

SHOULD YOU DANCE WITH THE DEVIL IN THE PALE MOONLIGHT?

It is tempting to quick-step away from scandal-tainted corporates, but nonprofits could reshape the role that business plays in addressing societal needs. **Hailey Cavill-Jaspers** looks at corporate partnerships in the new decade.

The 'noughties' decade ended with corporate reputations well and truly tarnished. It's no wonder, after numerous scandals hit the headlines time and time again.

We saw Dieselgate (the emissions violation), dairy giants embroiled in milk pricing scandals, wage scandals, exploding phone batteries and kitchen appliances, data privacy breaches, embarrassing supermarket plastic bag flipflops, sexual assault payouts, tax avoidance and money laundering. We watched aghast as corporate negligence and environmental disasters were exposed, plus the Royal Commission's finding that Australian banking was riddled with dishonesty and greed.

Scandals like these have eroded the general public's already shaky trust in business. Today, misdeeds are impossible to hide, as consumers literally hold the power around which news stories go viral in their phone-clutching hands. Companies can no longer control the public narrative as they once did in the previous two decades, before social media changed the balance of power.

TRUST IN CORPORATIONS AT AN ALL-TIME LOW

Recently, the ABC *Australia Talks* survey revealed one key thing that all Australians concurred with: *90% agreed that big business cares more about profit than what's best for Australia.* I've been tracking trust levels for 20-plus years and this latest statistic is an all-time low for trust in business since, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer, it began to plummet in 2009.

Unfortunately, lack of trust in corporates is global. This isn't limited to corporates, either – we're seeing trust in all-powerful institutions, including government and church, diminish. We're amid a global revolution as people

question democracy, challenge capitalism, take down immoral politicians, and call out inequality and inaction on climate change.

We're living in the era of populism, increasing polarisation and transformative movements like #MeToo, #TimesUp, #ClimateStrike, #ChangeTheDate and #StopAdani. An era where scientists, doctors and ordinary people top the trusted professions list, and politicians, bankers and priests lurk at the bottom.

I believe we've reached a tipping point, where people worldwide are recognising that

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'the system is broken' and significant change always follows system breakdown.

DOES THIS MAKE CORPORATIONS AND BUSINESS EVIL?

I don't believe so. And, anyway, playing the blame game isn't terribly helpful. It's all too easy to point the finger, but we cannot exist in a world without corporations and business.

We all rely on their products and services to some degree – just think about the phone alarm that woke you this morning, the clothes you wear, how you travelled to work, the coffee you had, the tools you picked up or the computer you use.

I work with corporates every day and the people inside them are just lovely. Just like

you and me, they're trying to juggle their job, family and health. It's not helpful to demonise a whole sector when it really is a few rotten apples – and the media naturally tends to favour and amplify the bad news stories.

Don't get me wrong, I'm as frustrated as you are about the inequality of corporate CEO salaries vs everyday Australians, and ashamed of our banking culture. I'm angry that giants like Exxon Mobil and Apple pay zero tax in Australia, robbing the social purse of billions in revenue.

But I'm also fortunate to see many corporates truly stepping up to address social issues in Australia, investing not only dollars but using their influence, reach and resources to fill a void left by government. As bushfires raged across Australia, the business response was swift and

generous – \$170 million plus by the close of January. Many more are committed to working at the coalface for years to come to help rebuild devastated communities.

A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

What we're witnessing is the rewriting of the social contract between the public and institutions. Consumers are using their voice, skills and wallets as tools of change.

Millennials, in particular, are turning their backs on corporates and brands that don't align to their values. Boycotting brands is at an all-time high. Society is demanding that corporates make a stand for social issues; they will be forced to change or become irrelevant.

Now, we can either be part of reshaping >





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the role that business plays in addressing societal needs, as well as their impact, or we can stand back and demonise them, and miss the opportunity to tap into what I believe is the greatest resource for innovative thinking: massive reach to influence behaviour change and cash to fast track action.

And if there's one thing I know for sure, it's that the nonprofit sector is brilliant at listening, having the difficult conversations and putting aside egos in order to collaborate for the greater good. Which is precisely what's needed as we enter an extremely challenging time for everyone with a recession almost inevitable.

PARTNERSHIPS IN 2020

For climate-related nonprofits, it could be a bumper year as corporates realise they must take action to minimise their environmental footprint. They will want to partner with specialist nonprofits to achieve their goals. Medical research and disease-related nonprofits may do well as COVID-19 has put a spotlight on health.

For the rest of the sector, however, it's going to be a very challenging year for income generation. Many Christmas appeals were down as donors directed funds to bushfire relief. Many fundraising events were cancelled due to isolation measures in March. Government grants can't be relied upon as it redirects funds to hold up the economy.

The great thing about corporates is that they are strategic. All of my corporate clients with a foundation or a substantive CSR program will continue with their activities – despite donating to the bushfires and with uncertainty ahead. Corporates are also very customer-focused and as consumer wallets tighten, they'll be looking

for ways to give customers what they want: and customers want hope, they want good news stories and they want corporates to do good and solve social problems.

So, I think 2020 is going to be a great year for corporates wanting to partner with nonprofits. There are fabulous benefits to be gained from dancing with corporates – we just need to be open to collaborating and minimise the risk.

DANCING WITH CORPORATES

If you're considering a corporate partnership this year, perhaps you're thinking about asking your board for contacts or wondering what kind of skills are needed?

Partnering with corporates requires preparation. You need to consider what type of dance you want to have. You'll need to learn the steps and then glide onto that stage (or boardroom) in full spotlight. Because of the risks – and there are many – you must go in with eyes wide open, without the romance of soft moonlight.

Have you ever danced with a stranger? I have! Some years ago, at the annual FIA dinner, a handsome fundraiser sitting next to me revealed he was learning Latin dancing. Having obtained a Bronze Medal the year before, I confidently said, "Shall we cha cha, then?"

The scene on the dance floor didn't match the movie in my mind. Even though we were doing the same dance – he was a bit awkward and we stepped on each other's toes. It was fun, but it certainly wasn't graceful!

On the surface, corporates and nonprofits appear to be at opposing ends of the spectrum, listening to different music, a contrasting rhythm. While you're hearing Simply Red's *Money's Too Tight to Mention* they're listening

to ABBA's *Money, Money, Money*. It can often be difficult to find common ground. It's the reason some nonprofits can't turn a corporate meeting into a signed partner. This is why corporates employ me to help them find cause partners – they want to learn the steps, they want to avoid collisions and they want it to last for a long time. Because there's risk for them, too.

Once there is an alignment of vision and goals, understanding of expectations and each other's song, language, needs and constraints, the result is a partnership that starts to build its own choreography and unique rhythm. Each partner sees the world differently through the dance, and new perspectives are opened up, new opportunities are created and, voila, stubborn societal problems get resolved!

It won't always be graceful. It requires preparation and practice. Just like on *Dancing with the Stars*, there will be missteps and maybe bruises in the lead-up to the dance, and then there will be judges who may not always be complimentary. But the rewards are worth it. Let's look at them.

THE UPSIDE

Money Corporates can provide cash for events, campaigns and programs ('tied' cash aka sponsorship) but there's also huge potential for untied cash within a partnership.

Unlike the general public, corporates understand that administration is essential to efficiency. Untied cash can fund staffing, social impact measurement and those essential services that aren't appealing to donors.

Imagine if all admin costs were covered by a couple of corporate partners – how great would it be to know (and say) that all the donors' money goes directly to the cause? PetRescue's income doubled when they signed up PetStock and Woolworths, allowing fundraising dollars to go where they should: rehoming animals.

Skills Corporates can provide skilled volunteers and in a real partnership, they will share so much more. Twenty years ago, I brought SEEK and Volunteering Australia together to form SEEK Volunteer, Australia's largest free online source of volunteer opportunities. As a lean startup they didn't have much cash to invest, but they had an army of socially-conscious tech experts who built the site – and have maintained it ever since. In 2012, through agency Leo Burnett, they encouraged companies to volunteer their media space with impressive results – an increase in volunteering enquiries of 555%, \$3 million in media value and \$20 million of incremental labour value for Australian charities

Voice Corporates have massive reach: some, such as retailers, through their everyday interactions with customers, others through

mass marketing. When corporates got behind the same-sex marriage debate, it was taken to a new level. When brands promote causes through products and services, they turn an unknown charity into a household name. This, in turn, will lift your spontaneous donations as well as escalate your social impact.

As Vodafone Foundation promotes their DreamLab app (a partnership with the Garvan Institute), the social impact is spectacular – increased downloads mean new research discoveries are being generated in half the time it would have otherwise taken.

In the interests of playing devil's advocate, let's look at the downside of a corporate partnership.

THE DOWNSIDE

Risk Pairing a valuable purpose-led brand publicly does carry some risk. It's not so much about finding a partner, but avoiding the wrong partner. The wrong partner can manifest in numerous ways. The most common is that they expect too much for their investment, over-servicing ensues and resentment and burnout results. The way to minimise risk is to be prepared. Make sure you know what you want, know the value of your brand and the value of your assets, and this will allow you to stand shoulder-to-shoulder as equals from the get-go.

You both bring something to the partnership the other needs – there is no room for handouts in the boardroom. Ensure there is a written agreement at the start, with SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) objectives, as without an agreement you're extremely vulnerable. The devil really is in the detail!

Time Because a corporate partnership is unlike any other fundraising strategy (let's be clear here: the right partner is so much more than just a funder), it can have a positive impact on all aspects of your organisation, including brand awareness, innovative thinking, leadership, growing your donor database etc.

It takes time to professionally prepare your approach. All up, the time required from start to sign-up, which includes preparation, approach and negotiation, is about 18 months. If that seems long, consider how much time is wasted if a person unskilled in corporate partnerships is flailing around burning bridges. Corporate partnerships is a specialist skill.

Investment Like any strategy that has the potential to transform your organisation and enable you to achieve your vision and mission, it requires an investment – in recruiting the right people, training them and supporting them. Too often, I see a corporate partnership strategy fail because an inexperienced board sets up staff to fail by giving them unrealistic goals to achieve in an unrealistic timeframe.

GETTING THE RIGHT STEPS

If you're hesitating or feeling stuck between the corporate devil and the deep blue sea, rest assured, you don't need to sell your soul. All you need is to learn the right steps and you can form a dance partnership where everybody benefits. **F&P**



Hailey Cavill-Jaspers

Hailey is a corporate-cause partnership matchmaker, having built 50 partnerships for companies including SEEK, Mondelez, Disney Australia and Vodafone Foundation. These partnerships have seen \$40 million flow into the social sector, amplifying previously unknown causes and charities, and accelerating social impact. In her 25th year, she has channelled her knowledge into a world-first online training program: BePartnerReady.com. It enables nonprofits and social enterprises to learn – and implement – the critical steps to winning corporate partnerships.

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