

TRIGOS AWARD HELPS AUSTRIAN COMPANIES TO COMMUNICATE CSR

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Abstract: Austrian companies are still quite reserved about communicating their activities in corporate social responsibility. Especially SME's are rather afraid of using their social engagement for marketing purposes. Most of the local companies understand their activities as a matter of course. The contribution, at first, presents the Austrian TRIGOS award that has rewarded businesses for excellent CSR-projects since 2004. This award helps enterprises of all sizes to present their activities in public. TRIGOS is provided by the Austrian representations of national economy and some large NGOs as Caritas and others. Projects in the categories employees, market, ecology and society are awarded. Straßer, who is the head of the regional CSR-initiative called "Verantwortung zeigen!" in Southern Austria, was responsible for introducing this national CSR-award to Carinthia in 2007 and to Styria in 2008. She will provide an insight into the award and present the results of a large study that analyzed especially the main benefits of the TRIGOS award from the winner's view.

Keywords: *TRIGOS Award, Communication of CSR, Carinthia, Styria.*

NAGRADA TRIGOS POMAGA AVSTRIJSKIM PODJETJEM POROČATI O DOP

Povzetek: Avstrijska podjetja so še vedno precej zadržana glede sporočanja o svojih dejavnostih glede družbene odgovornosti podjetij (DOP). Zlasti mala in srednja podjetja se bojijo uporabiti svoje družbeno angažiranje za marketinške namene. Večina lokalnih podjetij šteje svoje dejavnosti za samoumevne. Prispevek najprej predstavi avstrijsko nagrado TRIGOS, s katerim so nagrajevali podjetja za odlične projekte glede DOP od l. 2004. Nagrada pomaga podjetjem vseh velikosti prikazati njihove dejavnosti javno. TRIGOS zagotavljajo avstrijsko predstavniški organi gospodarstva in nekaj velikih nevladnih organizacij, kot so Caritas in druge. Nagrade dobijo projekte v kategorijah zaposleni, trg, ekologija in družba. Straßerjeva, ki je vodja regionalne pobude za DOP z imenom "Verantwortung zeigen!" (Pokažite odgovornost!) v južni Avstriji, je imela odgovornost za uvedbo te državne nagrade na koroško v letu 2007 in v Štajersko v l. 2008. Pokazala bo bistvo nagrade in izide obsežne študije, ki je analizirala zlasti osrednje koristi, ki jih imajo od nagrade TRIGOS nagrajenci-

Ključne besede: Nagrada TRIGOS, Poročanje o DOP, Koroška, Štajerska

Introduction

In June 2007 an international project on corporate social responsibility (CSR) called "CSR excellence" (INTERREG IIIA 2006-2007, Austria-Italy) was finished. It focused on the status of daily practice of CSR in the cross-border region Carinthia and Upper Italy. One part of the work was a study that presented the opinion of about 400 companies of all sizes and lines of business concerning CSR and explored the intenseness of dialog with their stakeholders. Which are the main results?

View to the status quo especially in Carinthia

Of course, all surveyed companies want to be economically successful. But most of them want more: More than 90% of the asked persons, almost always owner-managers or executive managers, told us, that they also want to move something forward while doing profitable business. It is important for most of them to be in open contact with their stakeholders.

Priority is given to the relationship with customers and employees, following the contact to regional public authorities, media and the population in the environment. Generally the public relations seem more important to large and international companies than for traditional regional companies, especially for SMEs.

Larger companies are asked to handle various social matters and to care about the needs of their employees, ecologic topics and provide several contributions to the social environment (this is e.g. done by supporting regional associations with donations and by providing voluntary collaboration).

But although many things are done, the survey shows also that most companies' engagement is neither planned nor systematically communicated and it is seldom used for systematic public relations activities.

Far from it! A successful metal construction entrepreneur with about 110 employees even told me about his social engagement: he would never want to be named in any publication for his social activities because he would fear to be laughed at by the people in the neighborhood because all the initiatives are meant to be a matter of course.

This first example described the general status quo in 2007, but the situation in Southern Austria now begins to change. Due to our regional initiative named “Verantwortung zeigen!” a broad discussion about CSR was initiated in our region and a considerable number of socially engaged companies started working systematically on their CSR. The success is respectable. The next part of the contribution will report about the sustainable development.

Companies start to focus on CSR

Let me start with an example again: A few days ago we were invited to attend a strategic meeting of an international company headquartered in Carinthia. We were asked to comment the status quo concerning the company’s CSR and to propose the next steps for helpful CSR-activities. To give an answer was quite easy: The company has developed plenty of activities and realized various projects over the last years; the next step is obviously to communicate ambitious efforts and respectable results. The main result of the meeting was to publish a sustainability report for the first time in addition to the next EMAS report. Even more: They are about to change their whole corporate identity in order to focus on their “responsibility in future”. This will be an enormous change for the whole identity of the traditional manufacturing company based on the appreciation and awareness that CSR becomes an essential strategic factor in communication, marketing and public relations.

This case shows the main direction for the future, therefore the topic of this year’s symposium in Maribor is well selected.

Focus on the status quo in Southern Austria in general: As we got in close contact with many well-known companies especially in Carinthia participating the network of the initiative “Verantwortung zeigen!”, we were able to push the public awareness of CSR and CSR-communication as well. The first step was the publication of a good practice book “*Verantwortung zeigen! 2007*” in June 2007. It was the main result of the cross-border project already mentioned above.

TRIGOS – The award for responsible businesses in Austria

TRIGOS is a nation-wide assigned award for outstanding responsible companies in Austria. As far as possible the award is assigned to a small, medium and a large company in the categories workplace, market place, ecology, and society. Interested companies have to apply with a concrete project, but also the company’s engagement for CSR all in all was an increasing part of the evaluation over the last years.

The Austrian Chamber of Commerce (WKÖ), Association of Industry (IV) and NGOs like Caritas, Red Cross, WWF and further partners from the economy and media sector launched the award in 2004 as a non-monetary trophy. In 2008 220 very engaged and broad projects were submitted.

In cooperation with the CEO of a financial institute situated in Carinthia and Styria we achieved the regionalization of the TRIGOS in Southern Austria in 2007 as well an increasing awareness and communication of CSR in regional public.

Since 2007 the TRIGOS has also been given as a regional award in Carinthia and in 2008 it also spread to Styria supported by the regional Chambers of Commerce, Association of Industry and the NGOs.

In consideration of ‘public relations’ the following conclusions can be drawn:

- All participants are interested in communicating their social engagement to achieve public recognition.
- Mainly well-known and internationally active companies intend to communicate their projects.

The different CSR-activities should be communicated also inside the company to enhance the company’s image and the job attractiveness. These advantages are the most important arguments for nearly all participants: like in many European countries also in Austria exists a significant and ballooning lack of specialized workforce and an increasing competition between the companies for the best employees. Social engagement delivers additional arguments to boost employer attractiveness.

National study describes: TRIGOS pays

In 2007 another large study called “*CSR TRIGOS rechnet sich*” (about “CSR TRIGOS pays for companies”) was presented by the Ministry of Commerce in Austria.

As TRIGOS itself states, the CSR pays also in economic terms due to the increased trust into the values of an organization. The project clustered the 150 applications including the 18 winners of the TRIGOS 2005 and 2006 by their realized activities and evaluated the internal and external (monetary) effects of the selected projects. As far as possible, the results were monetized. Immaterial values and benefits, risk aspects, and external effects were at least qualitatively described and assessed by a cost-benefit-analysis.

A questionnaire on motivation, effects, costs and benefits of the TRIGOS project, and the CSR-orientation in general was sent to all TRIGOS applicants. It was followed by telephone interviews with the companies. In about 30 companies’ more detailed costs and specific indicators were discussed to monetize at least partly their CSR effects.

The self-assessment focused on the benefits from CSR, the implementation of activities, the relation to the overall strategy and the evaluation of costs and benefits of selected projects.

What are the results? Most companies mention that they benefit from a better image and high employees' enthusiasm, but only few participants want to quantify or monetize their CSR effects; more of them are proud to be pioneers in CSR. Nearly no company has a strategy to implement and communicate CSR systematically to make CSR pay off. But it is meant to be important and valuable for the companies' development.

Gray expressed it like that: "CSR doesn't pay, unless you define CSR as things that DO pay!"

Some successful TRIGOS-projects that show the benefits of CSR

Although companies are not used to and it is in general not easy to measure the benefits of CSR as a well-defined amount of money, we want to show some outstanding examples for definitive beneficial projects of TRIGOS winners in Carinthia. They show the enhancement of the companies' image and higher acceptance in the region:

The first example of a well-done and TRIGOS assigned project is called "*Women in technology*" (in German "FIT - Frauen in die Technik"), done by an international active industrial enterprise in Carinthia with about 3000 employees.

This consequently realized project created awareness of the topic and carried it to the companies apprentice training, re-entry from women (in technical professions), internal raising of awareness. The external communication focused on lectures, conferences and a variety of workshops, mentoring programs, cooperation with institutions and consistent media work helped to raise awareness for the integrated internal processes. The company benefits from a superior attractiveness for female technicians, researchers and qualified employees, who are searching for a good working atmosphere. Various measures concerning the personal work-life-balance and a wide range of working time models guarantee an attractive work environment.

The female employee rate increased up to 12 % and the trend is ascending further on. The acceptance of the regional population is very high.

A second excellent example is a hotel in the mountains, the Turrach in Carinthia. For three generations the owning family already attaches great importance to the relationship to the employees, especially for their continuous education and training. Last year they founded an *academy for the employees* and designed training plans for all employees. The training includes functional aspects and also character building modules and wise recreational activities.

Unlike other tourism companies, the hotel has a high and constant employee board, less employee turnover and a lot of good job applications.

This seriously affects the working atmosphere and the satisfaction of the visitors. Periodic surveys pointing to the satisfaction of the visitors confirm the engagement of the hotel. As in the example given before, in this case as well the company has an excellent image in the environmental population, public authorities and the media.

Not least you can find friendly employees, regular guests and regional connections in the marketing strategy of the hotel. An actual project of the company points on the connection between CSR engagement and the marketing strategy.

Consequent PR and high transparency strengths the company's image

A third example of a TRIGOS winner's project will give insight in the benefits of public relations with regional stakeholders, especially in the neighborhood and with the public authorities.

All presented companies assure us, that they benefit from the TRIGOS award, which shows the engagement once again in the public and helps to communicate it to their stakeholders. The TRIGOS award underlines, that the offers made by the company aren't a matter of course but rather something special and honorable to the employees. So the award also brings an important boost of motivation inside the company.

After the mostly short medial benefit of the award these companies are now using their engagement for continuative marketing purposes.

Summary

In summary the awareness and the commitment for CSR already exist. More and more companies are working systematically on their CSR, they improve their stakeholder dialogue, and try to manage CSR as an important duty like other activities in the company as the given examples illustrate.

As awards generally have a high value and help to communicate engagement, the establishment of the regional TRIGOS leads to a continuous public discourse about CSR and encourages the companies to act responsibly furthermore.

"Do it well and make it known!" – therefore the TRIGOS award is valuable and motivates more and more companies every year to realize – and also to benefit from – ambitious and also long-term projects.

Because of the growing recognition of the TRIGOS within the next year an increasing number of companies will compete for the award. The awareness for CSR will also grow in public.

More and more companies will draw high potential from their CSR, which delivers attractive and credible content for their marketing, their relationship to the stakeholders and their public relations in all.

References

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