

ORGANIZATION SUMMARY

Citizens Market is an exciting new nonprofit organization in Boston that recently won \$70,000 in seed funding from Echoing Green. Our mission is to empower consumers with tools to shop responsibly. We're currently raising \$151,000 to pilot a crowdsourced website where information about corporate behavior is organized into scores that consumers can see while they shop.

The Problem

Picture this. *The nearest gas stations to your home are a Shell and a Chevron, sitting right across the street from each other. How do you decide between them? You probably don't care where you buy your gas. But you might care about oil spills. Chevron's subsidiary Texaco is responsible for the worst oil disaster in history, having dumped 19 billion gallons of toxic waste and 16 million gallons of crude oil into Ecuador's Amazonian rainforest between 1972 and 1991. To this day, Chevron refuses to account for this behavior.*

The private sector has phenomenal power to change the world, for good or for ill. Many of our most pressing societal issues are profoundly impacted by the private sector: pollution and global warming; economic opportunities for women and minorities; labor practices in developing countries; special interest lobbying and campaign financing.

As consumers, we often fail to reward companies with strong performance on these issues – or punish companies with poor performance. We have the leverage to change business incentives, but we need reliable information and tools to make responsible marketplace decisions.

Our Vision

Our mission is to empower consumers with tools to shop their values. We have a vision where consumers think about corporate social responsibility (CSR) as naturally as they think about product price and quality. Social performance is fully integrated into business strategy. Companies compete on every social and environmental issue in our database.

With just a few seconds on our website – www.CitizensMarket.org – you discover that Shell has a much better score than Chevron for social and environmental performance. You can search our crowdsourced database for thousands of other companies or brands. And you can buy your gas and other products accordingly.

Picture the impact.

Our Solution

Our nonprofit organization, Citizens Market, is developing a crowdsourced website and other tools to share information on the social and environmental performance of companies.

We invite anyone to contribute information – a rating with brief rationale and sources – for any company's performance on a certain issue, such as treatment of minorities, political lobbying or toxic emissions. Our volunteer contributors will include journalists, academics, CSR professionals, expert organizations, and ordinary citizens.

Our contributors' submissions will be reviewed and rated a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" by peers. Contributors will receive long-term scores based on all the peer ratings they received. In this way, persuasive contributors will have a higher impact on the company's final score and will receive recognition for providing quality information. We'll publish our algorithms to ensure transparency and encourage feedback.

By aggregating our contributors' ratings of corporate behavior, as weighted by peer ratings and contributor scores, our website will automatically generate a "report card" of issue scores for each company. Each company's profile will be linked with its brands and products' barcodes.

The database will deliver personalized results. Consumers may assign priority weights for the various social and environmental issues. When a consumer requests a score for a brand, that score will incorporate a weighted average of the issue scores, thereby reflecting the consumer's values.

Now picture this. As you fill your gas at Shell you decide to get a snack. Chex or Pringles? You pull out a mobile phone with a barcode scanning application. With one swipe of your mobile phone camera over the barcode on a can of Pringles, your phone instantly displays a score for Procter & Gamble, the owner of the Pringles brand. Swiping a bag of Chex reveals a different score for General Mills.

Ten years ago, this scenario would have been impossible. Now it is just around the corner. Our consumers will have convenient access to corporate scores as they move through the real or virtual marketplace. Anyone will be able to quickly search the website for free. A widget will enable consumers to view company scores while shopping at other websites. With new mobile technologies, such as barcode scanners and text messages, consumers will use their mobile phones to instantly view scores as they walk down the store aisle. In this way, consumers will rapidly compare the social performance of companies as they move through any marketplace.

Our Competitive Edge

Other organizations have developed online corporate rating systems, but not with our unique combination of capacity, credibility and convenience. Our model allows users to contribute unlimited information about an unlimited number of companies, from the largest multi-national to the diner down the street. Our system is therefore best positioned to return a score for each consumer's search query, minimizing the frustration of searching for a brand and seeing no score. Our peer rating system will leverage the most persuasive reviews, and our publicly available scoring algorithms and nonprofit status will boost our credibility among consumers concerned about conflict of interest. Finally, our company scores will be customized for each consumer's values and will be conveniently accessible via the web or mobile phone.

Our Market & Financial Plan

At first we'll approach our strongest consumer segment – people who already try to shop responsibly – but over time we'll broaden our target audience. We'll accept individual donations to our website and recoup costs through subscriptions to our mobile phone application and annual data reports. Our expenses will be limited to the salaries of our small staff and costs related to our hardware, supplies and office space.

Our Team

Citizens Market was incubated in the Social Enterprise Collaboratory at the Harvard Kennedy School. Our team is connected to CSR networks and experienced in database and website design:

- **Stéphane de Messières**, Executive Director. MPP 2007, Harvard Kennedy School. Echoing Green Fellow 2009. Consultant to Oxfam America Private Sector Team.
- **Luke Griffiths**, Volunteer Web Developer. BS 2005, Civil Engineering, Northwestern University.
- **Kyle Magida**, Volunteer Content Development Manager. BA 2008, History & Science, Harvard College.
- **Grace Mathews**, Volunteer Web Designer. MA, Visual Arts Management, New York University.
- **Mark Muskardin**, Volunteer Web Developer. MSIT 2007, Carnegie Mellon University.
- **Isaac Wohl**, Volunteer Content Development Manager. MPP 2007, Harvard Kennedy School.
- **Vanessia Wu**, Volunteer Product Manager. BA 2005, Computer Science, Brown University.

Our Request

In May 2009 our team won a \$70,000 Echoing Green Fellowship that enabled us to hire a full-time Executive Director for two years. Our team has prepared a business plan, incorporated our nonprofit organization, recruited a Board of Advisors and posted an online prototype with over 200 registered users. We developed our legal and marketing strategies through partnerships with the CyberLaw Clinic at Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet & Society and teams of MBA students at Boston University's School of Management. We're using donated office space from BzzAgent, a hip marketing firm in Boston's South End.

We're on a roll. But we risk losing our momentum without increased technical capacity for web development. Our volunteers have designed improved features to enable our users to rate peer reviews, add local companies to our database, and customize company scores according to individual values. Now we need a full-time Technical Director to program these features and manage our website launch. **With funding of \$151,000, we can establish our own office and hire a Technical Director to pilot the website.**

Consumers can make a difference – with the right tools. Join us in our mission to empower them.

Contact: Stéphane de Messières, Executive Director, sdemessieres@citizensmarket.org, (617) 429-3702

View our full plan online at http://www.citizensmarket.org/Citizens_Market_Organization_Plan.pdf