

Social Awareness

SOCIAL AWARENESS is a shared social consciousness within a society, including the relationships between individuals, groups, and communities. Organic fashion, eco-fashion, and repurposing of garments are becoming elements of our collective textile and design social consciousness. Social awareness may include wearing an awareness ribbon or bracelet.



Objective:



Summarize social awareness practices.

Key Terms:



cultural awareness
cultural sensitivity
discrimination

eco-fashion
EEOC
environmental issues
ergonomic design

human resource
department
kurta
La Quinceañera
market research
niche market
organic fashion
OSHA

racial profiling
repurposing
sari
social awareness
target markets
upcycling
word-of-mouth
advertising

Understanding Social Awareness Practices

To be successful in life, you should be socially aware. Certain practices and understandings exist in various industries. Knowledge of such can assist you in advertising and marketing appropriately.

SOCIAL AWARENESS

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Manufacturers and retail associates who value the importance of human rights acknowledge the importance of diverse ethnicities and cultures in the United States. The best way to know people's needs is to ask directly. The worst way to determine needs is to "read" their outward appearance and make assumptions or presumptions. The best-case scenario is a natural response to people, taking their situations and needs into account as much as possible. Being socially aware is associated with the following three competencies:

- ◆ Empathy is understanding another person's or group's emotions, needs, and concerns.
- ◆ Organizational awareness is understanding the politics within an organization and how those related policies affect the people who work in the business.
- ◆ Service is understanding and meeting the needs of clients and customers.

Profiling and Discrimination

Racial profiling is a form of stereotyping and discrimination based on the characteristics of some people in a culture, ethnicity, or race and involves applying that characteristic to unknown people in the same culture, ethnicity, and/or race.

Discrimination is the prejudicial treatment of a person or a group of people from others. Bigotry and intolerance are descriptors associated with discrimination practices. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (**EEOC**) laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of age, sex, disability, national origin, race/color, religion, pregnancy, genetic information, retaliation, and equal pay/compensation.

Niche Markets

A **niche market** is a small, but specifically defined, subset of the overall population for which targeted goods and services are provided. Knowing the customers is not racial profiling. For instance, being aware of customers' needs may include having items



FIGURE 1. Social awareness is a shared social consciousness within a society, including the relationships between individuals, groups, and communities. This image displays awareness ribbons for some widely recognized causes.



FIGURE 2. A niche marketing campaign is designed to appeal to the target market rather than the general public. For example, Web sites that offer just tutoring services or cooking utensils are advertising to niche markets.

on hand for their special occasions and traditions. For example, a community with many young families may support businesses selling playground equipment, gymnastic and dance clothing, and baby gear.

Market Research

Market research is an action that gathers information about consumers' needs and preferences through surveys, product testing, and focus groups. Some market research assesses the viability of a new product or service and helps a business define its target market and learn what potential customers think about a product or service.

Target markets are the audience (customers) for which the company or store wants to sell its products and for whom it would send the most appealing messages. That segment of the total customer pool is most likely to buy from the store. Therefore, the store actively directs its marketing efforts to the target customers and knows their wants, needs, and desires. Small targets rather than “shotgun” marketing is more likely to succeed.

- ◆ Forever 21's target customer is a young adult who enjoys fashion, fads, and low prices.
- ◆ Athleta's (a division of Gap) target customers are people who participate in exercise or yoga and the fashions worn during those activities. The customers seek fashionable, functional, built-to-perform clothing and can pay a mid-range price.

Traditional target marketing is based on common characteristics of the target customers, such as:

- ◆ Gender
- ◆ Age range
- ◆ Education level
- ◆ Income level
- ◆ Geography
- ◆ Lifestyle (e.g., homeowners, apartment dwellers, young family, retired couple, and college students)

Qualifying Customer Needs

Store associates are able to qualify customer needs by asking open-ended questions. For example, an associate determines that a customer wants a pair of dressy black heels for evening wear. When asked, the customer says she prefers to spend \$100 or less on the shoes. A socially aware associate avoids recommending the \$200 plus Donald J. Pliner shoes and opts to show the customer the Franco Sarto shoes within her budget.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Environmental issues are problems caused by harmful human activities that result in changes in natural systems, such as air, water, and soil. Environmental problems include global

warming, deforestation, animal products, littering, child labor, greenhouse gases, destruction of natural resources, fossil fuels, soil contamination, water pollution, etc. Urban, suburban, and rural customers may have different definitions of the importance of environmental issues.

Clients may state that they do not purchase leather shoes or do not purchase products made with child labor. The associate may explain corporate social policies to the clients and/or may provide information about the designer or vendor's manufacturing and distribution processes. Minimizing the environmental impact during the life cycle of a product may be important to customers.

The life cycle of a garment or accessory may be of special importance to customers. For example, a listing of the herbicides and pesticides used to grow cotton or the petrochemicals used to create synthetic fibers may convince certain customers to shop elsewhere. Both fabric processes damage the environment. At the end of a garment's life, it may be discarded and end up in a landfill. When multiplied by the number of garments required for the billions of people on the planet, this may be viewed as a negative practice. As a result, new businesses and efforts are emerging to create more environmentally friendly textile practices.

Eco-Fashion

Eco-fashion is a broad term for textiles, garments, and accessories manufactured in an environmentally conscious way; it is sustainable fashion. Some eco-fashion is produced from recycled materials. The majority of clothing in U.S. stores is manufactured outside of the country due, in part, to lower labor costs. Also, manufacturing regulations imposed by the local governments may be far below American standards. Lax manufacturing regulations may result in environmental degradation that threatens all life. Examples of lax manufacturing regulations include:

- ◆ Nylon and polyester are made from petrochemicals that pollute the environment and cause global warming. They are non-biodegradable. Nitrous oxide is released as part of the process when manufacturing nylon. It is a greenhouse gas 310 times stronger than carbon dioxide.
- ◆ Viscose is an artificial fiber made from wood pulp. To manufacture viscose, wood pulp is treated with toxic chemicals (e.g., caustic soda and sulphuric acid).
- ◆ Non-organic cotton uses more pesticide per cotton plant than almost any other crop in the world. The pesticides used on the cotton plants affect local ecosystems, killing some plants and animals. In addition, some cotton farmers die from exposure to these dangerous pesticides.



FIGURE 3. Cotton uses more pesticides than any other crop and about 16 percent of all pesticides used. A push from knowledgeable customers has increased the demand for organic cotton in the past 10 years. What is the difference between 100 percent cotton, 100 percent natural cotton, and 100 percent organic cotton?

Eco-fashion brands include:

- ◆ Stella McCartney—a high-fashion vegan designer
- ◆ H&M—eco-friendly Conscious Collection
- ◆ Rachel Kibbe—HELPSY Web site
- ◆ Ethica—prints and handbags
- ◆ Coclico—eco-friendly shoes
- ◆ Eileen Fisher—sold in the “greenest” fashion chains
- ◆ Melissa Joy Manning—eco-friendly jewelry

Organic Fashion

Organic fashion is textiles, garments, and accessories produced with a minimal use of chemicals and with limited environmental impact. For example, a substantial decrease in the use of herbicides and pesticides on living plant materials may qualify for the distinction label “organic” fashion. In the United States, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) requires garments and textiles to be labeled with fiber content, country of origin, and manufacture identification. Customers vote with their dollars by purchasing products that embody their values.

Repurposing

Repurposing is the use of unwanted items for a secondary purpose rather than for their original intent. Repurposed textile products include converting textiles into wiping cloths or remanufacturing them into products such as home insulation, carpet padding, or soundproofing materials.

The Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles (SMART) Association supports programs to donate, recycle, and refrain from throwing away old clothing. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports that 13 million tons of solid municipal waste is generated annually—exclusively clothing and other household textiles. Of this amount, 2 million tons—15.3 percent—is recycled. However, clothing and textile recycling does more to reduce greenhouse gas emissions than the typical recycling of plastic, aluminum, and paper.

Upcycling

Upcycling is turning textile waste and discarded garments into desirable fashion. Upcycling reduces textile waste and reintroduces it back into the fashion market. Textiles are virtually 100 percent recyclable, upcyclable, or downcyclable. Cotton and wool fiber can be shredded, mixed with new fiber, and re-spun. Monofilament polyester can be melted and re-spun a limited number of times or may be chemically recycled.

A home’s color scheme changes, so all the drapes are changed. Instead of discarding the drapery fabric, pillows can be made from the fabric and sold in an interior design business.

Denim jeans, shirts, bags, and jackets can be used as insulation anywhere fiberglass insulation is used in the home. A non-profit organization takes discarded denim and repurposes it to make a difference in communities.

Labor Standards

OSHA—the Occupational Safety and Health Administration—is the division of the U.S. Department of Labor that sets and enforces occupational health and safety rules. However, OSHA does not regulate the garment industry outside of the United States. The safety and health of the workers is still a major concern of the garment industry. Fibre 2 Fashion at <http://www.fibre2fashion.com> cites the major issues for those working in the garment industry (mainly outside the United States).

- ◆ Exposure to cotton dust leads to health problems impacting the lungs. Child labor is common in India and other garment-producing countries. Children and adult workers are exposed at dangerous levels.
- ◆ Exposure to chemicals (e.g., formaldehyde) occurs. This known carcinogen is used to produce wrinkle-free clothing.
- ◆ Exposure to noise inside the factory can result in hearing loss.
- ◆ **Ergonomic design** (human engineering or human factors) is an applied science that creates solutions for people who interact with products, systems, or processes. The focus of ergonomic design is to “ensure that designs complement the strengths and abilities of people and minimize the effects of their limitations rather than forcing them to adapt.” (Source: <http://www.ergonomics.org.uk/learning/what-ergonomics/>.) For example, some common ergonomic designs address age, size, strength, cognitive ability, prior experience, cultural expectations, and goals. Ergonomists arrange equipment and tools for people to prevent injuries and accidents while increasing comfort and reducing stress.
 - Anti-glare glasses reduce the effects of computer vision syndrome (CVS); they are an ergonomically friendly tool.
 - Ergonomic chairs are good solutions to back, neck, and shoulder pain and eyestrain that result from incorrect posture.
 - Repetitive strain is the result of someone sitting in the same position for a length of time while performing repetitive motions. Ergonomic keyboards help prevent carpal tunnel syndrome in the wrists experienced by workers who use a mouse or keyboard for long, uninterrupted periods.

Countries that manufacture clothing for American companies have recently come under

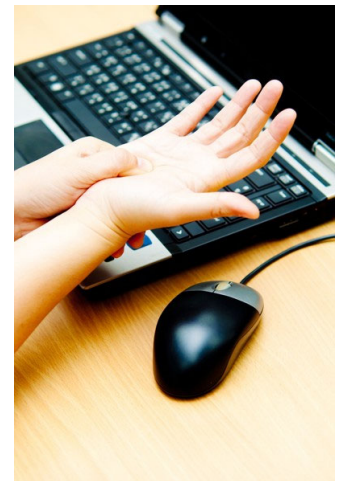
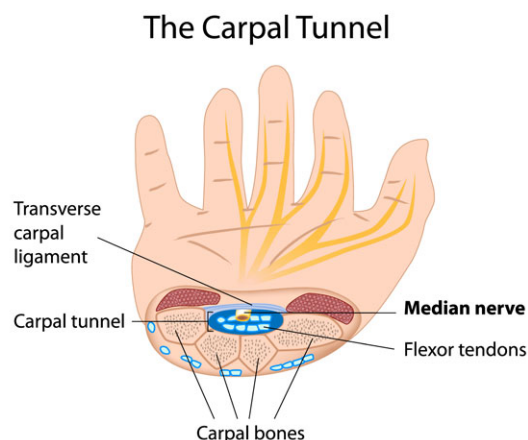


FIGURE 4. The carpal tunnel is a narrow passageway of ligament and bones at the base of your hand. It contains nerves and tendons. Irritated tendons or other swelling narrows the tunnel and causes the nerves to be compressed. As tingling or numbness increases, grasping objects can become difficult.



FIGURE 5. China is the number one exporter of garments to the United States, and Bangladesh is the second largest.

increased scrutiny for occupational health and safety issues in the workplace. Public awareness of the working conditions and the labor laws of garment-manufacturing countries often are far below U.S. standards. For instance, many Bangladesh garment factories have recently burned or collapsed resulting in the tragic death of workers. Those factory buildings did not meet common safety standards to ensure a safe environment for the employees. The hours worked and the age of workers are of concern to some educated U.S. customers.

CULTURAL AWARENESS

Cultural awareness is developing sensitivity and understanding of another cultural or ethnic group. It involves being conscious and continually developing an understanding of the values, beliefs, and perceptions of oneself and of people of other cultures and ethnicities. Knowledge of traditional beliefs, meanings of words, phrases, gestures, customs, significant holidays, activities, and rituals of another group is essential to avoid misunderstandings. This is especially important in business. Personal behaviors and mannerisms may be offensive to someone from another culture or ethnicity. Investigation of other cultures is a good activity to become more self-aware of one's actions. A dangerous assumption is that all customers view our actions, words, and gestures as we intend them. Four degrees of cultural awareness are as follows (Source: Quappe and Cantatore at <http://www.culturocity.com>):

- ◆ My way is the only way.
- ◆ I know their way, but my way is better.
- ◆ My way and their way.
- ◆ Our way.

Cultural sensitivity is recognizing that cultural differences and similarities exist, without assigning values (good, bad, right, wrong) to those cultural differences. Developing cultural awareness skills results in one valuing cultural diversity. Cultural diversity is an advantage to a business or an organization when seeking to expand its solutions and its sense of identity and problem solving. Diversity can create valuable new skills and behaviors that highlight differ-



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Corporate Social Responsibility Policies

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies differ from business to business. Some businesses and companies do everything possible to be socially responsible to the community and the environment while other companies do very little. Investigate the CSR activities undertaken by businesses in your area that you frequent—food services, movie theaters, malls, etc. You can compare local CSR policies with those of nationwide businesses by accessing the company's link to "social responsibility practices." For example, access the following businesses:

- The Gap at http://gapinc.com/content/gapinc/html/social_responsibility.html
- Macys at http://www1.macys.com/campaign/earthday/index.jsp?cm_sp=us_gfa_-row1_-turn-over-a-new-leaf
- Kohls at <http://www.kohlsgreen.com/media/pdfs/2012CSRReport-Kohls.pdf>
 - Sidebar: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a company's sense of responsibility toward the community and the environment—economic and social—in which the company resides. CSR is a type of citizenship that is demonstrated through 1) waste recycling, upcycling, and repurposing, 2) reduction of pollutants into the atmosphere, and 3) earning solid returns on the resources they use.

ences including education, technology, and holiday traditions. Diversity values an ability to find things we have in common rather than focus on differences. It is inaccurate to assume that all members of a racial, linguistic, or religious group share a common culture. Cultural sensitivity addresses ones perceptions and actions related to the following terms:

- ◆ Biases
- ◆ Prejudices
- ◆ Cultural norms
- ◆ Attitudes
- ◆ Beliefs
- ◆ Values

A **human resource department** is an organization within a business responsible for hiring, firing, legal employment paperwork, employee issues, and ensuring the business adheres to the law about the treatment of the employees. The human resource department may be responsible for recruiting a diverse workforce. The department provides training to employees about cultural diversity and sensitivity as it applies to working with each other as well as for the clients they serve.

- ◆ Many immigrants come to the U.S. speaking the language of their homeland. This can create a barrier for the immigrant when doing business with others. People from any culture, ethnicity, or other demographic are potential customers for local businesses. For

example, if many new potential customers speak Urdu, the business's human resources department could seek employees that also speak Urdu.

- ◆ Technology can be an aid in overcoming a language barrier. Translation software is inexpensive and readily available on iPads and other tablet devices.

Word-of-mouth advertising is customers reporting to others about their experience with a business. Word-of-mouth is more effective than radio, TV, and print advertising when attracting (or repeling) customers. Customers verbally telling others about their experience with a business are powerful. In communities with immigrants, word-of-mouth advertising is a very effective way to learn how to navigate the new area. Online reviews are also common as most people have access to technology and the Internet. However, the removal of negative online reviews is difficult. To be known for good customer service, strong businesses:

- ◆ Attempt to overcome the language barrier for any customer.
- ◆ Treat all customers with the belief that each one is important.
- ◆ Ask the customers about their needs and fill their requests.
- ◆ Train employees about cultural awareness.
- ◆ Employ a diverse staff.

CULTURAL AND ETHNIC TRADITIONS

Customer data and feedback is collected through requests, surveys, focus groups, and purchase history. Data housed in an electronic database or paper logbook within the store helps one analyze patterns and trends. Requested items not currently carried by the store are also included in the database/logbook. Typically, the more data collected by business the better. For instance, businesses avoid spending a lot of money purchasing a specific style if only one customer per year requests the item. Carrying customer-requested items brings people into the store often that customer finds other items to purchase once they are there.

Good customer service includes contacting customers to let them know the desired item is in the store. Customer contact is often part of the job description of a personal shopper.

Cultural, Religious, and Ethnic Traditions

La Quinceañera is a Latin American tradition that celebrates a young



FIGURE 6. A La Quinceañera dress is a young woman's first formal attire that includes a diadem (tiara) and a matching nosegay (bouquet). The term Quinceañera comes from the Spanish word Quince and means 15; it is a fifteenth birthday mass and fiesta. The celebration is religious and social.

girl's fifteenth birthday and her transition from childhood to womanhood. It begins with a mass and ends with a fiesta (party). It is a significant event in a 15-year-olds life and is highlighted by the exchange of shoes. Each girl enters in flats and leaves in high heels. La Quinceañera dresses are similar to prom dresses. In a community with a significant Latin American population, La

Quinceañera dresses and accessories would be an appropriate addition to the inventory.

A **sari** is a garment made of several yards of lightweight cotton or silk fabric wrapped around the body; one end forms the skirt and the other drapes over the head or over one shoulder. Saris come in many price points. The sari fabric and the sari designer affect the price. Southern Asian women traditionally wore saris. In a community with a significant Southern Asian population, sari dresses and accessories would be an appropriate addition to the inventory.

A **kurta** is a long-sleeved, hip- or full-length collarless shirt traditionally worn by men and women in India. A kurta worn by a woman is sometimes referred to as a kurtis: a sleeveless shirt worn over or under the angiya (a short-sleeved bodice that ends just above the waist) the by women in India. Today, kurta/kurtis garments are popular cross-culturally.



FIGURE 8. A kurta is a long-sleeved, hip- or full-length collarless shirt traditionally worn by men and women in India. Women wear the kurta/kurtis with leggings.



FIGURE 7. A sari is a garment made of several yards of lightweight cotton or silk cloth wrapped around the body. One end forms the skirt, and the other drapes over the head or over one shoulder. Saris come in many price points. The fabrics used and the sari designer affect the price.

Summary:



There is a saying that it takes 100 positive comments to overcome one negative comment. Customer comments about your business, customer service, and products are important referrals. A business needs to be culturally aware of all potential customers.

Many businesses are informing customers of every environmentally conscious behavior they take, as part of corporate social responsibility. Customers vote with their dollars based on what is important to them. The impact the product has on the world environment and employment conditions is as important as its function to some customers. Prior to purchasing, many customers research the creation and disposal of products they are considering.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. Describe corporate social responsibility (CSR).
2. What is a niche market?
3. What word-of-mouth advertising has influenced one of your purchases?
4. Describe racial profiling.
5. Describe eco-fashion.

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Investigate the ways clothing and textiles may be reused/repurposed. Contact recycling centers to learn which ones accept used clothing and textiles. Create a list of local donation opportunities. Donation centers include the Salvation Army, Goodwill, hospital thrift shops, and homeless shelters. Search for opportunities to donate clothing and textiles. For instance, denim clothing and sneakers can be donated to large nonprofit organizations for repurposing.

Web Links:



Blue Jeans Go Green

<http://www.bluejeansgogreen.org/>

Corporate Social Responsibility in the Textile Industry

<http://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/2/179/corporate-social-responsibility1.asp>

Cultural Awareness

<http://www.culturocity.com/>

Textile Manufacturing Report

<http://www.epa.gov/wastes/inforesources/pubs/infocus/k02028.pdf>