

# Why 'Social Enterprise' and 'CSR' Should Be Part of Your MICE Vocabulary

By Michael Arkes



**P**riya Haji, Co-founder and CEO of World of Good, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of low-income women and their families around the world, recently noted that people are becoming increasingly more conscious and responsible about how they spend their money. "This means that corporate employers must demonstrate the same level of consciousness and responsibility if they are to thrive in this new economy and retain their most forward-thinking and savvy employees," she says, adding that corporations that are conscious about the impact and origin of their gifts and incentive programs send a very important message to their employees: We care about each of you, we care about our community, we care about the social and environmental impact of our actions, and we are forward-thinking and innovative.

This is one reason why an increasing number of companies like Eileen Fisher, eBay, and Marriott purchase incentive products and corporate gifts from "social enterprises" like Women Helping Other Women, The Enterprising Kitchen, Bright Endeavors, Greyston Bakery and Divine Chocolate, enabling these organizations to provide more opportunity to more people.

Amy Hall, Director of Social Consciousness at Eileen Fisher, says working with The Enterprising Kitchen was an opportunity to make a statement to the public about who they are as a company. "Because we're a women's clothing company, we support philanthropic endeavors that will help women feel good about themselves," she explains. "We take into consideration the social enterprise's mission. People are beginning to attach items to their origins.

What else did it do? Did it help women feed their children?" Hall emphasizes that the quality of the items has to be there, but the true value-added derives from what purchasing an item can do for others – "It's icing on the cake," she notes.

Women Helping Other Women started a bakery in rural North Carolina to provide women in a domestic violence shelter not only jobs, but also assistance in navigating the path toward self-confidence and economic independence. Jewelry designed by Mary Fisher is hand-crafted by HIV-positive women in Zambia. The money these women earn goes toward housing, as well as fees and books for school. Forty percent of the women working at The Enterprising Kitchen in Chicago are former inmates. Though these women made poor decisions in the past, this transitional employment program is helping them build their job skills, learn how to better deal with conflict, and prepare for permanent job placement.

And it's not just small-scale. As part of its focus on global citizenship, eBay has partnered with World of Good to launch WorldofGood.com by eBay, an innovative online marketplace offering socially- and environmentally-sustainable gifts, from home décor to jewelry to electronics. To celebrate the launch of WorldofGood.com, eBay gave corporate gifts to 15,000 employees. World of Good designed the gifts, which were made by artisan communities in 10 countries. Each employee received a unique, globally inspired handmade desk set. The handmade items included a leaf-paper journal crafted by artisans in Thailand and a hand-carved soapstone pencil cup from cooperatives in Kenya. The set also included the story of the

nearly 500 families who were able to improve their livelihoods through making these "fair trade" gifts.

Another socially focused trend rapidly gaining traction in the corporate market is providing a more personally fulfilling experience for participants by connecting meetings and incentive travel with volunteerism. According to a recent article in *Plan Your Meetings*, 42% of meeting planners expect to incorporate a volunteer/community service activity in a trip during the upcoming year.

In fact, a number of companies now require a "corporate social responsibility" (CSR) component for all meetings and incentive programs. Not only is it a great way to give back to the communities they serve and sell to, but at a time when every meeting and incentive trip is being scrutinized by the press and shareholders, it's a great way to provide a sense of balance and a dose of reality – to remind the rest of the world that it's not just about how exotic and expensive a destination is, it's also about context, impact and making a difference. **I&MI**

*Michael Arkes is President and CEO of Hinda Incentives, one of the leading specialists in motivating employees and sales forces and providing incentives to dealers, distributors and clients. Arkes started Helping Hand Rewards in 2006, connecting social enterprises like Divine Chocolate and The Enterprising Kitchen with corporations that want to demonstrate social responsibility through more meaningful corporate gift giving, rewards and incentive/loyalty programs. For more information, visit [www.helpinghandrewards.org](http://www.helpinghandrewards.org)*



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