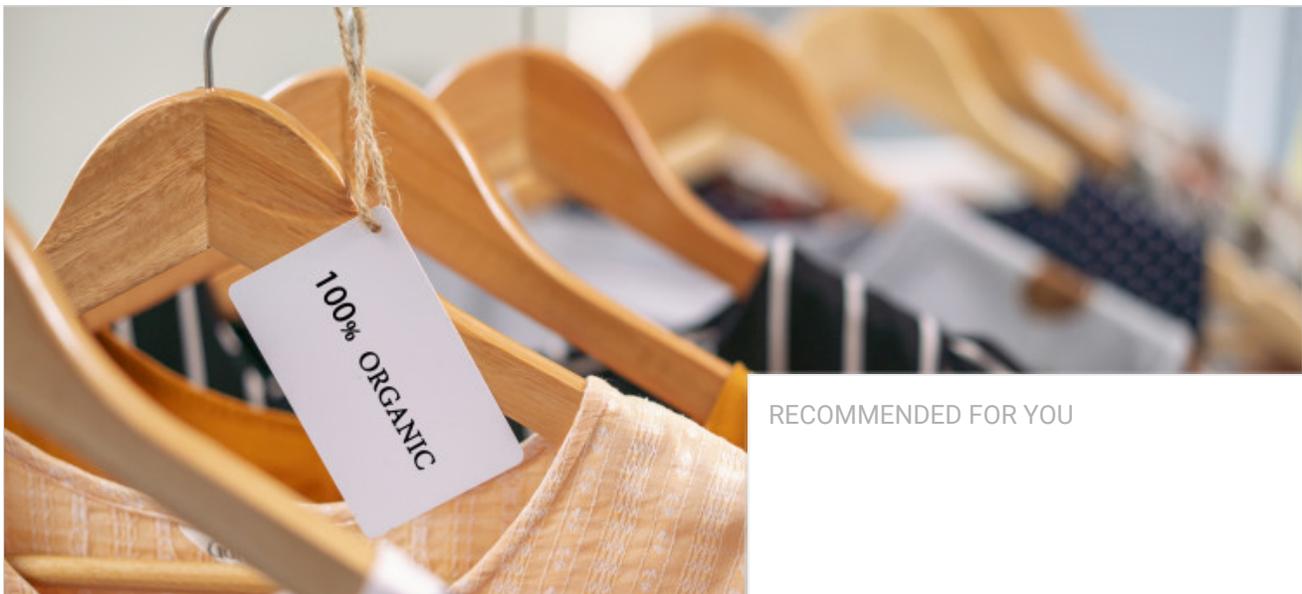


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MANAGEMENT

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# 3 Ways for Retailers to Demonstrate Corporate Responsibility in 2024



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By **Jake Weatherly**



During the holidays, many retailers focused on demonstrating corporate responsibility through

generous corporate giving programs primarily centered around donations. While donations are a wonderful start, there are many additional ways to show consumers you care, and holistic corporate responsibility is crucial year-round. Brands can be good social stewards throughout the year by focusing on inclusive retail, sustainability, and corporate giving.

## **Inclusive Retail**

During the pandemic, retailers prioritized fostering inclusive shopping environments for older customers concerned about shopping in large crowds. For instance, some retailers set aside shopping hours exclusively for customers over 65. Today, socially conscious retailers are lowering even more barriers to inclusion.

Take Asda as an example. The UK supermarket chain demonstrates its commitment to inclusion by leveraging technology to make it easier for blind and partially sighted customers to navigate its stores. Asda offers [an app](#) that pinpoints their customers' in-store location and uses it to direct shoppers to product groups or aisles via audio, touch and enhanced visual commands.

Inclusive retailers are also finding ways to make physical shopping environments more accommodating. For example, [Walmart](#) offered quiet, sensory-friendly shopping hours for customers with sensory disabilities during the back-to-school season. During these quiet hours, lights were dimmed, store radios were turned off, and TV screens were silenced and set with stationary images.

Retailers can also implement internal inclusivity measures. For instance, [Starbucks](#) operates signing stores that provide employment opportunities for deaf and hard-of-hearing folks. These signing stores also serve as hubs of career development for the wider deaf community. Stores often host seminars and classes on topics like career education or improving sign language skills.

By making commitments to inclusion, both internally and externally, retailers show considerable care for [the more than a quarter](#) of adults who have a disability, while creating opportunities for deeper customer connections.

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## **Environmental Sustainability**

With inflation limiting the scope of household spending, shoppers are concerned both about costs and what they choose to purchase. For many consumers, these concerns extend to a retailer's sustainability practices. In fact, 50 percent of shoppers say they will pay a premium for

sustainability, according to a joint [study](#) from IBM and the National Retail Federation. Responsible retailers can make sustainable decisions that allow customers to feel confident they're making purchases that align with their values.

Sustainability solutions often take the form of a circular economy — a system that focuses on the reuse and regeneration of materials or products for sustainable production. For example, [Levi Strauss](#) started making its jeans with more recycled materials and organic cotton. While the brand encourages customers to use its products for as long as possible, the material composition of Levi's jeans allows for them to be safely recycled again and again for future products. This system helps optimize resource use and cuts down on excess inventory. Retailers can demonstrate their commitment to sustainability by prioritizing and highlighting environmentally conscious brands like Levi's.

In addition to apparel retailers, the circular economy approach is catching on in the electronics space. The global electronics marketplace Back Market, for example, gives customers access to high-quality, professionally refurbished iPhones, laptops and other electronics. The marketplace ties its business directly to efforts to ultimately cut down on larger e-waste, carbon emissions, pollution, water and raw materials depletion. Back Market recently [announced](#) that it has prevented 1 million tons of carbon emissions.

Executing upon these sustainability efforts allows retailers to demonstrate their values to customers while also rewarding customers for theirs by empowering them to act as environmental stewards.

## **Corporate Giving Reimagined**

Retailers often donate to groups and causes relevant to their brands. For example, a pharmacy chain like CVS might donate to a children's hospital to demonstrate its support of consumers who frequent its stores year-round to pick up prescriptions. Retailers can also get creative about giving by bringing the same attitude to discounts and loyalty programs.

For example, a sport and fitness retailer might provide discounts specifically for first responders to honor the customers who sprint into collapsing buildings and hoist people out of trouble. By aligning discounts with this community, the chain not only garners favor with first responders and those who care about them, it also shows first responders what it is as a business and what it stands for, capitalizing on the increasingly [intimate connection](#) between consumers' values and commercial decisions.

The bar for corporate responsibility has risen, and with it so should the creativity and depth of retailers' efforts to show customers they care. Donations are a good start, but retailers can make deeper inroads with customers by fostering inclusive shopping and working

environments, underscoring their commitments to the issues customers care about, and extending giving back to customers' primary interactions with them – the items they buy. If they do all of the above – and do it year-round – retailers will achieve the holy grail of corporate responsibility: doing good while also doing better.

*Jake Weatherly is the CEO and co-founder of identity marketing company [SheerID](#).*

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#### **Jake Weatherly**

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As the CEO of SheerID, Inc., Jake has advanced the company to its position as the proven leader and pioneer of identity marketing, a new form of personalization to help brands connect with consumer communities like students, teachers, and the military. He spends much of his time and energy on the strategic direction, growth, and development of SheerID. When he is not concentrating on channel expansion, strategic partnerships, and product strategy, Jake is consistently pushing to achieve company milestones ahead of time and under budget.

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