



Innovation of the Day

AMEELIO

Ameelio, a nonprofit with an app that lets prisoners' loved ones easily stay in touch with them, launched this quarter. The COVID crisis has prompted US prisons to ban in-person visits, but the only other option – phone calls and texts – are prohibitively expensive for many. Since only two companies operate the prison communication industry, rates have reached up to USD 25 for a 15-minute call and USD .50 for a text. Ameelio responded with its app, which transforms a digital message and photos into an actual letter. The nonprofit covers all mailing costs and logistics on behalf of families, to ensure letters reach their destination. As of this month, 15,000 letters have been sent.

Ameelio sits at the intersection of the two issues right now: COVID-19 and the current social justice movement. Just to give you more context: This mind-bogglingly-corrupt duopoly disproportionately affects low-income populations – which most incarcerated Americans belong to, and which are least equipped to shell out USD 25 for a phone call. It also has an outsize impact on African Americans – who account for 33% of all US prisoners, despite representing only around 15% of the general population.

Yes, this innovation is very US-specific. But there are injustices everywhere, and [74% of consumers globally believe CEOs should initiate important societal changes](#), rather than waiting for governments to act. So if your brand holds a strong sense of purpose (as it should), get inspired by Ameelio! Do something to dismantle a system you oppose. If you believe in equal parental leave for all genders, make like [Volvo](#) and instate it for your employees. [Copenhagen Fashion Week](#) denied the catwalk to brands that weren't sufficiently sustainable. In a more aggressive move, [PETA](#) bought enough stake in Starbucks so it could speak out in shareholder meetings about charging customers extra for non-dairy milk. Here, Ameelio carved out a road prisoners' friends and families could take to circumvent an absurd practice.

If your current CSR strategy relies on simply donating to causes or 'speaking out', try to go further and infuse some innovation. What solution could you create to actually move the needle on the issue at hand? How can you set an example for other organizations?

Stay healthy,
The TrendWatching content team

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