

## **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) — Media Sector**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is strongly linked to the media. Stories can be conveyed with a compassionate and ethical perspective or stories can result in an inappropriate portrayal of children and/or child abuse. The Council of Europe has stated that media can “infiltrate the public with liberal and tolerant attitudes towards child pornography and prostitution” or alternatively it can give youth a distorted impression of sex and sexuality. Increasingly media is a powerful force that guides societal perspectives and beliefs.

The role of the media has expanded in the past decade as the breadth of content has increased. Media now includes blogs, podcasts, Internet TV, and social networking websites such as Twitter. This expansion has arguably resulted in a more democratic media with more voices being heard; however, it also demands that the general public be more critical as consumers.

### **A Closer Look at Media**

“Media” includes journalism, photography, television/film, acting, modelling, and advertising. All of these areas can have a specific relationship to the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). Businesses in these areas need to highlight CSR. All of these sub-sectors can either reinforce or challenge stereotypes. Media industries can play a unique role in promoting youth empowerment and in raising awareness of health and education issues.

Journalists play an important role in ensuring that their reporting style is sensitive to the complexities of CSEC and other social issues. If they do not take such care they run the risk of undermining programmes trying to alleviate CSEC. In 1998, the International Federation of Journalists drafted an international guideline looking at children’s rights; however, it is self-regulating and uses language that allows for significant interpretation. The guidelines can therefore be difficult to enforce.

Photography and the modelling industry also play a key role in helping to prevent the representation of children as sexual objects. Children can experience damage in the production of exploitive material, as viewers of such material, or when such material is used by abuse-intent adults.

The TV/film industries also have an important role in ensuring that children are represented in a healthy way. If not the audience can become desensitized to sexual images of children. Warnings and/or screening systems are sometimes used; however, these systems only focus on the receiving end of such images and do not stop the production or distribution.

## Sector Specific Issues

In 2008, the Media CSR Forum in the UK completed a stakeholder engagement exercise which highlighted unique CSR issues for the media sector. The Media CSR Forum includes companies that aim to discuss, develop, and promote CSR issues within the UK media sector. Specific issues raised by these companies included:

- Freedom of expression
- Creative independence
- Impartiality / balanced output
- Transparency / responsibility of editorial policies
- Integrity (ensuring that content does not mislead or incite intolerance)
- Encouraging learning through understanding and prioritizing global citizenship including individual and group participation in society

## Sources

- Mark Erik Hecht, *Private Sector Accountability in Combating the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children* (ECPAT International World Congress III, November 2008).
- *Mapping the Landscape: CSR Issues for the Media* (Media CSR Forum, 2008).