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## **PR TECHNOLOGIES FOR CREATING THE IMAGE OF A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE COMPANY**

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### **Abstract**

The article is devoted to the study of modern experience in the implementation of corporate social responsibility policy. The study is relevant due to the fact that nowadays committing to the principles of corporate social responsibility is becoming a key aspect of the company's activities, as well as making a profit. The social responsibility of an organization is becoming the most important factor for its economic freedom and efficiency. The author examines tools for implementing the social responsibility policy in Russia using the example of Ingka Centres. The company's strategy takes into account modern principles of social responsibility and is aimed at development that is capable to create the most positive socio-economic changes in the regions of its presence, as well as to improve production results. The social policy of Ingka Centres is a significant competitive advantage of the company; it increases its attraction in the labor market and is aimed at attracting highly qualified employees and establishing long-term retention with them. Media coverage of social projects and events implemented by the company actually acts as commercial advertising, being an important tool for building audience loyalty. Two effective projects of the corporation, implemented in Omsk, are considered in the present article: the ecological campaign “Sort and Collect” and the social and educational campaign “Free City Tours”. Both projects fully comply with the mission of the studied organization and the classical understanding of corporate social responsibility as a voluntary decision of companies to participate in improving society and protecting the environment.

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*Keywords:* Corporate social responsibility, social responsibility, Ingka Centres, ecological campaign, social campaign, PR technologies



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## 1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a mandatory element of the strategy of companies that care about their business image at the present stage of economic development: organizations of publish non-financial reports, engagement in charity work, social investments, sponsorship, providing grants, etc. Modern conditions for the development of the world economy increasingly require not only building an effective production process, but also strengthening the reputation and image of the company through the optimal use of resources. It is the “benevolence” of the public that allows enterprises not only to keep their heads above water in conditions of economic instability, but also to increase profits.

Currently, the social side of the enterprises’ activities is becoming more and more important. However, we note that, unfortunately, there is still no theoretical and methodological basis for the social responsibility of integrated corporate structures, which would allow the most detailed analysis of the processes of its formation and functioning, and assess the role of management of organizations in these processes. The lack of development of the social responsibility concept does not make it possible to assess the real influence of the factors that form it and contribute to its increase.

## 2. Problem Statement

### 2.1. The essence of social responsibility of business

Thus, there is a huge number of definitions of CSR in the world practice today, which imply:

1) A concept where companies voluntarily integrate social and environmental policies into business and their relationship with the entire range of company-related organizations and people (DeCotis, 2021; Swanson & Orlitzky, 2017);

2) An effective communication system of a social subject with its public, which ensures the optimization of social interactions with significant segments of the environment (Mescon et al., 1997);

3) A constant commitment of business to ethical manners and contribution to economic development, while improving the quality of life of its employees and their families, as well as of society at large (Baltacheyeva & Torba, 2017; Bataeva et al., 2018; Contini et al., 2019).

European Commission gives a fairly deep concept of corporate social responsibility of enterprises: “Corporate social responsibility, in its essence, is a concept that reflects the voluntary decision of companies to participate in improving society and protecting the environment” (as cited in Bataeva, 2007, pp. 91-97). Other definitions focus only on certain aspects of business social responsibility (Agudelo et al., 2019; Ali et al., 2017), but in one form or another they all include issues of development, professional growth, protection of the rights and health of personnel and members of the community where the company operates. “Corporate social responsibility is a concept based on the idea that companies should not only pursue their own profits but also be aware of the effects that their activities have on society. Companies should bear their share of responsibility to build a sustainable society and environment” (Marumo, 2020, p. 205).

## **2.2. The importance of social projects for company image**

The introduction of CSR principles into the company's activities and commitment to them is, as practice shows, not only socially, but also economically justified necessity, since it allows achieving the following results:

1) to improve the company's reputation by creating a positive attitude and increasing trust from the target audience (Contini et al., 2020);

2) to strengthen relationships with business partners, as more and more business relationships are built with socially successful companies (Marik, 2015);

3) to attract and retain qualified personnel, since CSR is an important factor in motivating employees and attracting highly qualified specialists according to research (Abulhanova et al., 2016; Averin, 2014);

4) to form a zone of social well-being around the enterprise (social projects attract more and more attention from the media, which often provides an economic and communication effect comparable to the effectiveness of PR activities) (Milkina, 2018);

5) to increase the loyalty of existing customers and attract new ones (companies, perceived as socially responsible, are increasingly becoming "consumer choice companies", which provides them with certain advantages in a highly competitive market) (Abulhanova et al., 2016).

## **3. Research Questions**

The main research questions of the study are as follows:

- What are the main modern approaches to corporate social responsibility? There is not a single definition that would describe what the business social responsibility really is.
- What are the benefits of corporate social responsibility policy?
- What are the distinguishing features of the regional experience of corporate social responsibility?
- What are the communicative and socio-economic impacts of Ingka Centres' social campaigns?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to analyze socially responsible activities of Ingka Centres (MEGA, IKEA). The regional experience of the MEGA and IKEA companies (Ingka Centres corporation) in the development and implementation of the social responsibility policy is analyzed. We emphasize that the communication activities of any organization, including those related to corporate social responsibility, must correspond to the company's mission and its positioning strategy.

## **5. Research Methods**

To reach the purpose of the research, the author employed the following research methods:

- Methods of systematization and theoretical generalization.
- Direct sampling method.

- Participant observation method.
- Questionnaire survey method.
- Methods for statistical data analysis.

## 6. Findings

The mission of Ingka Centres is to change people's everyday life for the better. All IKEA divisions, including Centres Russia, maintain this principle. In all its activities, the company strives to follow the principles of maximum efficiency within the framework of its sustainable development strategy – the People and Planet Positive strategy. All these actions help the company to become ultimately not only the best place to shop, but also the best shopping center for work, shopping, meetings, walks and leisure. Let us analyze the company's strategy. *A sustainable lifestyle* (People) is about meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising future generations in being able to meet their own needs. *Energy and resources* (Planet) is the ability to live without exceeding the capabilities of the planet and protecting the environment. *People and local communities* (Positive) is the promotion of a stable, healthy and just society with equal opportunities for all its members who have the opportunity to realize their potential and achieve success. Thus, the quality and safety of the goods sold by the company is a top priority. MEGA, as a part of Ingka Centres corporation, builds its communications in accordance with the mission of this corporation and strives to ensure that “customers return, not goods”.

The main areas of social responsibility of Ingka Centres business are **energy saving, water saving, waste reduction and recycling**.

It is worth emphasizing once again that all socially oriented projects at Ingka Centres are implemented within the framework of a general sustainable development strategy, and all divisions of the Ingka Centres group of companies follow it. We note the high communication efficiency of the projects implemented by the company: there is great interest from the media in the federal and regional social products of the company. The Wish Tree, Change Promotion, opening of new playgrounds or programs aimed at waste sorting – all of these initiatives are covered by journalists so that people know about them and can contribute.

In 2016 MEGA and IKEA announced the launch of a waste sorting campaign in Omsk, dedicated to the city's anniversary.

The purpose of this project is to draw the attention of Omsk residents to the problem of waste disposal, to build the skill of sorting household waste, to teach people to respect clean city. For this, Omsk MEGA and the waste management company Region55 have placed special containers for waste sorting in Omsk. The slogan of the project: *Take a step towards the clean streets and common areas of Omsk together with MEGA and IKEA!* The campaign “Sort and Collect” was designed for a specific target audience, i.e., everyone who is not indifferent to the ecological future of the city. The urgency of making a decision on the implementation of the social project (promotion campaign) “Sort and Collect” was due to the severity of the problem of utilization, burial and processing of solid household waste. One of the objectives of the described project was the installation of specialized waste bins in order to teach residents to sort household waste. It was assumed that Omsk residents would sort waste into four categories: metal, paper, glass and plastic. Separate bins were installed for each type of waste in containers.

The main results of the project are considered.

The project “Sort and Collect” was designed for two months (August-September 2016) and it was expected to install 50 containers for waste sorting (42 containers in the common areas, 8 on the territory of schools), as well as educational eco-activities for children and adults.

The main goal of the “Sort and Collect” promotional campaign was to attract public attention to the problem of waste disposal and to the issues of responsible attitude to the environment.

During the “Sort and Collect” promotional campaign, 10 tons of garbage were collected: 3000 kg of paper and cardboard, 80 kg of plastic, 120 kg of glass.

More than 500 kg of sorted waste was collected by Omsk companies and journalists for further disposal.

In total, more than 2000 children (students from 7 secondary schools) listened to 15 lectures on the importance of high-quality disposal of solid household waste and the need for their sorting.

1000 children from 14 residential complexes took part in the project “Sort and Collect” (objects of research).

Young project participants painted over 200 eco-bags and over 200 eco-t-shirts during 10 workshops held at the MEGA Omsk shopping center as part of the “Sort and Collect” promotional campaign. Furthermore, over 500 plants were planted.

Participants of various eco-relay races ran 10,000 meters as part of entertainment events.

According to the consolidated estimate of the project 1,780,994.65 rubles were spent directly for the preparation and implementation of all events out of 5 million rubles allocated for the implementation of the project. The rest of the funds were spent on organizing garbage disposal outside the city (the work was carried out by the project partner OOO Region 55).

After 1 year since the development of the “Sort and Collect” project, it was concluded that it was socially and commercially ineffective for a number of reasons. Due to the modern way of life in Russia and the Russian mentality, it turned out to be extremely difficult to make waste sorting a part of the way of life. Such a project must be approached in a comprehensive manner, including participation of the Government and Administration. The terms of the project implementation (3-4 months) are extremely insufficient, which led to low efficiency.

Thus, in general, the social project “Sort and Collect”, despite its relevance, turned out to be not fully effective. This is due to the *unpreparedness of the population* of the Omsk region for drastic changes associated with the sorting of household waste, as well as *the lack of comprehensive support from the regional authorities* and the *inadequacy of the laws* regulating the issue under study.

The sustainable development strategy of Ingka Centres is primarily related to an ecological lifestyle, which, however, does not contradict the implementation of social initiatives of a different kind. Thus, in 2017, it was decided to develop a new project “Free City Tours” aimed at strengthening the image of the MEGA shopping center, as well as addressing issues related to the organization of leisure activities for Omsk residents. It was a socially significant initiative, thanks to which everyone could take part in any free excursion around the city of Omsk, improve their cultural level, and get acquainted with the sights of the city. This promotion campaign is fully consistent with the strategy of positioning MEGA as a socially responsible company: MEGA Omsk supports the development of culture in the city of Omsk, is the creator

of the only free cultural space in the network “Cultural Center”, which opened in January 2017. The cultural center is positioned as a creative space where educational lectures and workshops are held every day, which allows MEGA visitors to spend their leisure time productively.

The main goal of the social project “Free City Tours” is to remind Omsk residents that the city is full of interesting and fascinating places, cultural events and creative people that theaters, museums, galleries are closer than we sometimes think. The project slogan: *Become a tourist in your own city*.

The main results of the project are outlined.

1. As a result, the social project “Free City Tours” ran from September to October and included 15 unique routes around the city of Omsk and its attractions. We also emphasize that some of the routes were implemented in the inclusive format.

2. 58 excursions were held during the social project; it is more than originally planned. The increase in the number of excursion routes and excursions was due to the underestimated interest of Omsk residents in this social project. In total, more than 1200 people took part in it as a result of the project. At the end of the project, a list of more than 10,500 people wishing to get on excursions was collected.

3. Most of the excursions were unique, as they could not be found in an identical form in the list of excursions offered by travel agencies in Omsk. Thus, thanks to the partnership with theaters, it was possible to organize several unique excursions around the theater backstage. And through cooperation with MKR-Media, about 70 people were able to get on the other side of the television screen and see the television production and recording of the news. The project organizers attracted 5 partner organizations to conduct excursions during the social project.

4. The project was covered by all the leading mass media of the city, which drew attention to the problem and the project.

5. There was no additional fee for the entrance tickets from the visitors of the excursions, which is due to the principled position of the MEGA Omsk administration. However, all participants could check with the tour guide the cost of the ticket, which once again made it clear: visiting museums, theaters, galleries in Omsk is more than affordable.

6. The social project “Free City Tours”, as shown by a survey based on the results of the campaign, was able to influence the main target segments and contributed to the destruction of the stereotype that “nothing happens” in Omsk. That contributed to the understanding of the fact that it is necessary to form the level of culture from childhood; demonstrated to the seniors that modern youth is not a lost generation, since the entire project team consisted of young people under 30.

7. The possibility of launching the next stage of the “Free City Tours” project in Omsk depends on the degree of involvement of Omsk residents. After the completion of the project, the organizers of the PR campaign thought about continuing the excursions, only in a different format, but using the same methodology for developing marketing.

## **7. Conclusion**

Summing up the studied theoretical aspects of business social responsibility and the analysis of 2 regional socially oriented projects, we will formulate a number of final conclusions.

Corporate social responsibility is the activity of a company aimed at the implementation of significant social programs that contribute to the development of the company and society at large. Its results contribute to improving the company's image and its development, as well as increasing business ties with the state, business partners, communities and organizations. Considering the tendencies of the Russian Federation in relation to CSR, we can note that this area is only developing and is being practiced mainly by large companies. We can say that CSR is not just charity, but an effective and generally recognized factor of competition. Therefore, it is important that the social projects implemented by the organization should be in line with its positioning strategy. So, as a global company, IKEA has remained true to Swedish traditions and values, among which the main place is taken by economy and care for the environment. The scale of the company has allowed various business to make a significant contribution to solving environmental and social problems. More than 250 million people visit MEGA shopping centers and IKEA stores every year. If you inspire them to change their habits and be more environmentally friendly, you can achieve significant results.

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