

Case study

“Verantwortung zeigen!” (“Show responsibility!”)

Overview

Driver	STRASSER & STRASSER Consulting GmbH
Country	Klagenfurt, Austria
Societal issue addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Connect responsible companies and facilitate their engagement concerning CSR and sustainability ▪ Publishes the companies’ social and ecological engagement in reports and help to share good practise ▪ Set up strong relations between companies and Nonprofit organizations
Partners	Businesses, Nonprofit organizations (NPO), Chambers of commerce, Catholic church of Carinthia, Federal government of Styria, respACT austrian business council for sustainability, Bertelsmann Foundation, IRDO Institute Maribor
Status	Running since a project supported by the European Commission in 2006/2007, no ending planned
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Since 2006 more than 100 companies and 8 large NPOs in Carinthia and Styria participated in activities ▪ 2008: 45 Companies and NPOs with about 25.000 employees ▪ 2009: 57 Companies and NPOs with about 30.000 employees ▪ 35 companies and organisations are part of the network, most of them work continuously on their responsibility and sustainability in-house as well
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As Verantwortung zeigen! is a private initiative, is it not easy to provide funding ▪ The publicity of the network is growing slowly, thus a great deal of individual engagement and drive from the Verantwortung zeigen! team is necessary
Endorsements	Nominated for the Austrian CSR-Award TRIGOS in 2008



Executive Summary

Verantwortung zeigen! is a regional business initiative in southern Austria, initiated and coordinated by Strasser & Strasser that connects companies and nonprofit organisations in various activities, facilitates their engagement concerning corporate social responsibility and sustainability and coordinates several regional cross-sector projects. Currently, about 500 executives from 100 companies are in close contact with the initiative, and many of them regularly participate in the dialogue. The private initiative motivates regional companies and NPOs to develop their social and ecological responsibility and sustainability as well as regularly reporting on successful projects and activities.

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About 35 well-known Carinthian and Styrian companies and organizations are members of the corporate network as well. All member companies are in regular contact with Verantwortung zeigen! and most of them are also working systematically on their responsibility with the aim to develop CSR strategically within the organization. In addition to different consulting services, Strasser & Strasser offers workshops and focus evenings free of charge to transfer know-how practically oriented to the companies' needs. These focus evenings take place every 3 months and include a "speed dating" session, in which executives exchange experiences on social and ecological topics. In 2009, participants from more than 100 companies discussed subjects such as "Successful management of demographic change", "Regional business cooperation" and "climate protection and energy efficiency".

1. Situation and societal issue

Doing business in line with social and ecological issues is increasingly important to companies in South Austria. Although many companies already act responsibly towards their employees and the environment, few of them do so systematically. Hence Verantwortung zeigen! has been set up with the aim of promoting Corporate Social Responsibility in South Austria and it supports companies in assuming their responsibility systematically.

2. Partners

a. Driver

Strasser & Strasser initiated the regional discussion in 2005 and is the organization running the business initiative Verantwortung zeigen! in continuance of a correspondent EU-project in 2007. Since 2000 the company has successfully developed, implemented and evaluated national and international projects, predominantly in the areas of CSR, children, family and education, social affairs and regional development.

Verantwortung zeigen! and especially the corporate network is the result of private engagement by Iris Straßer, head of the consulting company Strasser & Strasser. Her team aims to develop a broad regional discussion around the responsibility of companies and facilitates activities and projects that generate win-win-situations for businesses, regional society and the environment. Up to now many voluntary activities have taken place and with a high amount of personal engagement, so popularity for the concept is already high in the region.

b. Businesses

The following businesses are 'official' members of the VZ! corporate network:

- Businesses: AddIT, ATRIO, BKS Bank AG, DEAKON Degen, Donau Chemie, Dorfhof, EB&P Umweltbüro, Embatex, Feistritzwerke-STEWEAG, HIRSCH Servo, HOBAS, Hotel Hochschober, Kelag, O.P.M., Physiotherapiezentrum B. Stefan, RHI, Saubermacher, SCHWING, Sonnenkraft Österreich, Sto, Technikon, The Cleaning Company, Tiebeldruck, Treibacher Industrie, Wietersdorfer & Peggauer Zementwerke, Kindernest gem. GmbH.

Committed Carinthian and Styrian businesses are the core of Verantwortung zeigen! The companies represented by high-leveled managers and CEOs exchange their experiences on CSR and sustainability, use the know-how of the initiative, work systematically on their

responsibility (with the “VZ! Jahres Check” (“Annual Check”, see 2.e Activities) and implement different projects. Verantwortung zeigen! members furthermore act as role models for other companies.

The companies and organisations in the network pay a small annual amount for being part of the network and for the work on CSR and they are financing the activities of the initiative Verantwortung zeigen!

c. Community organisations

As Verantwortung zeigen! wants to bring the business sector and society into closer contact, nearly all well-known Carinthian NPOs participate. Several organizations and institutions are ‘official’ members of the VZ! corporate network:

- Community and nonprofit organizations: Arge Naturschutz, Diakonie Kärnten, Integrationsfachdienst autArK, SOS Kinderdorf Kärnten, Hilfswerk Kärnten
- Public placement service of Carinthia
- University of Applied Sciences of Carinthia
- Catholic Church of Carinthia

In projects the initiative partners also with:

- respACT austrian business council for sustainable development
- Bertelsmann Foundation (Germany)
- Studio Equalitas (Italia)
- Secondary schools all over Austria (e.g. in the project JUVI)

A special sub-project of the initiative, called JUVI Jugend.Verantwortung.Innovation (Youth, responsibility, innovation) connects schools and companies: A team of the most talented students of a particular school programme (e.g. Federal Secondary College of Engineering) develops new ideas and solutions to a task the company has given. The students spend a week at the company, with full-time coaching from the Verantwortung zeigen! team. JUVI has been carried out very successfully 5 times in 2008/09.

d. Broker/ intermediary organisations

Strasser & Strasser undertakes the lead on initiating new projects and is in close personal contact with all connected companies and many managers and representatives of all partners involved.

As there is close contact to many well-known company owners and CEOs, they help to spread the discussion, introduce new relevant issues, recommend Verantwortung zeigen! to others and give continuous feedback to the hub of the network at Strasser & Strasser.

e. Public administration and government

Several organisations support the initiative by reporting about it and its activities in their media (websites, publications) and subsidize selected activities (focus evenings):

- Federal Economic Chambers Carinthia and Styria
- Industrialists’ Associations Carinthia and Styria
- WIN (business initiative for sustainability initiated by the federal state of Styria)

As the initiative is deliberately built up with a long-term perspective and should mainly be driven by the regional companies, there is little contact with regional government. In Styria “WIN” is a partner of Verantwortung zeigen!. In Carinthia only one public department of the federal state – the “Initiatives for older employees” – is directly involved in the project.

3. Programme Description

a. Initiation

Verantwortung zeigen! has been set up with the aim of promoting Corporate Social Responsibility in South Austria (Carinthia, Styria). The initiative supports companies in assuming their responsibility systematically. Notably committed companies are showcased so that other enterprises and organisations can learn from them. The exchange of experiences across companies and sectors is a characteristic of Verantwortung zeigen! Furthermore, the initiative aims to connect economy and society to benefit both sides. All in all, the objective of Verantwortung zeigen! is to strengthen South Austria as a business location.

“The initiative supports companies in assuming their responsibility systematically.”

b. Process

Verantwortung zeigen! was founded in a 2007 EU-project (Interreg IIIA 2006/07). The result of this project was the publication „Verantwortung zeigen! 2007 – Carinthian economy and social responsibility” with 41 good practice examples of doing business responsibly in Carinthia. The project was continued in 2007 with many of the 41 companies working on their responsibility with the “Jahres-Check” (annual check). In 2008, the initiative was expanded to Styria. In the course of time, Strasser & Strasser have developed many sub-projects in the context of social responsibility and sustainability (e.g. JUVI, Brückenschlag).

The most important step is to spread the regional discussion and to reach all interested companies and organizations in the south of Austria.

Out of the regional discussion several very interesting projects have developed, in which some local companies work on problems in their local communities together with local community partners (e.g. the reduction of streetwork in the city of Villach has led some well-known companies to work on this issue together in the framework of “Verantwortung zeigen!”).

On the other hand the initiative will be in close contact also with international partners and the wider experiences will be shared with others. Out of this the south of Austria should become well-known and attractive as a responsible business-region.

c. Resources

The initiative does not receive any public funds, but is financed by the companies’ fees for consultant services (e.g. the “VZ! Jahres-Check”). The focus evenings were supported by the regional Federal Economic Chambers, the regional Industrialists’ Associations, respACT and WIN respectively. Many activities, especially the extensive daily coordination of the corporate network, are carried out voluntarily.

d. Activities

The regional initiative promotes CSR and connects committed companies by various activities.

Booklet

In 2007, 41 company reports have been created and published in the booklet “Verantwortung zeigen! 2007 – Carinthian economy and social responsibility”. All 41 companies have actively taken part in this project, as well as the HTL Ferlach as a creative partner.

VZ! Annual Check

Many VZ! member companies use the “Jahres Check” to systematically work on and develop their responsibility. Once a year, all fields of action (management, workplace, market, environment, communication and society) are discussed with the management. The result is a company report and additional good practice examples. Both are published at www.verantwortung-zeigen.at. The website currently offers more than 70 good practise examples and numerous reports from companies and NPOs.

VZ! focus-evenings

The initiative continues to organize different events on the topic of CSR and sustainability. Fixed elements include the “VZ! focus-evenings”, which take place approximately every 3 months in Carinthia and Styria. The aim of these focus-evenings is to present particularly successfully projects and activities on a special topic (about 8 projects per evening) and exchange experiences across companies in the so-called “Speed dating” session. On average, 30 – 40 executives discuss and exchange ideas at the VZ! focus-evenings. In 2009, the following topics have been covered:

- “Older employees and successful demographic change management” (March, Carinthia)
- “Apprenticeship training and junior staff development” (April, Styria)
- “Lived responsibility especially in SME” (June, Styria)
- “Climate protection and energy efficiency (July, Carinthia)
- “Climate protection and energy efficiency (September, Styria)
- “Business and regionalism” (October, Carinthia)

In addition to the focus-evenings, various other events are organised by the initiative. In January 2009, for example, a dialogue on the economic crisis took place, as well as an “information breakfast” on TRIGOS – the Austrian CSR-Award. In summer 2009 Verantwortung zeigen! together with the Familie & Beruf Management GmbH, informed executives from businesses and NPOs about the “Audit berufundfamilie”, a certification for especially family-friendly companies.

VZ! Newsletter

About 550 executives receive regular information via the Verantwortung zeigen! newsletter about the initiative’s activities, new reports and good practice, interesting studies and more.

Project “Brückenschlag”

The “Brückenschlag” programme enables executives to spend a week at a nonprofit organization improving their social competence and in return managers of nonprofit organisations can improve management competences in companies as well. In Carinthia

about 20 managers have already changed allegiance since 2008 and many more will follow. Partner of the programme is the Catholic Church.

In future Verantwortung zeigen! companies will increasingly initiate and drive local projects and work together on important social issues. Joint work on social issues will carry forward and strengthen the network amongst the participants.

The popularity of the initiative in the region has to increase further, as Strasser & Strasser wants to maximise social profit – so the initiative needs the commitment and support of many prominent social and economical people and organisations. The growing international recognition of Verantwortung zeigen! will help too.

4. Programme Evaluation

No systematic evaluation with questionnaires has been conducted. However, the increasing number of participating companies and executives and the good feedback are indicators for the success of the project.

As the companies pay for the work of Verantwortung zeigen! it is obvious, that the work of the network is well-accepted: If the partners are paying for the cooperation it is relevant and important for them. Otherwise they would not participate and invest their time in order to finance the regional network.

5. Impact

a. Benefits to the local/ regional community

The local community benefits from a growing number of regional companies that do business in line with social and ecological issues. The example of the developed local streetwork-project in the city of Villach (Carinthia) will show the broad benefit of the cooperation for local society.

b. Benefits of the community organisations

As most of the well-known NPOs are equal partners of the regional network, their executives come into close contact with representatives of companies. These contacts can lead to long-term partnerships. The programme “Brückenschlag” enables businesses and NPOs to learn of each other directly, managers from NPOs improve their management competences and managers of enterprises reflect social competences and change them for the better – the employees in turn benefit from that.

c. Benefits to the companies

Companies benefit from a network that offers know-how and the exchange of experience with other companies and nonprofit-organisations in South Austria. Verantwortung zeigen! supports businesses by developing their social responsibility by a wide range of innovative projects and activities. The initiative furthermore offers a platform, where companies can report on their projects and present themselves.

The employees, especially in small and medium sized companies, are proud and motivated if they see how committed the company-owner and their managers are to the initiative. As they can hear or can read in the company’s annual report about the variety of social and ecologic responsible actions, they feel greater commitment to their company as well.

As the popularity of Verantwortung zeigen! increases on the regional level, the committed companies also enhance their image.

d. Further Impact

- Increased awareness for corporate responsibility in many large companies
- New motivation especially for the most engaged companies of the region

6. Challenges

Developing a powerful regional cross-company network requires a lot of conviction, a lot of energy and time. As Verantwortung zeigen! is a private initiative Strasser & Strasser have to challenge the fine line between unpaid and paid activities every day. So both take each step professionally and individually. This is valued and well-accepted by the initiative's partners.

In future Strasser & Strasser will build up cooperations in written form with their institutional partners and as the network grows they are an interesting partner for events and public discussions and regional media as well.

Another very important point and challenge is to identify the relevant issues and to develop the best programmes to work on them. This needs very close contact especially to the companies and a lot of new ideas for projects and attractive activities.

Also creating the awareness to reach all interested companies costs a lot of time and money. As Strasser & Strasser have little money for promotion they have to compensate with excellent business and a lot of motivation that they share with their partners. This way is not very quick but authentic.

7. Endorsements

Verantwortung zeigen! was nominated for the Austrian CSR-Award TRIGOS in 2008 (category "society"). Moreover, Iris Straßer is invited to present the initiative on national and international congresses several times a year. About the activities of the initiative is regularly reported in the media (see press news on www.verantwortung-zeigen.at).

8. Contact & Further Information

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INCLUDE – Pathways to Community Investment

The European project INCLUDE provides local intermediaries like civil society organisations, economic development agencies, chambers of commerce and public authorities with support that will help them to engage businesses in innovative cross-sectoral partnerships. INCLUDE identifies on a worldwide scale good examples of collaborative business initiatives as well as business engagement in cross-sectoral partnerships, which contribute towards skills development and employability of disadvantaged groups, towards social inclusion and innovation in addressing societal challenges and communicates them.

INCLUDE builds upon the results of the CSR-Laboratory “Skills for Employability enhanced through Employee Engagement” which was carried out as part of the European Alliance for CSR and is run jointly by UPJ and the ENGAGE initiative coordinated by Business in the Community (BITC). Partners of the project are the German Federal Department of Labour and Social Affairs, Citi-Group, Asociata pentru Relatii Comunitare (Romania), Önkéntes Központ Alapítvány (Hungary), SMartKolektiv (Serbia), Pontis Foundation (Slovakia) and Özel Sektör Gönüllüler Derneği (Turkey).

The project is supported by the European Commission (Directorate-General for Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities).

Further information about the project is available at www.bitc.org.uk/global/include.html (in English) www.upj.de/include (in German)

UPJ

UPJ is the German national network of engaged businesses and local non-profit intermediary organizations. Its projects and programmes create new connections between businesses, civil society organizations and public authorities thus contributing to solve societal challenges and to shape sustainable communities. UPJ, a registered charity under German law, provides organizations from the business, community and public sectors with information and consultancy to improve their Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Social Responsibility activities. www.upj.de



ENGAGE

ENGAGE is an international programme that brings together businesses and community organisations around the globe to increase the quality and amount of employee community engagement in their local communities. Its mission is twofold: To inspire, mobilise and support companies to develop sustainable community investment programmes, and to provide community organisations with a network, tools and support that will help them work more effectively with business partners. www.engageyouremployees.org



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