



Purpose Over Profits: How REI Meets its Mission

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ABSTRACT

REI is a company that stands by its mission statement in every endeavor. Over the years, REI has found ways to be a positive steward of community, the environment, and ethical business practices. In this report, I present how REI leads with its mission in mind, which is to awaken a love of the outdoors for everyone. From hosting community classes, conducting a positive, diplomatic presence online, and creating ways in which the company gives back to the community, REI has not only become a trusted brand name but has also consistently followed their founding business principles and mission statement since the company was founded. This report also provides background information about REI, how the company has created programs to foster community, and the business decisions REI has made that demonstrate the values and principles the brand stands for.

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INTRODUCTION

REI's story began with a group of outdoor-loving friends who had a vision to make the outdoors more accessible to everyone by creating a co-op to make outdoor gear more affordable and offering memberships at \$1.00 so that anyone interested would be financially able to join. REI's content strategy is not just about selling products but also about bringing the outdoors to everyone, educating the community, and creating a love for the outdoors. Through stewardship programs such as Force of Nature and Rewilding Our Cities, refusing to sell products from companies that do not share REI values, and offering community classes, trips, and resources to get people outside, REI demonstrates its founding principles and business strategy. Online, REI presents itself as a source of educational resources about the outdoors, providing content on all social media platforms aimed at offering tips and guidance on how to conduct outdoor activities safely and efficiently. Over the years, REI has expanded the ways in which it can further its mission.

As a consumer and supporter of REI and its mission to outfit everyone with the right gear and knowledge for their outdoor pursuits, I was curious to know more about how REI creates brand loyalty and follows its mission as the company evolves. In my research, I set out to answer the following questions:

- [How does REI conduct itself as a company online?](#)
- [How does REI accomplish their mission?](#)
- [What is REI's content strategy?](#)
- [How does REI create a sense of community?](#)
- [What makes REI a trusted brand and/or source of inspiration for outdoor enthusiasts?](#)

METHODS

The primary methods I used in conducting my research were reading articles about REI through online searches about controversial decisions REI has made, reviewing REI's website and social media platforms, and taking screenshots of the way REI conducts itself online and the content the company shares. I use the screenshots to provide visual evidence of my research findings throughout my report.

ABOUT REI

REI is a co-op founded by 23 friends who wanted to source affordable outdoors equipment. The company provides outdoor recreational equipment, community classes, group trips, and educational resources to help equip people for outdoor adventures. REI's mission is "to awaken a lifelong love of the outdoors, for all." The brand's logo, a mountain range connected a pine tree, has become a trusted symbol of the expert outdoor outfitter.

REI believes in "purpose before profits" and follows that principle by putting money and efforts into rewilding urban areas (creating outdoor recreation for urban areas) and selling sustainable products. All brands sold at REI must meet product sustainability standards REI and partners collaborated on. Additionally, REI supports efforts to combat climate change and public land stewardship.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND USAGE

Online, REI is diplomatic in the way it responds to customer feedback, whether good or bad. On their platforms, REI shares content that follows their mission to help bring the outdoors to everyone by offering tips, ideas, and safety information about various outdoor activities. REI rarely uses any of their social media platforms to market products. Occasionally, REI will post an ad for a product, but usually follows it with activity ideas the product will allow you to do or ways to use the product safely. REI's marketing strategy on social media is subtle. Their focus is clearly to inspire a love of the outdoors. Below, I break down the content of each social media platform REI uses.

TWITTER

REI posts tips about eating and activities that help prepare people for getting outside and making the most of outdoor activities. Usually the posts consist of a short sentence and an interesting, high quality photo. Sometimes they post advertisements.



Figure 1: REI Twitter post

FACEBOOK

REI posts the same content on Facebook but engages more with the community by responding to comments on posts. When customers complain, REI responds professionally and uses evidence (looking up orders, looking into issues before responding, etc.) to support their response. REI does not respond to every customer comment regardless of positive/negative feedback. The following screenshots are from REI's Facebook page and demonstrate the way that REI conducts itself on this platform.

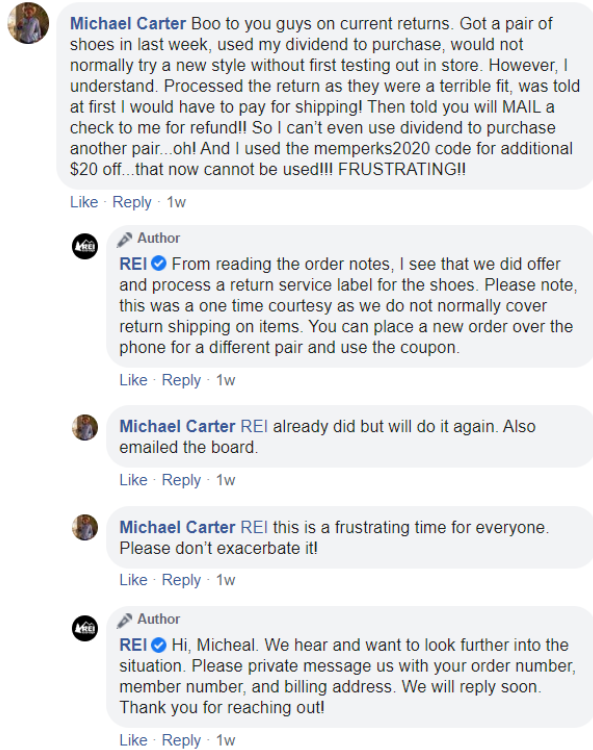


Figure 2: REI responding to customer complaint on Facebook

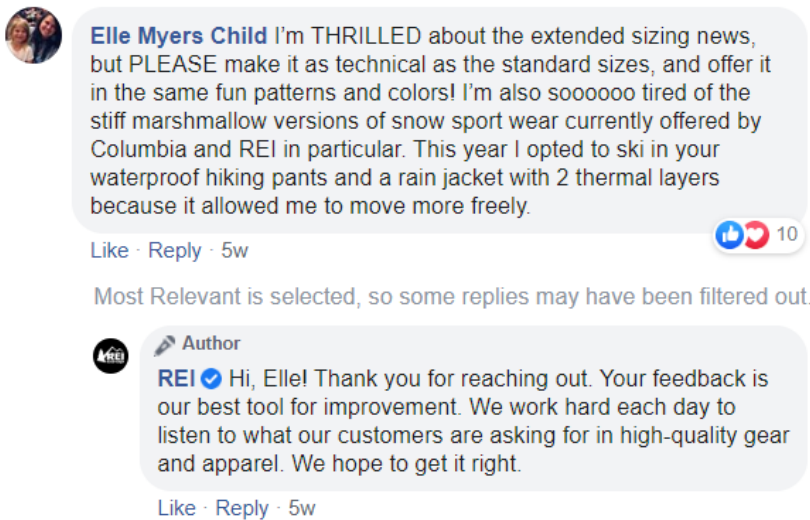


Figure 3: REI responding to criticism on Facebook

Dr. Turdington · October 28, 2018

What about those who are 5 feet tall? Nearly all female family and friends are curvy and hover around FIVE FEET TALL (or short if you prefer). Yes, some fat too, but it is the SHORT that is the problem. Can't shorten pants that have zippers and etc. on the bottom of the leg and we have to pay the same amount to cut off all the fancy features so we aren't tripping around on flapping cuffs.

Reply



Aer Parris · October 30, 2018

Dr. Turdington,

Thank you so much for your comment. We're committed to outfitting all! We've passed your feedback along to our buyers and designers.

Best,
Aer Parris, staff writer

Reply

Figure 4: REI responding to negative feedback

INSTAGRAM

REI shares some of the same posts on Instagram as they do on Twitter and Facebook but may change the photo. Occasionally REI reposts pictures from customers that tag REI in the photo using the hashtag #rei1440project, which is an homage to a website REI had years ago that allowed users to share pictures of the outdoors. The number 1440 refers to the minutes in each day – the number of opportunities to have an outdoor adventure. Now the hashtag is used on social media platforms. The hashtag #optoutside is another popular hashtag used on Instagram. REI also responds to comments on their posts.



Figure 5: Instagram post using a customer photo

CREATING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Over the years, REI has demonstrated its commitment to equipping communities with the tools and resources needed to foster a love of the outdoors through initiatives like Force of Nature, which supports women and non-profits in outdoor recreation, and Rewilding Projects, which are projects aimed at creating access to outdoor areas in urban cities. These initiatives provide a variety of support – from financial support to classes and events – and demonstrate that REI is a company devoted to serving its communities before making profit.

PURPOSE OVER PROFITS

One way REI has demonstrated their commitment to purpose over profits in recent years was their decision to close the store on Black Friday every year beginning in 2015. REI closed their doors on Black Friday, a day that generated \$12 billion in revenue, to give their employees the day off and encourage people to get outside. REI encourages people to share their outdoor adventures on social media platforms using the #optoutside.

SUPPORTING EQUALITY

In 2017 REI Launched an initiative called [Force of Nature](#), which aims at advancing gender equality in a traditionally male-dominated outdoor environment. The initiative came with a \$1 million commitment to support nonprofits that create opportunities for women in the outdoors, 1,000 events to help women connect with other female outdoor enthusiasts, more product research and development for women’s gear, and more advertisements featuring women (Pressner Kreuser, Amanda, 2018).

EXTENDED SIZING

Following its belief that the outdoors is for all, in 2017 REI made a commitment to making the brand inclusive for all by offering extended sizing. REI’s senior merchandising manager, Helen Stauffer said in an article, “Not only is it the right thing to do for our business, more importantly, it is the right thing to do for our customer. To do it, we have to bring the industry along” (Parris, Aer, 2017)

INVESTING IN MEMBERS

Not only does REI give back to the community through initiatives, the company also gives members dividends every year and invests in their employees. In 2016, REI gave back \$193.7 million in annual dividends and credit card rebates. REI also invested \$57 million in retirement and incentive program contributions for employees and invested \$9.3 million in more than 300 nonprofit partners (“REI Co-op Gives Back Nearly 70 percent of Profits to the Outdoor Community after Year of Record Revenues in 2016,” 2017).

REI publishes their annual stewardship report publicly on their website to maintain transparency and show members how the company invests their money. REI is committed to acting in the best interests of their members and prove that they make efforts to encourage people to get outdoors by sharing their stewardship report.

REWILDING URBAN CITIES

Another effort REI has made to bring the outdoors to everyone is launching the Rewilding Projects. The projects aim to help people in urban areas have easier access to outdoor areas. Some of these projects include completing the 550-mile Bay Area Ridge Trail (370 miles are complete) in the San Francisco Bay Area, enhancing outdoor recreation infrastructure at the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument, and creating a network of multi-use trails distributed throughout the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region (Parris, Aer, 2018).

A LIFELONG LOVE OF THE OUTDOORS

In addition to community initiatives, REI sticks to their mission of encouraging a love of the outdoors for everyone by providing free apps that help people plan trips and engage in outdoors activities safely as well as offering community classes and trips.

APPS

Aside from a shopping app, which most companies offer, REI offers an app for a variety of outdoor activities, such as rock climbing, mountain biking, hiking, trail running, and skiing.



REI – Shopping App

Shop REI from (almost) anywhere. Use the REI Shopping App to browse, check in-store availability and buy top-brand outdoor gear and apparel. Find classes and events, get daily deals in the REI Outlet and build your wish list. Save your checkout details for quick, secure ordering. Plus, select the delivery method - including free same-day pickup when available.



REI – National Parks App

Your go-to app for trail maps, guides and more. To celebrate the centennial of the National Park Service, we've built the ultimate crowd-sourced guide. Find the best hikes with the REI Co-op Guide to the National Parks app. And while you're at it, add your own photos and favorite trails.



Mountain Project app

The world's definitive climbing resource. With the country's largest database of routes and counting, Mountain Project is an essential and unrivaled resource for all climbers. Search by state, then download area beta and photos for use at the crag, even out of cell range.



REI – Credit Card app


Apply for and manage your REI credit card. REI Credit Card App gives you one-touch access to apply for and manage your REI credit card. If approved for instant credit, you can shop right now and begin earning cash back on your purchases!



Figure 6: REI apps

CLASSES AND EVENTS


REI offers classes and events to local communities to teach people how to engage in outdoor activities safely and to bring local communities together.



Paddle Camping Basics

Take kayaking or paddle boarding to the next step, paddle camping. In this 1.5 hour class learn the basics of what gear to bring, what to leave behind, and how to pack your kayak or SUP for an overnight or multi-day kayak trip. Learn from an REI expert the tips and tricks for an amazing adventure.

MON Jun 1	Pineville REI 7:00pm - 8:30pm	Free
<hr style="border: 0.5px solid #ccc;"/>		
THU Jun 11	Riversport Adventures 6:00pm - 8:00pm	Free



Yoga for Outdoor Enthusiasts

Practicing yoga is an excellent way to develop strength, balance, and flexibility. Join REI's professional yoga instructor for a class tailored to help enhance your pursuit of season specific outdoor activities.

MON Jun 1	Buford REI 7:00pm - 8:00pm	\$5 member \$10 non-member
<hr style="border: 0.5px solid #ccc;"/>		
SAT Jun 6	Buford REI 9:00am - 10:00am	\$5 member \$10 non-member

Figure 7: Example of REI classes

GROUP TRIPS

Another effort REI makes to encourage people to get outside is by offering group trips to a variety of places around the world.

Where do you want to go this year?

[Explore all trips](#)

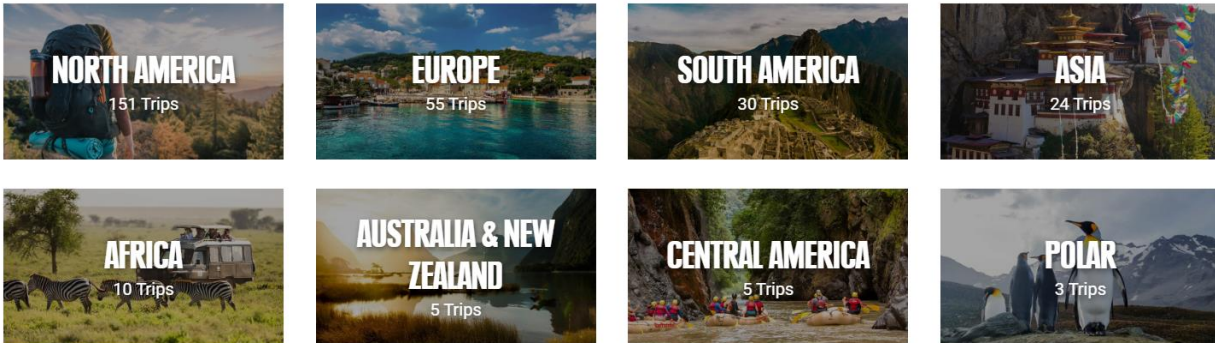


Figure 8: Locations of group trips organized by REI

BRAND MANAGEMENT

In recent years, REI has demonstrated their commitment to the outdoors by taking a political stance on issues that conflict with the values that REI believes in.

In 2017 when President Trump shrunk the size of two national monuments REI posted a graphic on its website that read “We ❤️ Public Lands.” Clicking on that image directed visitors to a corporate statement expressing concern over Trump’s decision (Pinkser, Joe, 2017). REI’s decision to make a political statement in support of efforts to preserve the environment fits with their brand as an outdoor outfitter.

In 2018, REI responded to the Florida school shooting that happened in February of 2018 by suspending sales of products made by brands such as CamelBak, Giro, and Bolle because their parent company Vista Outdoor also makes ammunition and assault rifles. REI stated ““We believe that it is the job of companies that manufacture and sell guns and ammunition to work towards common-sense solutions that prevent the type of violence that happened in Florida last month”” (Johnson, Gene, 2018). REI’s decision is concurrent with their mission to outfit people for the outdoors and support wildlife and the environment.

WHAT IS REI’S CONTENT STRATEGY?

REI has a well-established, positive reputation both online and in the world of outdoor retailers. From REI’s presence in the media, online, and in business, there are a few ways that REI stands out amongst other outdoor retailers.

- REI truly believes the outdoor is for all and proves its belief by offering extended sizing, community classes and trips, apps to help guide people’s adventures, and by making donations to non-profits that help outfit people for the outdoors.
- REI believes in stewarding the earth in positive, conscientious ways and stands up for that belief by refusing the sale of products made by companies that do not support REI’s mission
- REI does not just sell products but experiences and knowledge by offering tips, ideas, and safety guidance on their social media platforms

- REI treats its members like family by offering dividends, discounts on group trips, and free classes

REI's strategy is not to simply make money by selling products. Rather, REI is focused on exposing people to the outdoors, improving lives, stewarding the earth, and making sure that when people do get outdoors, they do so safely. REI's strategy is simply to foster a lifelong love of the outdoors by truly helping outfit people in the right gear and offering guidance, tips, and activities to help get people outside.

CONCLUSION

By observing REI's social media presence, the tools offered through the website and in stores, and past controversial decisions the company has made, REI clearly is not out to make a tremendous profit at the expense of consumers. REI is an earnest, respectable brand and has earned that reputation by consistently finding ways to improve local communities, whether that be creating access to outdoor spaces, offering ways to support women and women-owned businesses, or providing community classes to help outdoor enthusiasts expand their interests and knowledge of outdoor activities.

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