overall, this weakness could be abolished quite simply, and Ben & Jerry's would likely see even more success with its current CSR strategy with heightened focus.

Opportunity

Peters analyzes how Ben & Jerry's maintains a political presence in the media; its corporate activism manager previously worked for Bernie Sanders (Peters, 2018, para.2). Ben & Jerry's aims to encourage conversation about the values and beliefs its company holds (Peters, 2018, para.1). Ben & Jerry's has a popular presence on social media, so this is an opportunity to increase the posting activity, as it is very low (see Appendix two). The brand also does not engage in a conversation with its publics on social media. If Ben & Jerry's were to take advantage of its social media outlets more, the organization would see an increase in brand awareness and ultimately, sales.

Other companies have noticed that its social media presence is somewhat correlated with the profit earned (Blue Fountain Media, 2018). Additionally, being more active on social media will allow for the brand to share its key messages more frequently. Engaging in a dialogue with

the company's key publics is important as well; if Ben & Jerry's is going to advocate for different movements and charities, the organization must be willing and available to discuss these issues, especially those of controversial nature. As demonstrated in Appendix three, ignoring negative comments and speculations on posts does not reflect well on Ben & Jerry's. The CSR strategy that Ben & Jerry's implements is successful, but to optimize this success, the company needs to re-evaluate its social media presence. If Ben & Jerry's new social media plan is intertwined with its CSR strategy, the company will likely notice an overall increase in its brand reputation, recognition and sales (Blue Fountain Media, 2018).

It is worth noting that the posts that see most success on Ben & Jerry's Canadian Facebook page are regarding its CSR strategies; the audience is interested in the issues, Ben & Jerry's simply must post more and increase dialogue while maintaining its successful CSR strategy.

Threat

Ben & Jerry's actively voices its opinions on social issues, some of which controversial. A recent example was Ben & Jerry's support of the Black Lives Matter movement beginning in 2016 (Masse, 2016, para.1). Support of the issue resulted in a group of people boycotting Ben and Jerry's; in particular, police were against the company supporting the movement (Masse, 2016, para.2). By taking one side, Ben & Jerry's has alienated those who do not support the movement. With politically-charged issues such as this one, not everyone's opinion will be the same, and the more controversial the topic, the more customers the brand may potentially lose. It is part of Ben & Jerry's mission, vision and values to be actively involved in issues such as this one; however, as a business organization, Ben & Jerry's needs to be mindful about which groups the organization alienates.

In my Appendix, I have included an example of the social media outrage Ben & Jerry's has faced. It is important to note that there was no response from Ben & Jerry's in the comment section, suggesting poor engagement. If Ben & Jerry's continues to be vocal about controversial issues, the organization will need to engage with its audience more to create meaningful conversations, and to keep CSR commitments positively affecting the company.

Recommendations

As of Dec. 11, 2018, the most recent post on the Ben & Jerry's Facebook page was on Nov. 1, 2018. Despite the lack of engagement, the company still sees a growing range of followers; if the company were to post more, it would likely receive more likes and social engagement. It is also important to maintain an active social media presence because it increases brand awareness (Blue Fountain Media, 2018). Additionally, it is crucial for Ben & Jerry's to respond to and clarify its values on its posts (see Appendix three). The example provided is negative; however, Ben & Jerry's does have a popular social media presence, and if the organization utilizes the correct strategies, brand reputation will improve, contributing to the positive effects of its CSR.

Ben & Jerry's should also consider supporting fewer causes; when the brand publicly commits to so many charities, the organization has a responsibility to follow through on the claim, which does not always occur (or is not publicly displayed, which negates the company announcing its commitments). To avoid this, Ben & Jerry's should select a few charities that the organization proudly supports, so that the organization does not commit to too many causes.

Overall, the CSR strategy is effective for Ben & Jerry's and the company has enjoyed the benefits, in both reputation and sales.

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Appendix One: Suggested social media plan

Platforms

- Facebook: Although followers on Facebook continue to increase, Ben & Jerry's is very inactive on the platform. To make the most of existing followers, Ben & Jerry's needs to post regularly on Facebook; four to five times a week is ideal. Photos, videos and/or links should be included in each post, all promoting the three key messages listed below. Posting more frequently will build a larger fan base, and allow for more conversation within the community. Posting about CSR initiatives should be a priority, as these posts see higher likes and shares.
- Instagram: A priority for Ben & Jerry's should be to grow the number of followers on Instagram, as this platform can be quite useful, particularly for a brand posting mainly photos. Posting on this account should occur once every one to two days, depending on new content (if there is nothing new or interesting for stakeholders, don't post). This would also be an appropriate place to sprinkle in images of Ben & Jerry's staff, CSR initiatives and stores, as the page is primarily ice cream.
- Twitter: Since Ben & Jerry's is most active on this platform, it is important to continue to post regularly with multimedia content. There should be at least four tweets per week with images or videos. The content should be primarily focused on driving customers to the Ben & Jerry's website, promoting CSR content or sharing photos of ice cream.

Key messages

- Ben & Jerry's is passionate about creating quality ice cream products.
- Ben & Jerry's prioritizes social justice, equality and change.
- Ben & Jerry's has created real impact on the world through CSR initiatives.

Appendix Two: Social media tracking

Ben & Jerry's Facebook likes

Nov. 20: 8821449

Nov. 21: 8821685

Nov. 22: 8822125

Nov. 23: 8822595

Nov. 24: 8814209

Nov. 25: 8814416

Nov. 26: 8814516

Nov. 27: 8814897

Nov. 28: 8815330

Nov. 29: 8816582

Nov. 30: 8819306

Dec. 1: 88121303

Dec. 2: 88115392

Dec. 3: 8811539

Dec. 4: 8810629

The posting on Ben & Jerry's Canadian corporate Facebook page is very minimal. Posts do not show audience engagement; the likes to follower ratio is not very low. Photos of only ice cream get significantly less likes as compared to those with mentions of CSR movements. The comments on the posts concerning CSR can be negative, and the lack of response from Ben & Jerry's is problematic: no response suggests that the organization does not see the comments. Negative comments are an opportunity for Ben & Jerry's to reform its social media strategy to

start a dialogue with its consumers. In fact, creating an open discussion with consumers is a priority of the newly-appointed CEO (Lee, 2018, para.6). Social media is a great platform for discussion and Ben & Jerry's needs to utilize this by posting more frequently to build a larger fan base, continually showcasing CSR efforts and creating a discussion with the community. However, the likes Ben & Jerry's consistently receives on its main Facebook page suggests that people are paying attention to the brand, and the organization are interested in the CSR programs. Strategizing and posting more about CSR initiatives will allow the brand for more two-way symmetrical communication, which will ultimately benefit the business in both reputation and sales.

Appendix Three: Example of Ben & Jerry's negative exposure and lack of response to commenters.

