Harnessing Sage's Goodwill And Care For The Community In An Innovative Philanthropic Programme

Ivan Epstein *(www.sagesouthafrica.co.za/OurBusiness/We-Give-Back.asp)*

Corporate philanthropy is nothing new. For decades, big businesses like Microsoft and Ford have contributed money, employee time, and expertise to causes and projects they deemed worthwhile.

Philanthropic values and attitudes have been embedded within both these companies from an early stage, shaped by the visions of their founders and leaders.

This is crucial for any company with designs on creating its own framework for giving – you can't fake compassion. It is especially true if you are retrofitting your framework to an existing business. It's with this in mind that Sage in June launched the Sage Foundation, a global initiative that will provide a concrete framework for our philanthropic efforts.

The Foundation will roll out globally from October. It will follow a 2+2+2 model of committing 2% of employee time, 2% of free cash flow, and 2 donated user licenses for our technology to any eligible registered charity, social enterprise or non-profit organisation. We will focus on creating social and economic opportunity in the communities we operate within around the world.

For us, formalising our philanthropic programme was a logical and necessary step to take. It was the result of many months of hard work, and the vision of our board and people. Without the commitment and passion of our leadership and employees, creating something like the Foundation in a global company like Sage would be impossible.

Cultivating a culture of philanthropy

Further developing the culture of caring that already exists in the organisation is one of the prerequisites for enabling philanthropy within our business. Sage is a big family of 14 000 entrepreneurial people. We are a large business that has the heart of a small business. We have always been committed to making a difference, bound together by our mission of supporting 'the little guys' in the form of Small and Medium Businesses (SMBs), so it is a natural step for us to start supporting the world's social change organisations, too.

For many years, our colleagues around the world have supported their communities in their own ways. Sage operates in many different countries, with each

Ivan Epstein

region possessing its unique take on the 'Sage culture'. Our philanthropic efforts reflect that heritage. In my home country of South Africa, for example, we have supported a wide range of initiatives for a number of years. The *Afrika Tikkun/Mandela Day initiative* supports children and youths in accessing quality social, educational, health and nutritional support on their journey from 'Cradle to Career'.

Sixty-five Sage South Africa employees each volunteered four hours of their time and we donated Sage software to the organisation to help them run more efficiently. There are similar examples like this elsewhere throughout Sage – driven by colleagues who want to make a difference to their communities.

I was fortunate enough to spend time working with Nelson Mandela on social projects. I saw how he approached his own philanthropic goals after his presidency, collaborating with businesses to make them a reality, and that inspired my own passion for replicating his ethos at Sage. It is the same drive and desire that binds all of our people together and defines our culture.

We also see in the Foundation a reflection of a cultural shift with the emerging Millennial Generation. This is a not generation that is content to show up and collect a cheque. They want to be part of something meaningful. With the Foundation, we are providing them with the platform to do that.

Buy-in from the top

Securing buy-in to this culture and vision from the very top was another prerequisite for getting the Foundation off the ground. Stephen Kelly, the Sage Group CEO, was committed to the project from the outset and made his desire clear to launch a philanthropic framework. That gave everyone in the company a goal to rally around, and the ambition to make it a reality was evident across the board.

Without having the right people in place, you won't be able to turn the vision into a reality. You need people that embody compassion, but there are other equally important qualities that define what a Sage Foundation employee should be.

They need a strong understanding of the world we operate in, the social change organisations we will partner with, and of the challenges they face. They must also be commercially-minded, and must be able to see clearly where our support could have the most impact for the people and organisations we are trying to help.

Experienced leadership

Experience is an incredibly important factor too, which is why we brought in Isabel Kelly to head the Foundation. Her experience of developing and growing the Salesforce Foundation internationally means we have someone who knows what structure we needed to drive things forward.

We are fortunate to have many people within the organisation with many of the attributes I've just outlined. This enabled us to create a team of familiar, dedicated faces with an unparalleled knowledge of how our communities work.

We already have non-profit customers globally, and we want to partner with them; giving our resources and in return, benefiting from the positive social change they bring to the world. Governments and communities in many of the countries we operate in also expect us to use our position of privilege to reinvest in the future.

The only way something like this can work on an international scale is by having people in each region that understand what will work in their markets. We are empowering them, through the framework of the Foundation, to make the decisions they feel will have the most impact locally.

The Sage Foundation will build on the best of what we are already doing all over the world, giving it the commitment and support it deserves.

Ivan Epstein, Chief Executive Officer, Sage AAMEA (Africa, Australia, Middle East and Asia), Chairman Sage Foundation.

He leads Sage's businesses across Africa, Australia, the Middle East and Asia, a territory which includes some of the fastest-growing markets for business solutions in the world.

He is one of three operational CEOs in the Sage Group and serves on the Sage Executive Committee which is responsible for the strategic direction and continued growth of the Sage Group internationally.

In addition, Ivan serves as the Chairman of the Sage Foundation, which provides support to non-profit organisations and communities around the world by sharing Sage resources with them. The Foundation's 2+2+2 community model involves donating 2% of employee time each year, 2% of free cash flow and 2 of Sage's smart technology products for any charity, social enterprise or non-profit organisation.

Ivan began his career at Price Waterhouse Coopers before co-founding Softline in 1988. He led the company's growth from a start-up to a listing on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange in 1997.

Sage acquired Softline in 2003 and appointed Ivan to its executive committee as CEO for Southern Hemisphere countries. Sage appointed Ivan to his current position in 2010.

Ivan was awarded the Ernst and Young 'South Africa's Best Entrepreneur' in 1999/2000, and appointed to the panel of judges where he has served for an extended period in selecting many of SA's entrepreneurs. In addition he was awarded SA's 'IT Personality of the Year' in 2009.