Trust is a purchase driver. Leading organizations are building it through purpose.

Corporate social impact programs generate credible stories backed by real action — an asset most CMOs have never used for brand content.

For years, companies competed on product and pricing. Today, trust is a deciding factor in purchase decisions. For some consumers, particularly Gen Z, it is often the primary one.

> **88% of consumers say trust is an important or critical purchase consideration.**
> 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer: Special Report: Brand Growth in an Insular World

Leading companies are already responding to this shift. Data from Benevity Impact Labs show that organizations are investing significantly in social impact initiatives to build corporate reputation and trust.

91%

of companies invest in purpose to drive corporate reputation and trust

85%

cite customer brand perception as a top reason for purpose investment

86%

cite local brand reputation as a top reason for purpose investment

A growing number of organizations are directing significant budget toward the stories their CSR investments produce. Between 2024 and 2026, impact storytelling rose from ninth to the second-highest area of investment.

Impact storytelling is an underleveraged trust asset

Social impact programs continuously generate authentic, unpaid brand advocacy through community impact data, employee volunteer stories and annual sustainability or impact reports. This content is rich and grounded in real commitment and genuine relationships. For today's consumers, that kind of authenticity builds trust faster than most marketing can.

Savvy CMOs are increasingly leveraging social impact for their brand strategy. They are collaborating with their CSR teams to use community investments, and the stories they generate, to fuel trust and affinity.

How to make this shift:

1. **Work with your CSR and social impact teams to promote existing social investments for brand reputation and trust**
2. **Embed social impact themes into your brand strategy and storytelling**
3. **Partner with your CSR teams and nonprofit partners for impact data and stories that lend authenticity to your brand**
4. **Engage your employees as advocates, amplifying your organization's stories of purpose**
5. **Invest in social impact storytelling over the long term — sustained commitment, not short-term campaigns, is what builds enduring brand trust**

A deeper look at the brand case for purpose

Read the State of Corporate Purpose 2026 report

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