

Engaging Civil Society in Testing & Market Outreach

Civil Society Organisations can play an important role in the testing of your assumptions with regards to your clients or target markets, but their support can become a real igniter for reaching the market and getting your product known.

When considering plastic revaluation, it is important to bear in mind that the plastic lifecycle involves a wide range of actors and stakeholders, which have different agendas, responsibilities and address the needs of different groups. Involving them in your process can be relevant as they bring different considerations and ideas to the table.

There are different across the different stages of the plastic lifecycle, such as the plastic producers, governments and waste management companies, however, for the purpose of a plastic revaluation process based upon co-creation, here we focus on the collaboration with the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

The CSOs such as NGOs and trade and industry associations play a role in advocating for policy changes, raising awareness of plastic pollution, and promoting sustainable consumer behavior. They can also collaborate with companies to develop solutions to reducing plastic waste, and it is in this role where they can provide a high added value to the plastic revaluation process.

Benefits involving CSOs.

CSOs, depending on their core activities can provide a range of benefits for your process. Here are some examples:

- Identifying needs and preferences of consumers, all CSOs tend to publish different studies and/or trend analyses on the developments in society, they have, depending on their core activity good insights and data.
- CSOs in essence have a wide network and collaborate with a range of stakeholders, this can help to tap even more into new ideas or developments and generate support for your efforts to reevaluate your plastic waste. They also tend to organize events and get together, which can be a great place to present your ideas and test the assumptions for your (plastic revaluated) product.
- CSOs tend to provide training and capacity building, and can help in the process of preparing your staff better with specific knowledge on certain topics.

Of course it is not all roses and moonshine, as in any collaboration process, it is a matter of give and take, as said CSOs also have their own agendas and are accountable to their members, volunteers and/or donators or sponsors. They will want to see their core activities benefitted from the process as well.

Steps to follow.

1. Define why it is relevant to involve a CSO in your plastic revaluation process, and in which phase or phases you want their contribution. You can for instance decide to only involve them in the testing of assumptions and prototyping, but you can also involve them already in the ideation stage and have them co-create with you the idea for your product. You need to have a clear idea why they are relevant for your particular situation.
2. Learn from others – search for related cases or experiences in which CSOs and businesses, especially SMEs, have collaborated and see how you can learn from them. You can search

on the internet, but going through your networks and asking for experiencing will give more insight on the pitfalls. Success stories then to be highly communicated, failures or things that do not work less so. Focus on all kind of experiences, not only those related to sustainability or waste.

3. Define the goals and expected outcomes. As you are involving “outside” players, communicating clearly what is expected of them, what the goals and expected outcomes of the plastic revaluation process are is key to avoid misunderstandings. If you do not have a clear idea on what you want to achieve, how can you convey the message to others?
4. Identify the challenges and barriers in the change process. Bringing in CSOs and “outsiders” in the process might generate resistance from your own staff involved in the plastic revaluation process, they might perceive them as “intruders” or doubt their competences and integrity. It is important to work with your staff to make sure they all understand the importance of the CSOs involvement. At the same time the staff or volunteers of the CSOs can perceive that the effort of the company is more for “greenwashing” and not really because they care about the environment.
5. Find solutions to overcome these barriers and create a feeling of pertinence and joint ownership of the process. Think of specific activities which can reduce the barriers and contribute to generate trust between the company staff and CSO. Teambuilding activities and a clear set of “rules of play” can be helpful tools.
6. Identify the knowledge and expertise required a successful implementation and closing of the plastic revaluation process, and identify the gaps within your staff, or areas where this could be reinforced. This gives you an idea on what type of CSO you should be looking for.
7. Identify potential CSO partners & dialogue to select the one you feel aligns most with your needs and business.
8. Initiate the co-creation and co-design process with your partners, and evaluate and monitor the progress and achievement towards the goals and expected outcomes on a continuous basis.

Case studies & Examples

VinylPlus program's Recovinyl is a crucial component and the primary driver of PVC recycling in Europe. The European PVC value chain launched Recovinyl in 2003 with the goal of facilitating PVC waste collection and recycling in Recovinyl accredits converting businesses that use recycled PVC to create new PVC products as well as businesses that recycle PVC waste. It is an example of a collaboration between an industry association and their businesses.

La Hormiga Verde is an electronics recycling company, which dismantles these devices and separates the raw materials by type to then sell them and reintroduce these materials into the market, giving them a second life.

At the same time it also a social enterprise, and works together with different NGOs in the field of inclusion to employ persons at risk of exclusion on the labour market.

They collaborate actively with different entities and organisations to turn “their” plastic waste into new products that this entity then re-uses, a good example is the collaboration with a government stakeholder like a municipality, where the collected plastic waste was turned into office desks.

Resources

Links:

Successful corporate-NGO partnerships

<https://www.fm-magazine.com/issues/2019/apr/successful-corporate-ngo-partnerships.html>

Partnering with NGOs: The 4 Keys to Success

<https://nbs.net/partnering-with-ngos-the-4-keys-to-success/>

What are the key elements to a successful corporate/NGO partnership?

<https://getrevere.com/what-are-the-key-elements-to-a-successful-corporate-ngo-partnership/>

Videos:

7 tips for creating successful partnerships with ngos

<https://youtu.be/XprnSLu3Yl8>

Successful collaboration

<https://youtu.be/wyx3fOEVuDo>