

# How to Foster Meaningful Public Relations to Improve Brand Value



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By Pamela Biery

**Every brand needs a story, and some brands are writing ones that include the planet.**

Each year, millions of businesses each spend thousands of dollars on advertising. Others invest in contrived giving programs, costing more to publicize than actual contributions made to charities. Advertising casts a broad net.

Public relations, if taken in the sense of its purest meaning—relating to the public—is about communicating with specific audiences, and what better way to communicate than to do something good that is meaningful to this public?

**Do the right thing and share it with social media.** This represents a new opportunity for companies that are serious about two key factors: **ROI and social responsibility.**

## Small Company with Big Vision

One early adopter of this strategy is **Nutiva**. Nutiva specializes in organic, non-GMO coconut and hemp products. Nutiva currently outperforms its competitors in the Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (**LOHAS**) marketplace.

Nutiva has been listed 2 years in a row as one of America's 100 Fastest Growing Companies by Inc. magazine, and is on track to do this again for 2010. Nutiva has grown around 40% each year since it was founded in 2001. Nutiva is now growing at around 100% annually. Very few natural food brands even approach this level of development. How is Nutiva's profile staying so cheery?

According to founder and CEO John Roulac, it is largely because Nutiva knows its audience and is truly committed to re-investing in non-profit concerns, which protect its products and shared consumer/company values. Turns out, the notion of greenbranching is in Nutiva's DNA. Nutiva donates 1% of profits to the planet, specifically to sustainable agriculture. Nutiva has historically also funded efforts to label **GMO**. They participate in an ongoing non-GMO project, proactively working to label and eliminate all GMO ingredients in Nutiva brands.

In February 2011, Nutiva donated \$25,000 to the effort of stopping **Monsanto's** use of genetically modified alfalfa seeds. Communicating this story through unified press and social media channels resulted in the highest ever amount of likes on their Facebook page, gaining the most personal comments and positive feedback in Nutiva's history. The campaign announcement via e-mail news blast garnered a 3-4% response rate within 48 hours.

They beat the margins by doing something that aligns fully with their brand story, audience and product values. For this and other efforts, Nutiva actively provides ongoing new content for YouTube, Facebook and twitter. Additionally, it supports social media with e-mail blasts, e-newsletters, tradeshow and cooperative promotions. The value of the Monsanto opposition legal contribution, arguably, had a greater return on investment than any number of advertisements ever could have. But the real news here—and this is where it gets interesting—**Nutiva didn't do it for exposure.** Nutiva made this contribution because as a company and industry leader, they fundamentally believe that GMO food, and specifically Monsanto's bid to use genetically modified alfalfa seeds is wrong.

"The new model is about doing great things, rather than saying how great we are." Roulac is dedicated to his industry and consumers. "We earn and maintain brand loyalty through our actions and attitudes."

## Engaging Triple Bottom Line for Change + ROI

As non-profits find shrinking budgets, limited resources and growing demands, the notion of **greenbranching** offers promise for social justice initiatives. Indicators now point towards a **greater return on investment for smart corporate responsibility programs than traditional agency advertising.**

Investments in slick agency campaigns could be replaced by **greenbranching**—meaningful brand stories with the first priority of doing the right thing, letting ROI be a secondary, albeit, productive result. The numbers on this hold the potential for great impact. Just for some rough notions, say around \$42B each year is being spent in the US for online marketing. If 1% of this was allocated to corporate responsibility and relationship building activities, this would capture a whopping \$420M in already budgeted expenses for triple bottom line (people, planet, profit) initiatives.

## Greenbranching Logic:

1. Young adults rely more on social media than on traditional advertising methods.
2. This adds value and importance to a brand's social story.
3. Developing relationships with non-profit and non-government causes for partners builds audience and



brand story.

4. Dynamic for increased ROI is shifting from traditional advertising to corporate social responsibility relationships that are tied to brand story.
5. A name for this trend is greenbranching.

*Action + brand + story: it's a greenbranching thing.*

*Pamela Biery is a freelance writer and communications professional living in Seattle. Her work has appeared in many regional and national publications. She has no professional affiliation with Nutiva. [www.PamelaB.com](http://www.PamelaB.com)*

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