

# Community SPIRIT

Corporate social responsibility used to be the preserve of big businesses, but many small organisations are now giving something back to the community and reaping the rewards

**C**hristmas is traditionally a time for giving, but with prospects for economic recovery continuing to look bleak, it's easy to assume that corporate social responsibility (CSR) and giving initiatives wouldn't be high priorities on many companies' agendas.

Yet instead of focusing purely on their bottom lines, many small businesses are increasingly investing in these areas and realising the benefits of doing so in a number of ways.

A recent survey from the FSB that looked at levels of CSR among 1,668 members found that two-thirds were engaged in some form of CSR, a third donated goods or services to local charities, while three in 10 (29%) made charitable donations from company profits.

**“These small firms find that giving back to the local community is key”**

Some nine in 10 said they were motivated to give something back by their personal views and beliefs, while half said it was good practice and two-fifths felt it had PR advantages and was good for the image of the company.

“While you might think that CSR is the preserve of bigger business, it is these small firms that find giving back to the local community key,” said Andrew Cave, Head of External Affairs UK at the FSB. “For small businesses, engagement with the communities they trade in is vital – and not just for sales.”

The benefits of engaging in CSR programmes can stretch far and wide. As the FSB members profiled on these pages reveal, giving something back to the community can help businesses to connect more with their customers, make a difference on a local or large scale and motivate employees to perform better.



Instead of sending cards, Realise planted 10 trees last Christmas

**➤ CASE STUDY ONE**  
**“We have a strong environmental ethic in all the tasks we undertake”**

**Salisbury-based Realise Product Design was founded by Andrew Redman in 2008.** Its core services include concept design, CAD modelling and prototyping.

Last December, the company opted to save on paper and show its commitment to the environment by planting 10 trees locally, rather than sending its clients Christmas cards.

“It shows we care more about the planet and the environment – we have a strong environmental ethic in all tasks we undertake,” says Mr Redman. “If we had sent everyone a Christmas card but put a seed inside, then that would be purely PR spin, because no one would plant a seed.”



Realise backs its words with actions

He adds that it would take years for that seed to replace the paper used on the card.

Mr Redman believes that it's important to ensure that a gesture like this isn't shallow, that it reflects your values as a business and that it genuinely makes a difference. “By physically going out and doing things like this, we hope people see how committed we are to backing our beliefs with actions,” he explains.

**➤ CASE STUDY TWO**  
**“As a socially aware entrepreneur, I have always had a leaning to give back to the local community”**

**Lorraine Turton is Managing Director of Greenwich Communication Group (GCG).**

Set up in 2006, the business originally focused on computer repairs. But in August, Ms Turton evolved the business into a community interest company, Greenwich Community Centre CIC. This has enabled her to manage the business for community benefit and not just for private advantage.

GCG aims to help local unemployed people obtain openings in the workplace, identifying their skills and boosting confidence levels.

“When we first started out as a computer repairs business, we were focused on our technical expertise and making profits,” says Ms Turton. “As a community interest company, we have diversified our offering, providing a meetings space, training venue and café. We've also expanded into smartphone repairs.”



A customer with receptionist Ayo Toma



GCG enables volunteers to learn new skills

Ms Turton's objective is to trade commercially and, in doing so, enable volunteers to learn new skills and inspire a work ethic among individuals.

“Decent work experience opportunities are a valuable step to building confidence and getting onto the career ladder in the current environment,” she adds.

**➤ CASE STUDY THREE**  
**“We've changed the lives of people we've never met and it's allowed us to form an even deeper connection with our customers”**

**Hatters, a promotional merchandise business based in Cheshire, was founded 14 years ago by Jo Shippen.**

It supplies personalised products to enhance a company's brand, advertising campaign or marketing message.

Earlier this year, Ms Shippen joined the Buy1Give1 scheme, a global business initiative founded in 2007 that enables companies to support causes in countries around the world via donations from sales.

“All the money donated goes to specific causes and there are more than 600 to choose from, so we avoid the politics of giving to one specific charity that one client could feel unhappy about,” explains Ms Shippen. “Giving can be directly related to the company to whom we are supplying



**“There are more than 600 causes to choose from”**

Jo Shippen's company gives money through Buy1Give1

goods or to the products themselves. If we supply products to a school we can, say, choose to provide a book for a child's education in a developing nation.”

She adds that her employees are very motivated, knowing that every time someone buys the company's products, some real good gets done elsewhere in the world.

“It does come off our bottom line and there is a small amount of extra administration,” she says. “But this is more than offset when we share the news with our clients that their purchases have provided clean water for a family, a mosquito net for a child or a goat for someone's livelihood.”