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Carving out web space for CSR stories

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Investors asking for more standardization

Public companies are using the web more for telling their CSR stories, uncovering information that has previously been stated only in annual or special reports, according to a new survey by communications consultancy Hallvarsson & Halvarsson (H&H).

'The corporate website is the main information source for any stakeholder,' says Marcus Eriksson, who heads the [H&H Webranking](#) projects. 'The CSR section is a relatively newly integrated part of the corporate website, but is growing fast in content.'

In a [review](#) of 700 European companies, H&H finds that 78 percent are dedicating part of their corporate website to CSR, up from 73 percent last year. Of the 150 largest European companies, 97 percent cover CSR topics on the web. In this study, H&H reviews corporate websites and not annual or CSR reports.

In a recent survey by George Washington University, US IROs reveal they have difficulty identifying model CSR communications efforts. The H&H Webranking, though, turns up 14 exemplars, including Centrica, Deutsche Telekom, E.ON and Nokia. Eriksson says these firms fulfill investors' expectations for online reporting.

The web also opens up possibilities for more dynamic presentation, Eriksson notes. Swedish clothier H&M, for example, produced a short film for its website on the sustainability of its supply chain. Marks & Spencer is using social media as a way to make CSR accomplishments a part of its brand in its Plan A campaign. H&H hasn't reviewed US companies, but Eriksson says 'US companies could also use European best practices as a way of improving.'

While there are some standouts, many companies still have a gap between what they present and what investors say they want. A common shortcoming is the failure to use sustainability reporting guidelines like those spelled out by the [Global Reporting Initiative](#). 'There is still a thirst among analysts and investors to get more standardized information from the companies,' Eriksson says.

Firms are also failing to tailor information to SRI investors or include information about how dialogue with SRI investors is conducted. Centrica, one of H&H's top-ranked firms, includes detail about its CSR roadshows on its corporate website, including presentations and even feedback it gets from SRI-focused investors.

By [Anna Snider](#)

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