

It is widely acknowledged that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become the new standard, alongside profit, by which a company's success is measured. At the recent UN Global Compact Summit, 20 major financial institutions (representing \$6 trillion in assets) pledged to begin integrating social, environmental and governance issues into investment analysis and decision-making. Environmental sustainability and social awareness are therefore becoming factors that corporate stakeholders take into consideration alongside a company's financial success. In Germany, strict regulation, particularly environmental, means that most companies already have a sense for the importance of non-financial externalities. Even so, they have been slow to link their best practices in the area of environmental sustainability with equally important issues such as ethical production, integration of communities and equal opportunities. This is where public affairs can make a difference.

In a business environment where it is no longer sufficient to merely succeed against your competitors, it is also a requirement to satisfy the demands of stakeholders, regulators and NGOs. The mix of interests is varied and often conflicting but a well organised communications strategy can go

THE NECESSARY GOOD

Dominik Meier contends that companies genuine about satisfying all their stakeholders must develop a strong CSR policy

a long way towards bridging the gaps. Just as multinational corporations are sometimes guilty of approaching their social responsibilities in a one-dimensional manner, NGOs are sometimes too quick to point the finger and governments too rash to implement regulation. Such actions only cause resentment, creating further barriers to communication. Public affairs agencies with a track record in the fields of business, government and most importantly civil society can offer a solution to these problems. They offer a professional external perspective, which is often lacking when corporations negotiate their CSR policies.

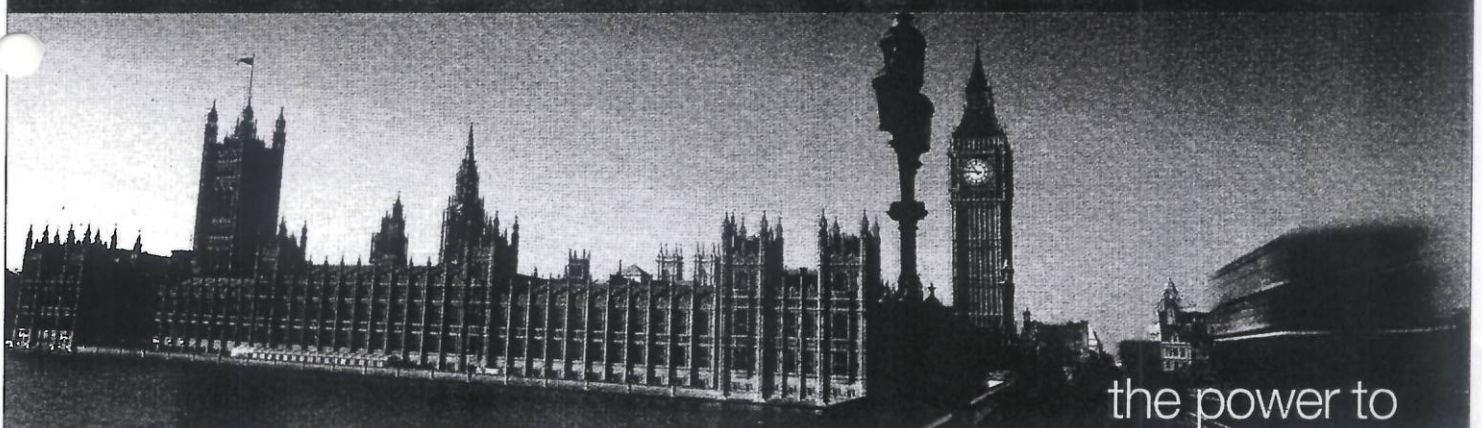
Public affairs can also play an important role in forging co-operation within

Multinational corporations are sometimes guilty of approaching their social responsibilities in a one-dimensional manner

large corporations, where an underdeveloped CSR policy can cause tensions amongst departments. Public affairs experts have the necessary "Know-How" to formulate codes of conduct and advise on sustainability reports. By embracing such a positive approach, the resulting policies often bear the hallmark of a genuine desire to progress rather than the stigma of compromise borne out of necessity. In effect, a co-ordinated and well designed CSR policy is indispensable for today's ambitious corporation.

Dominik Meier is president of the German Association of Political Consultants (de'ge'pol) and a partner in the European Affairs Consulting Group (Eacon).

The power to shape views where it matters



In Westminster and Whitehall, the devolved assemblies and local government, Weber Shandwick is the most powerful public affairs and government relations resource available. Working with officials and regulators. Shaping the direction of public policy. Influencing the decision-makers. Building campaigns and coalitions. Mobilising activists and advocates. Managing issues and changing perceptions. Isn't that the kind of power you want in support of your issue, your legislation, your reputation, your future? To learn more about Weber Shandwick's public affairs expertise visit www.webershandwick.co.uk/public

the power to shape opinions



WEBER SHANDWICK
WORLDWIDE