

Grow-Trees: Promoting Responsible Corporate Social Responsibility

5 minute read



Supriya Patil is sharing the story of Grow-Trees and how it is promoting responsible corporate social responsibility initiatives.

By ARAVIND SUNDARAM · March 12, 2021

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Supriya Patil is the Head of Partnerships and Projects of Grow-Trees.com. She holds a Master's in Environment Science from the University of Mumbai and has a post-graduate diploma in 'Urban Environmental Management' from WWF-National Law University, Delhi.

She is passionate about current issues of environmental governance and aims to achieve sustainable solutions to the numerous social challenges. At Grow-Trees.com, she is helping corporates to mobilize the resources for adopting the triple bottom line in the businesses by developing various social impact-driven projects. In her free time, she likes to visit various sanctuaries in India, travel to unexplored places and spend time with her pets.

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Edited Excerpts:

What led to the ideation of Grow-Trees.com? How important are social media campaigns and digital outreach for raising funds as well as increasing awareness about your work?

The seed of Grow-Trees.com was laid by a kind token of appreciation by an Israeli organization to our co-founder, Mr. Pradip Shah for sharing know-how on credit rating. It was the gift of 100 trees planted in his name that rekindled his love for trees and the environment, setting his journey of founding Grow-Trees.com with his son, Mr. Karan Shah.

We live in the digital era and what better way to raise awareness than by reaching to our users' cellphones. We believe that digital outreach is one of the most important tools to spread the word about our initiatives. With a strong media following, we have been actively involved in running social media campaigns for various occasions.

We get extensive support from influencers who are always willing to be a part of our mission and join our digital media campaigns. Another medium to reach out to the masses is by collaborating with larger organizations and co-running campaigns for Daan Utsav, Women's Day, COVID-19 Relief, or just to spread awareness. Further, we build alliances with our corporate partners, where they can give their customers a chance to plant trees by adding an excerpt on their website.

What has interacting with the corporate sector been like? What lessons have you imbibed from them and what have you taught them about not just CSR but a more sensitive approach towards the environment?

The corporate sector has been generous to not only us but also to the village communities that we support. Though it is a time-consuming effort to explain the on-field difficulties and the intricacies of the task at hand, our corporate partners have been very co-operative throughout our journey.

The most important take-away for us is the need to innovate. One can never stop. Every year, we brainstorm newer ways to reach out to our audience, try to fit with their needs, and improve our impact horizons and reporting.

With the advent of time, we believe that our corporate partners now understand the wholesomeness of our projects, where we don't just plant a tree for its oxygen. 1 tree that you plant with us generates employment, future economic avenues for the tribal-rural communities, a safer abode for the wildlife, increased water tables and improved biodiversity for all. The CSR sector is all about bringing a positive change in society, the meetings with our rural communities give corporates the confidence that what they are doing is for the larger good.

How do you convince corporate entities, donors, and volunteers to partner with you?

We believe that if the cause is right, people will connect to it. We have always focused on highlighting the work that we do and the impact that we have generated so far. In the last 11 years, we have planted over 7.2 million trees, generating about 600,000 workdays of employment. Our experience in the industry, on-site visits by the funders help us increase our credibility and walk up to our supporters with the assurance that their contributions will make a difference. Many testimonials help us convince supporters that the Grow-Trees TreeCertificate® makes a very positive impression on recipients.

What's your strategy to promote meaningful CSR activities?

With our CSR partnerships, organizations get an opportunity to join the mission towards alleviating climate change. The trees that we plant will help in offsetting atmospheric carbon, recharging the groundwater, enhancing biodiversity, uplifting the socio-economic status of the rural communities and improving wildlife habitats.

Our unique concept of greeting with trees also allows the corporate partners to include their employees, stakeholders and customers in their initiatives by gifting them the eTreeCertificates® and enhance their green credentials. Renowned banks, PSUs, global MNCs and other corporates love to use their trees to greet their employees on birthdays, anniversaries, acknowledge dignitaries, achieving a private purpose while doing social good.

This helps in building the stakeholders' and employees' trust in the brand that they are associated with and fills them with a sense of gratification to see a tree planted in their name. Numerous studies (Nielsen; Ipsos Mori; Monster TRAK; IBM; U.N.-Accenture; BCG; etc) have shown that green companies get a better valuation in the markets, attract and retain talent more easily, enhance brand, trust, and reputation, and find that customers are willing to pay more for their products. We hope that with our initiatives we reach out to millions of people across the world and spread the importance of planting trees across.

What's the roadmap for the next 10 years?

We aim to plant about 7 million trees across the tribal-rural sectors of various Indian states in the monsoon of 2021. We are strengthening our ties with the Forest Departments and assisting our corporate partners in achieving their goals of attaining Carbon Neutrality.

We aim to establish the concept of Blue Carbon by initiating mangrove plantation drives in the coastal belts of the country. (We have already planted mangrove trees across various projects in Kanyakumari, West Bengal, Odisha, etc.)

We look forward to building newer plantation projects in Jaisalmer to control desertification and reduce sand dunes in the region. We aim to rehabilitate and reclaim deforested lands by the method of afforestation while providing employment opportunities to the rural communities. These trees are expected to offset atmospheric carbon (~20 kg per tree/year), check groundwater, reduce soil erosion, and improve wildlife habitats among other benefits, upon maturity.

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