



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2018

## Mission

Rank a Brand contributes to a transition towards a sustainable and fair global economy by stimulating brands to continuously perform more responsibly, driven by consumers continuously making more responsible shopping choices. We do this by:

1. Creating a large international movement and a well-used tool by and for consumers to assess and compare policies and performance of brands on sustainability and social responsibility.
2. Creating pressure on brands through consumers, media and competitors to continuously improve their policies and performance on sustainability and social responsibility, and to be fully transparent on this.
3. Increasing awareness among consumers of their responsibility and influence on brands, and encouraging and facilitating them to select sustainable and fair brands.

## Positioning

Rank a Brand is an independent international brand-comparison website by and for consumers who want to buy sustainable and fair products or services.

Rank a Brand assesses and ranks major brands in several sectors on sustainability and social responsibility, and uses these rankings to inform and advise consumers, general public and media.

Rank a Brand encourages both consumers and brands to act responsibly, sustainably and fair, directly as well as through publicity and social media. We encourage competition between brands on sustainability and social responsibility.

Rank a Brand positions itself as a reliable and influential watchdog and information source for consumers, business and media regarding the assessment of brands on sustainability and social responsibility. Our rankings and assessments are fully transparent and based on verifiable public data and relevant specific criteria.






Rank a Brand cooperates with other organizations who are able and willing to contribute to our mission and can help us to increase our impact.

## Core values

The core values of Rank a Brand are: fair, reliable and independent.

## Concept

Rank a Brand assesses and ranks international and national consumer brands on sustainability and social responsibility. Based on scores on several criteria the brand gets a label varying from A-label (green, best, 75-100% of maximum score) to E-label (red, worst, 0-15% of maximum score), providing the consumer a clear advice whether or not to buy this brand.

Score	% correct	Advice
 A	75-100	Shop away!
 B	55-75	On track towards sustainability
 C	35-55	On its way, but can do better
 D	15-35	Should do better
 E	0-15	Beter put your wallet away

We focus on brands rather than products or companies, because brands are recognizable for consumers and are sensitive on their reputation. Our position is that brands should not offer only a few sustainable or fair products, but should implement sustainable and socially responsible policies for their full range of products and services and for all their processes and suppliers, and in all countries where they operate. Another, more pragmatic reason is that assessing individual products is less efficient and less reliable because of the required data and effort.

We select sectors and brands which have a significant impact on sustainability and social issues, and in which consumers show an interest.

Our position is that brands should demonstrate to their consumers that they have actually implemented sustainable and socially responsible policies. The brand has the responsibility to prove so and to be transparent about it. The assessment on their policies and performance is done in a transparent way by trained and qualified rankers of Rank a Brand, based on verifiable public data and relevant specific criteria. These criteria are defined in consultation with key stakeholders and experts. We expect brands to continuously improve, learn from best practices and take good notice of relevant developments and requirements. Therefore the standards which they have to meet will get higher over time. Like we will continuously improve our research and criteria.

## Key strategic objectives 2018

In order to progress on our mission we aim to increase our impact and influence on brands and consumers. Therefore we have formulated the following strategic objectives to be reached in 2018.

We want to increase our impact in the following way:

1. Increase the number of users of our website and app to at least 2,5 million.
2. Extend our activities to more countries.
3. Increase the amount of ranked brands to at least 1000, of which 600 international brands.

In order to be able to increase our activities and impact, and also to address the weaknesses in our organization, we need to do the following:

4. Review our methodology and criteria in order to ensure high quality and support for our ways of working.
5. Build a professional organization with 3 to 6 FTE paid staff members, in addition to our international network of voluntary rankers.
6. Create a coalition with 3 to 6 strategic partners.
7. Increase the annual income to between € 200.000 and € 300.000. This is the amount we will roughly need to be able to build a professional organization and decrease our vulnerability.

These 7 objectives are elaborated in the paragraphs below. Specific activities to address and monitor these objectives will be formulated in annual plans. These objectives we aim to have achieved by 2018. After that (or sooner if possible) we want to further increase our activities, brands, supporters and income.

### 1. Impact and outreach

We aim to increase our impact and influence on brands and consumers. Therefore we have to improve our brand awareness and media attention, as well increase our supporter base and the number of users of our website and app, as well as the number of countries where we are active. We will seek more free publicity and will respond to relevant issues in traditional and social media.

Our impact is difficult to measure exactly, but we can use some figures that give us a reasonable indications. The main impact indicators that we want to use are:

- Number of brands who mention Rank a Brand on their website, in their CSR report or in other publications, or who correspond with us about their ranking and/or CSR policies
- Number of consumers who send messages to brands encouraging them to improve their corporate social responsibility
- Number of visitors and users of our website and apps
- Media value: media attention for Rank a Brand and our rankings influences reputation and value of brands that are ranked by us, either positively or negatively

The number of users is already large (about 400.000 in the first 6 months of 2015), and we aim to increase this to at least 2,5 million in 2018. For the other indicators mentioned above we don't have

actual figures available and therefore we cannot set targets yet. This will be done in annual plans (subject to the possibility to monitor these indicators, which we need to check).

## **2. Internationalization**

We want to extend our activities to more countries. We will first focus on the current countries Netherlands and Germany, with the addition of Flanders (2015-16), ensuring a solid foundation there. The next step will be extending to other German as well as English speaking countries (2017-18), and later other European countries and elsewhere. Eventually we want to become a fully global organization, but this will take many years.

## **3. Production**

We want to gradually extend the amount of ranked brands from 600 brands in 2015, of which 400 international, to 1000 brands in 2018, of which 600 international. Our main focus is on international brands plus the main national brands in priority countries, which are the English, German and Dutch speaking countries. Within these groups we focus on sectors and brands that our supporters and website/app visitors show most interest in.

## **4. Review methodology and criteria**

In 2015-16 we will review and further develop our ranking methodology and process in consultation with the Advisory Council, our partners and other stakeholders, in order to ensure high quality and to achieve support for our ways of working.

Our criteria will be reviewed by an independent Committee of Experts with the same purpose. We will invite experts from our strategic partners, key stakeholders and possibly other parties. We will consider to include additional aspects in our criteria, such as animal welfare, living wage and tax justice.

## **5. Organization and governance**

We need to extend and professionalize the organization in order to be able to extend our activities, and to ensure high quality and continuity. Therefore we need to create a core team of 3-6 FTE professionals with contracts and salaries that are normal in the NGO sector. Other reasons are creating internal sustainability, offering a decent living wage (practice what you preach) and showing appreciation to our staff. Core competencies needed in the team are: research, communication, fundraising, management and support/administration.

In addition to the paid staff we also need to extend the international team of volunteers (rankers and also other functions) and provide them with professional training and support, as well as opportunities for developing their skills and expertise.

The executive responsibility for all activities, publications and the hiring and firing of staff and volunteers is with the managing director, but the team members will be empowered and self-managing as much as possible. The Board has a supervisory and supportive role, with the authority to approve the strategy, main policies, annual plans and budgets, the annual report and financial statements, as well as the hiring and firing of the managing director.

The Board and Managing Director are supported and advised by the Advisory Council, which is appointed by the Board, and which can provide advice on any issues regarding Rank a Brand (for example strategy, methodology) on request or on their own initiative.

In addition we will install an independent Committee of Experts to review the criteria. This Committee will report to the managing director.

Our base will remain in Amsterdam, but we want to extend our activities in Europe and elsewhere. Therefore we have to internationalise our organization: staff, volunteers, board, advisory council and partners. We need to develop an international structure with clear relations between the different entities. This structure will be developed in 2016.

## 6. Strategic coalition

In order to increase our impact and be able to continue and extend our activities we want to cooperate with other organizations who are able and willing to contribute to our mission. We want to create a strong coalition with 3 to 6 strategic partners who are willing to structurally cooperate with Rank a Brand for mutual benefit.

Strategic partners could be NGOs (working on e.g. sustainability, development and/or fair trade), consumer organizations, unions and other organizations who could contribute to our goals without compromising our independence from consumer brands. Preferably international organizations or organizations with an international network. Together they should be able to provide sufficient support and to cover all the different aspects that we include in our ranking criteria.

These strategic partners will contribute to Rank a Brand's strategic goals by:

- Strengthening the foundation of our work by providing expert input to our criteria.
- Increasing our public and media coverage with joined communication activities.
- Strengthening our brand and reputation by openly supporting our work.
- Co-financing our work.

What Rank a Brand offers its strategic partners is:

- A contribution to their mission and objectives, if these match with ours. In particular increasing awareness among consumers and general public on sustainability and social responsibility, and improved sustainability and social responsibility of consumer brands.
- A say in the criteria and sectors to be ranked.
- Outreach for their organization and promoting their mission via Rank a Brand's website and publications.
- The possibility to get reports on specific aspects of sectors to support their campaigns or other activities.

## 7. Finance and fundraising

Our income needs to increase structurally in order to be able to:

- increase our impact,
- extend our activities (more brands, sectors and countries),
- build a professional team,
- ensure continuity.

Our objective is an annual income of at least € 200.000 by 2018. This is the amount we will roughly need to be able to build a substantial professional organization (at least 3 FTE and sufficient budget for other costs) and decrease vulnerability. Preferably we will reach an income of € 300.000 in 2018 and € 500.000 in future years, to be able to further expand our activities (more brands, more criteria, more countries).

We will therefore have to invest in fundraising and offer a strong proposition for potential funders and partners. We don't want to depend on one or two sources of income, so we will have to use different channels:

- strategic partners
- crowdfunding and donations by supporters
- funds, subsidies and major donors

The short-term priority will be funds, subsidies and major donors in order to give us a kick-start and then further build from there. The mid- and long-term priorities will be strategic partners and crowdfunding.

The strategic partners are key to our strategy, not only as a source of income. We already offer paid services to other parties on an ad hoc basis, which in 2015 is our main source of income. This remains possible as long as it does not compete with our core business, so there must be a large overlap in methodology, criteria, sectors and brands to be assessed. But we prefer to cooperate with strategic partners.

Crowdfunding among our supporters and website/app visitors will strengthen our position as independent organization by and for consumers, and will make it more attractive for other funders if we prove to be able to also raise our 'own' funds. Crowdfunding can also help to enlarge our supporter base and audience. We will try several ways of crowdfunding and funding among supporters. This will probably take several years to show significant financial results.

Initially (2015-16) we will focus our fundraising on the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium (Flanders), where our brand awareness is strongest. Later (2017 and beyond) we will explore fundraising in other countries, based on market research and linked to where we will focus our ranking and outreach.