



## BEST! Business Excellence through Sustainable Trust

*Part of an ongoing series about companies whose practices are helping to restore, build and maintain trust in corporate America*

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### Image Micro: Paying it Forward Pays Trust Dividends

[Image Microsystems](#) (IM), of Austin, Texas, stands as one of the few companies that can ascribe new business gains to its core values of sustainability and community.

- IM has the world's only patent-pending technology that can recycle e-waste into a substrate product that can replace, for example, aluminum in road signs. Called MicroStrate, this new product recycles dirty plastics like ink jet cartridges.
- 40% of IM's 250-person workforce is deaf or has special needs, which is a commitment to diversity few other companies can imagine, let alone match.

This “double whammy” of CSR makes a compelling pitch in IM's quest for new business at a time when more companies are looking for proven partners that can enhance CSR performance.

“CSR is more important to companies,” says Liz Walker, IM's VP, Marketing and Business Development, “and we have companies seeking us out knowing that we have the same mindset. Word gets around.”



Walker says that, IM's revenues in the first six months of 2011 already match revenues for all of 2010, putting the company on target for 100% growth in the current year.

“I can directly attribute much of the growth [to] our diversity initiatives and our closed-loop, cradle-to-cradle process of converting e-waste into signage,” she explains. “Dell increased and extended its printer cartridge recycling contract with Image Microsystems because of our CSR commitments.”

“It's an ideal partnership between companies with a shared philosophy,” says [Dell in a blog post](#), which goes on to laud IM for being “a responsible partner.”

#### **From there to here**

While Image Microsystem's business trajectory was firmly set toward the reverse logistics and recycling sector, the diversity push was an unexpected goldmine.

IM was founded in 1992 as a manufacturer and seller of computers, but shifted focus over the years toward “reverse logistics.” IM diverts IT parts, equipment and waste from garbage heaps and incinerators by repairing, remarketing and recycling.

According to the [UN Environment Program](#) up to “50 million metric tonnes of e-waste are generated worldwide every year, comprising more than 5% of all municipal solid waste.”

In 2005, Toni Abadi, an expert in American Sign Language, convinced her Image Microsystems CEO husband, Alex Abadi, to hire two deaf workers.

The first hires were so successful that IM entered into partnership with Texas School for the Deaf, offering internships and employment opportunities.

In one case, a team overseeing printer returns at IM is 80% deaf, including the supervisor.

### **The Halo Effect**

As a take away, the strategy at IM boils down to this:

- Communicating CSR values by living CSR values (integrated throughout products, services and operations)
- Bragging effectively and in the appropriate channels when there is substance about which to boast
- Engaging CEO champions as prophets of CSR business strategies
- Converting audiences to customers through good deeds that reflect positively on those customers.

***BEST!** is a collaborative media partnership highlighting companies that are restoring, building and maintaining corporate trust. This article will appear in participating media outlets that have dedicated space to maximizing the reach of these best practices, to encourage others to adopt the principles and actions of companies already engaged in trustworthy business. Visit <http://trustacrossamerica.com/best.shtml> for more information.*

### **The Five Big Questions: Image Micro**

**1. Action:** What are the key actions that characterize your commitment to building stakeholder trust?

*Following up on our key pillars of Sustainability, Security, Technical Innovation, and Community through demonstrable and publicly communicated actions.*

**2. Leadership:** Which do you consider is your “Best Practice” in trustworthy business behavior?

*Actively abiding by the principals of R2 (responsible recycling), while at the same time staying true to our key pillars, and maintaining our R2 and ISO 14001 certifications.*

**3. Transformation:** What corporate behavior must you change/improve to be consistent with a commitment to trustworthy business?

*We now proactively add R2 and ISO certifications to our new facilities as they come online—prior to requests from our business partners.*

**4. Proof:** What verifiable evidence can you provide that these trust actions create substantive and positive impacts?

*These actions, and the promotion of these actions through public relations have helped double our revenue over the past two years.*

**5. Vision:** How will your trust building practices grow over the next five years?

*We will continue with our existing practices—but expand them to include additional new facilities.*

