CSR

STRATEGY IN DIGITAL WORLD

Exploring corporate partnerships for successful CSR programs and business development through Digital Marketing

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Acknowledgement

I would like to express my profound gratitude to PRO India Solutions for giving me this summer internship opportunity in their organization. I am highly indebted to Mr. Amit Saha for their insightful and informative supervision.

I would also like to extend special gratitude to Dr. Prakash Rao for his contribution in stimulating suggestions and encouragement. I would also like to express my sincere appreciations to all those who provided guidance and input to complete this report successfully.

The last 3 months has been a very enriching experience for me, as I gained a lot in terms of experience and knowledge about Waste Management and Plastics Recycling, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), CSR Domain and Digital Marketing while interning at PRO India Solutions. I perceive this summer internship as a great opportunity and a big milestone in my career development. I will strive to use the gained skills and knowledge to the best of my potential and will continue to work on improving them, to attain my desired career objectives.

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Executive Summary

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India was first introduced in April, 2014 following an amendment in Companies Act, 2013. Since the applicability of this mandatory law, CSR spending in India has significantly increased since 2014-15. PRO India Solutions has been actively involved in various social programs of their own like awareness programs for waste-pickers and school children. The primary aims of this project are study and explore corporate partnerships for successful execution of CSR projects in the future for PRO India. The project also involves performing background study on the CSR landscape in India and the opportunities and challenges for businesses in this domain.

Initially, primary and secondary research was done to gain some background information. Sources included online webinars, discussions and research papers. Further, a brainstorming session was held amongst the team which helped to prepare a list of possible CSR activities that the company can undertake in the near future.

Furthermore, a survey was also undertaken to understand company's stakeholder perception in adopting CSR activities and how it will be beneficial to them. The survey also focused on factors that proved to be opportunities or challenges in their activities. The survey also helped us to bring all the stakeholders to a common platform in a CSR Ideation Round-Table Conference held on June 3rd, by PRO India.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is also one of the major businesses of PRO India. Additionally, some study was also done to understand the new EPR framework guidelines which were released in June, 2020 and a comparative study was carried out between the Plastic Waste Management rules, 2016 and the new EPR Guidelines, 2020. All the collected data was gathered and presented in a round-table conference to the stakeholders (Brand-owners, Urban local bodies, Producer Responsibility Organizations, etc.)

Also, PRO India released its first edition of the fortnightly newsletter to its subscribers and this, combined with the digital marketing efforts helped gain a lot of traction and website traffic.

Organization Profile

PRO India Solutions is an integrated national supply chain solutions and waste management firm. The company was established on 5th June, 2018 by Mr. Amit Saha, who served as the Chief Sustainability Officer of Coca-Cola. The company's major businesses are in the field of Supply Chain Excellence, Advocacy, PRO India Recycling and Innovation & Development, along with Social Impact. Their unique school programs are being sought after for bringing about social awareness and behavioral changes in our future generation.

PRO India aims to create end to end innovative solutions through their expert network for transforming businesses to move towards a sustainable future. It strongly adheres to the principle of giving back to the society. The social team is adept at creating CSR and Marketing campaigns and programs to take messages to the target audience and enhance your organization's reputation.

For clients seeking to enhance their performance without hampering the resource availability and surroundings, they provide sustainable panacea to those committed to the society and their stakeholders.

Context of Study

One of the major businesses of PRO India is fulfilling the need of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for businesses. PRO India has been actively involved in various awareness programs for school-children and waste pickers. This helps them in building trust amongst stakeholders.

Recently, the company has expanded into providing Supply Chain solutions along with the Sustainability aspect of the company. Hence, the company has evolved from 'PRO India Recycling' to 'PRO India Solutions' to broaden its businesses.

Although being a supply chain management firm, the company understands the importance of demonstrating social responsibility and hence wants to explore more options in that area.

The main focus of the project is to explore possible CSR Partnerships for PRO India to collaborate with and expand their scope of contributing towards CSR Activities especially during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

Being a start-up, the company is also looking for expansion and brand awareness solutions. In this digital world, brand awareness can be best done by Digital Marketing and making use of different social media handles effectively.

Literature Review

India has been the first country in the world to make Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) mandatory, following an amendment to the Companies Act, 2013 in April, 2014. Businesses can invest in many areas such as education, poverty, health and sanitation, hunger, gender equality, etc.

Many studies have been conducted by researchers to understand the CSR Landscape for India and its importance to business communities.

One of the survey was aimed to study the drivers for executing CSR activities; and philanthropy (64%) followed by image building (42%), employee morale (30%) and ethics (30%) were found to be the prominent drivers. However, the number of companies executing CSR policies have increased significantly from 1999 and 2000.

Another interesting survey pointed out the fact that some companies believed that involvement of a business in CSR activities is directly related to the age and the turnover of the company; older companies were more likely to believe in their role in CSR activities. A poll report by TERI points out to the fact that some of the stakeholders believe that businesses, other than manufacturing quality products should also expand their horizon and focus more on sustainable packaging, labour conditions, human right abuses, environmentally sound operations, etc.

Although, India is seeing a gradual rise in the number of companies practising CSR, there are some barriers which have been observed by researchers in CSR execution. Government with unclear policies, poor monitoring record and poor infrastructure were some of the major barriers observed to CSR in India.

While executing CSR stands at a very important point for the businesses, presenting the CSR activities to the stakeholders remains very important for a company to gain traction. A qualitative research was conducted on top 100 IT companies in India to understand their CSR communication strategies. The main focus of the research was to study their corporate websites with an analytical focus on dimensions of prominence of communication, extent of information and style of presentation.

The survey revealed that in-spite of the increasing numbers of companies adopting CSR practices, the number of companies that have CSR information on their websites is strikingly low (30%). Maybe, the low representation of CSR activities on the website can be attributed towards non-activity or limited activity in the CSR domain.

The missing link of CSR communications on the websites points towards a very important issue of transparency and creating trust amongst stakeholders. This is very important for an increasingly transparent market-place and building brand reputation. One more important observation that was marked during this research was the seldom mentions of the stakeholders involved or the intended audience for the CSR activities. Quantification of CSR achievements and monetary investment also helps to speculate that the investment is justified to the investors. The need for transparent communication was pronounced for multi-national companies that have CSR engagements in host countries. Also, including a section of organized and more meaningful information on the website was identified by stakeholders either in the form of case-studies or blogs pointing out to the specifics of the CSR project undertaken. Transparent CSR communication can prove to serve as a platform for constructive dialogue for relevant stakeholders to foster mutual trust and collaborative action.

Objective & Methodology

Objectives/Tasks performed

The major objectives that were successfully completed in this project were:

- Primary and Secondary research on the possible CSR collaborations for PRO India

- Explore and brainstorm for different CSR activities and projects that can be executed during the lockdown

- Designed sample framework and business proposals for the respective activities

- Organized a round-table discussion on CSR : Ideas for Employee Engagement

- Invited companies and businesses for the discussion and collaboration with PRO India for CSR initiatives

- Designed business proposals for the activities and presented in the round-table

- Undertook a survey to understand the stakeholder perception on adapting CSR initiatives during and after COVID-19 lockdown.

- Compiled survey results and pitched the CSR products to companies

- Helped in designing the 1st edition of the fortnightly newsletter of the company

- Handled Company LinkedIn Page as a part of business development through digital marketing initiative.

Methodology

To understand the CSR future collaborations for PRO India, we first studied the ongoing or already undertaken CSR or Social Work activities by the team. One of the first programs executed by PRO India as a part of their CSR campaign was the school awareness programs. Sponsored by American Express, the program was an effort to inculcate a new social habit of preventing plastics pollution. The program created 25,000 Earth Champs who are building awareness in their families and neighbourhood on how to not let plastics mix up with wet waste from households. They further trained societies and collected plastics that they brought back to school every-day for 14 weeks.

One of the other interesting programs executed by PRO India was the waste-picker inclusion and financial literacy. This program was aimed at integrating the waste-pickers in the formal economy and also provide basic financial services and access to multiple government schemes, to improve their livelihoods. Another program initiated by PRO India was to practice Plastic

Neutrality by Employee Engagement. It is an initiative for corporate employees towards a responsible business and practice zero-waste living.

PRO India wanted to expand their CSR offerings by including in more activities and initiatives that could help businesses tackle issues especially which are relevant during the COVID-19. Issues such as need of digital education, promoting health and awareness, Employee Volunteering and Employee Engagement through various activities were identified as the top priority issues to be focused on.

Secondary data sources like webinars on relevant CSR topics were used to identify these key issues which corporates want to address on an immediate basis. Some webinars from TEDx and Impact4Nutrition (I4N) included key-note speakers from Tata Power, Diageo, AkzoNobel India, etc. Some of the main points that were discussed in the webinar included their current ongoing efforts towards COVID-19 relief by extending monetary support as well as distributing food and basic PPE kits to health workers, uninterrupted food and water supply to rural areas and providing primary healthcare facilities. The webinars proved to be a good source to understand the CSR landscape for businesses and their expectations from third parties or NGO's or start-ups who were looking to collaborate with them for undertaking their CSR activities.
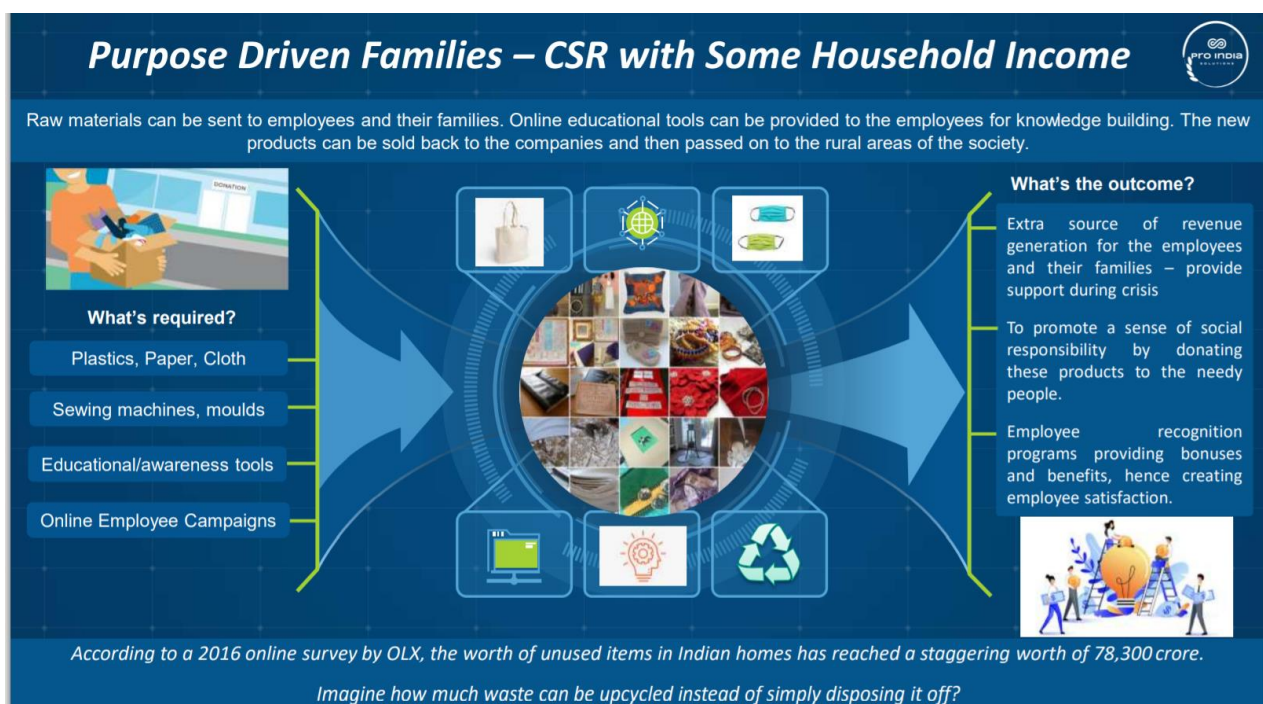
On the basis of this secondary research and multiple brainstorming sessions amongst the team, a list of activities were made and were discussed on further based on their feasibility, benefit to society and ease of providing services.

These draft ideas were then organized and designed in the form of a business proposal. The business proposal included the following points:

- Title
- Key Purpose
- Problem Statement
- Stakeholder involvement
- Inputs required
- Proposed solution
- Timeline
- Financials

5 business proposals were made based on this format on the following ideas:

- Smart Bins – Employee Engagement – It is an initiative to gain traction in the recycling industry post COVID. Two major aspects of this project were employee bonding and community inclusion

- Purpose driven families – CSR with some household income – Promoting up-cycling of recyclable products is an initiative towards motivating employees to adopt zero-waste living and increase workplace satisfaction and morale

- Plant your tree - Collective good with distributed effort – Aim to plant as many trees as the number of employees working in the company

- Engaged team, Productive team – Reduced anxiety & Anonymous Fun – Corporate team-building events to unleash and align peak performance of the company by Employee Engagement

- Teaching the underprivileged – online – purpose driven families – Providing online educational tools to increase awareness towards social topics and also provide skill-based workshops to employees

Purpose Driven Families – CSR with Some Household Income

Raw materials can be sent to employees and their families. Online educational tools can be provided to the employees for knowledge building. The new products can be sold back to the companies and then passed on to the rural areas of the society.

What's required?
- Plastics, Paper, Cloth
- Sewing machines, moulds
- Educational/awareness tools
- Online Employee Campaigns

What's the outcome?
- Extra source of revenue generation for the employees and their families – provide support during crisis
- To promote a sense of social responsibility by donating these products to the needy people.
- Employee recognition programs providing bonuses and benefits, hence creating employee satisfaction.

According to a 2016 online survey by OLX, the worth of unused items in Indian homes has reached a staggering worth of 78,300 crore.

Imagine how much waste can be upcycled instead of simply disposing it off?

Draft Financials

A cost-benefit analysis was developed to understand the feasibility of the project and the specific costs involved. Attached here is a draft view of the financials for a pilot scale study for the project mentioned above in case, if the company wishes to implement this project in future. These costs are approximate and purely used for a feasibility study.

Input Costs	
Cost of 1 sewing machine	5000
No. of employees	100
No. of machines required	100
Total cost of buying machines	500000
Courier services	500
Total courier charge	50000
Total costs	550000

Revenue (Through website)	
SP of 1 product	50
If 2 products get sold per day on an average	100
Monthly revenue	3000
Yearly revenue	36000

Based on this research, a round-table conference was held on 3rd June on the topic - Ideas on Employee Engagement – Emerging beneficiary needs. Almost 20+ CSR heads were a part of the round-table conference varying from diverse business sectors such as Tata Trusts, Novartis, Tesco and Marks & Spencer to hear their views & challenges on the changing CSR landscape.

The round-table conference proved to be very fruitful to understand the CSR domain and accordingly, an online or telephonic survey was conducted with the beneficiaries to understand their particular CSR concerns pertaining the company. The results of the survey were used to understand every company's perspectives and expectations towards their CSR activities.

Some research was also done to understand the new EPR framework guidelines which were released in June, 2020 and a comparative study was carried out between the Plastic Waste Management rules, 2016 and the new EPR Guidelines, 2020. All the collected data was gathered and presented in a round-table conference to the stakeholders ((Brand-owners, Urban local bodies, Producer Responsibility Organizations, etc.) on June 26th.

PRO India also released their first edition of the fortnightly newsletter on 11th May, 2020. The contents of the newsletter included articles on how COVID has disrupted across supply chain sectors, current scenario of plastic pollution and ways to re-design supply chain which were focused on in the webinars organized by FICCI and ICC.

PRO India has its social media presence on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. Every social media channel is as effective as the other but has to be handled in different ways. LinkedIn is a more business oriented social media channel and it can generate a lot of leads effectively.

PRO India LinkedIn page has gained 2000+ followers and continuous blogs and articles are being posted frequently to ensure customer engagement. The visitors, updates and followers were continuously tracked by using LinkedIn analytics and the overall website traffic and leads generated from LinkedIn were tracked by Google Analytics.

Secondary research was done to understand the customer acquisition techniques on Social Media. One of them included posting blogs or updates at specific times to increase customer engagement rate. The content for the page was also designed in a professional way for a specific target audience.

Results and Analysis

The round-table conference held on 3rd June, 2020 gained huge traction for PRO India. There was an overwhelming need to provide services to the needy in the pandemic crisis - however there appeared a consensus in not derailing the thematic areas of CSR already taken by the company which may be bringing regular & systematic benefits to society. The underdeveloped partner network in systematic execution, strength of processes & data driven outcomes were the feedback to the NGO who provide such services that may not match to the professionalism that we may get from other corporate vendors. PRO India has a network of partners through which they plan to get this message across and work with the NGO partners to upgrade them.

Most of the round table CSR Heads expressed the need of strong employee engagement as a great booster & motivation. There was a need for the employees to feel more attached to the companies by way of a Purpose or Cause led effort that they could individually contribute. Such a connection may bring engagement that companies may long for especially now when most employees are working from home and the sense of Togetherness, Camaraderie, Fun & Chit Chat has been replaced by tight VC, Meeting deadlines and Loneliness, Anxiety & Fear and loss of Purpose causing mental agony due to pandemic and its related WFH routines. These were some of the major problems identified by companies regarding their employee engagement.

The CSR Survey that was undertaken for understanding the Stakeholder perception and some immediate problems and challenges that the companies think were need to be addressed were also highlighted. Companies also highlighted some projects that they executed during COVID and specific challenges that they faced.

Your One : CSR Idea that may work during these lock down times :

13 responses

Help form a multi-stakeholder forum a.k.a covid collaborative to help revitalize the industry

Support to empower communities to become self sufficient

Eradicating hunger, support to migrant laborers, Infra development

1. Soap for Hope. Re-purposing used SOAPs from HORECA with standard process of disinfection with Self Help Group - Women Initiatives and distributing to underprivileged.
2. The world needs more sanitation people than ever before - Skill development of people in right practices of cleaning and sanitation and certifying them with a guided skill sets and support them in finding work/job.
3. Domestic Waste Management - With people resorting to work from home culture and better sense prevailing in understanding nuances of house hold activities, this is the right time to cultivate the habit of waste segregation (not yet adopted in many cities) and making a habit in 21 days.

Providing food, creating awareness and preventive measures during COVID

Virtual classes for rural parts of Mumbai

Major challenges faced during COVID in terms of execution of any CSR activity?

10 responses

Barriers in execution of education programs and tree plantation drives for employees.

None

Non availability of resources due to lockdown

Paucity of equipment

difficult to implement in terms of logistics

The lockdown and the guidelines on social distancing

Nil

Logistics and coordination

Your One : CSR Concern , Challenge during these lock down times :

14 responses

The plight of the migrant workers

The longevity of the pandemic and hence the challenges of continued support

lack of accessibility and support from concerned authorities

Virtual volunteering avenues

Planned CSR programs held back

To convert new clients

No availability of funds

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CSR work is challenging

Some of the respondents also mentioned their major CSR themes in which they have been involved over the years. Environment and Sustainability was observed to be as the topmost CSR theme for major companies (77.3%). Projects such as adopting forests, providing access to clean water, creating a forest cover, etc. were a part of such theme-based projects.
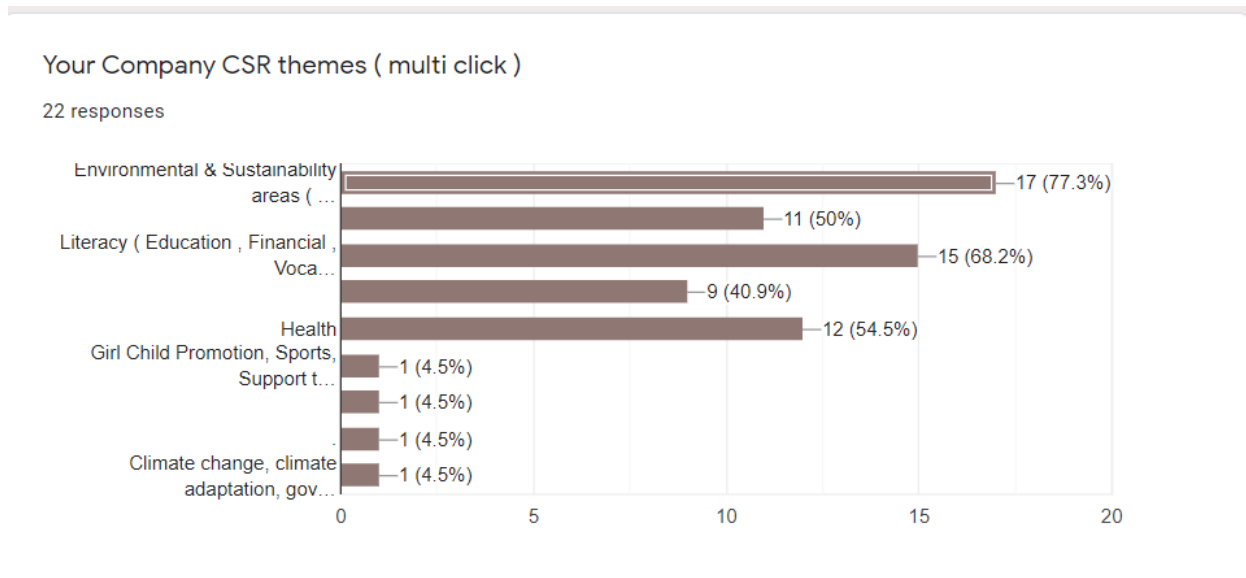
There were also a few responses noted for particular company's CSR strategy for this financial year; Whether they have an internal team allocated or would they prefer to collaborate with third parties, NGO's or start-ups for executing their CSR activities.

Approximately 50% of the respondent companies had specific internal teams allocated for these projects and they take recommendations from other board members or sometimes third-parties.
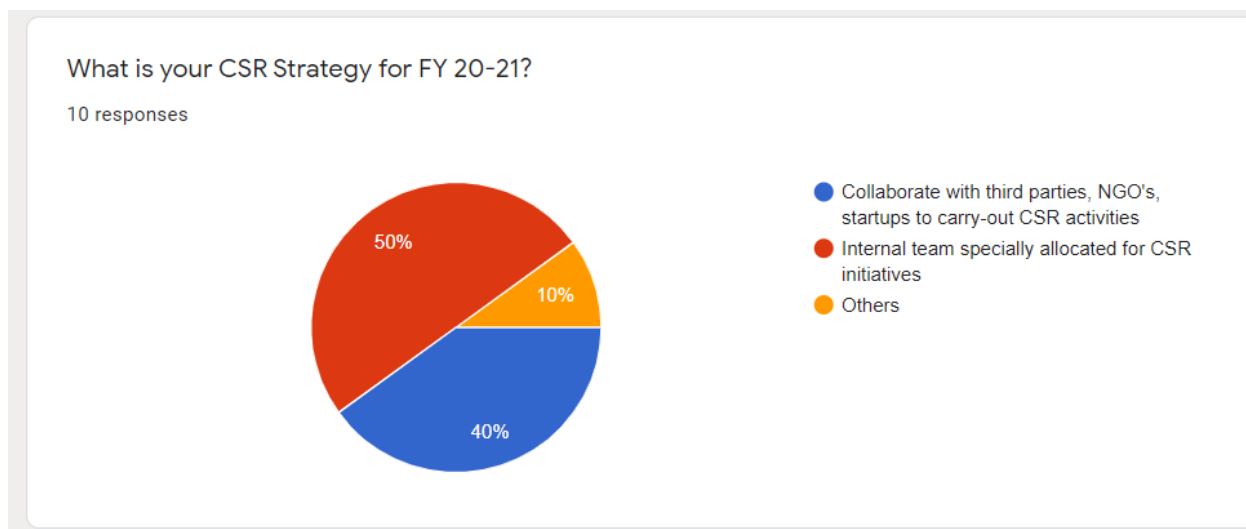
On the other hand, some 40% of the companies pointed out that this year they were open to collaborate with third-parties for executing their CSR projects. They would allocate some part of their CSR funds to these small companies depending upon their level of involvement in the projects.

Conclusions

The primary goal of this project was to explore some possible CSR collaborations for PRO India in the future to execute their projects. CSR has now started to gain a lot of importance especially as the businesses are realizing its usefulness in profits, reputation and brand equity.

Also, it has been found that now more and more businesses are open to collaborating with third-parties and start-ups to brainstorm some creative CSR activities and help in executing them. This can prove to be a great opportunity for a company like PRO India with its creative CSR campaigns.

Other than the CSR perspective, this internship opportunity also helped to learn a lot about the EPR and the recycling industry. Baseline studies on solid waste management in India helped understand the different aspects of it and how each aspect holds its importance when it comes to designing an efficient management system. In the growing awareness of the benefits of recycling and reusing plastics, creating various other means of promotion and spreading knowledge of how harmful it is to the environment is very important. This is where CSR plays a part in fulfilling one's responsibility towards social and environmental issues.

For a country like India, a single waste management model will never work because of its complexities, geography to name a few. So, the best way to tackle this to decentralize the waste collection and management and start new models for different locations, along with high level of awareness campaigns.

Recommendations

The process of execution of any CSR activity requires a lot of cooperation between individuals and companies. One of the things that PRO India can do, in the CSR domain is identify a specific group of individuals or a team especially dedicated for planning and implementing the activities with inputs from the top management.

The mission of the CSR department should be very much aligned to the company's main mission along with some degree of innovation which is very necessary to address that aspect.

Another aspect that the company can look into is the part of CSR communications. All the recent activities or company engagements in CSR can be posted across all social media channels with relevant details for the stakeholders to maintain transparency and trust amongst them.

Annexure

COVID-19 has affected several businesses badly. But, the one thing that businesses can continue doing is fulfilling their role of giving back to the society through their CSR initiatives.

The survey undertaken was an effort to understand the projects, immediate problems and challenges (if any), executed during this period. The survey questionnaire consisted of 10 questions and it was floated via LinkedIn, emails and telephonic methods. One of the major barriers during the data collection was lack of enough responses from the targeted audience. Most of the responses were collected from LinkedIn, but email marketing didn't prove to be useful in the data collection.

All the collected data was treated confidentially and the following results were presented as group data without revealing the personal information.

In the survey questionnaire, most of the questions are multiple-choice and some were subjective questions. A list of the sample questionnaire is given below.

Q. What is your CSR Strategy for Financial Year 20-21?

  i.   Collaborate with third-parties, NGO's, start-ups to carry out CSR activities
  ii.   Internal team allocated for CSR initiatives
  iii. Others

Q. Are your current CSR themes related to COVID related activities or post COVID development plan or both?

  i.   COVID related activities
  ii.   Post COVID Development
  iii. Both
  iv.   Others

Q. Your Company CSR themes (multi click)

  i.   Environmental & Sustainability areas (carbon , water , air , plastics , waste management)
  ii.   Poverty Alleviation (income generation , SHG empowerment)
  iii. Literacy (Education , Financial , Vocational courses)
  iv.   Disaster Support (food , water, shelter , restoration)
  v.   Health
  vi.   Others

Q. What are your current focus areas of commitment during COVID?

  i.   Employee Engagement due to work from home stress
  ii.   Environmental Sustainability
  iii. Literacy
  iv.   Health and awareness
  v.   Others

Q. Any projects that you have executed during COVID-19? (Subjective)

Q. Major challenges faced during COVID in terms of execution of any CSR activity? (Subjective)

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