**The World's Most Reputable Companies**

**For Corporate Responsibility 2018**

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The past year has seen much of the global business community doing damage control, and tech titans—untouchable as they may seem—have not been immune to the reputation crisis. While Apple and Facebook, still reeling in the wake of a string of scandals, have seen their brands tarnished, Google appears to have stayed above the fray.

“Google is still viewed as an employer of choice. It’s an aspirational, ‘do no evil’ kind of company,” says Stephen Hahn-Griffiths, chief reputation officer of the [Reputation Institute](https://www.reputationinstitute.com/), a reputation measurement and management services firm. Since 2011, the institute has published the CSR RepTrak, an annual study of companies with the best corporate social responsibility reputations in the world. This year’s ranking not only revealed an average 1.4-point decline in the reputation of companies but an evolution of the notion of corporate social responsibility.

“We’re redefining what we’ve previously called corporate social responsibility,” says Hahn-Griffiths. By highlighting the “social” piece of the equation, he says, companies overlook other equally important elements that are at play: employer, environmental and fiscal responsibility. And, so, the institute decided to omit the word “social” from its corporate responsibility language and renamed the ranking the CR RepTrak. “Corporate responsibility is quadrilateral between social, fiscal, employer and environmental responsibility. That is the new rubric for success.”

To determine the CR RepTrak, the institute surveyed more than 230,000 individuals in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States during the period from January to February 2018. The 140 companies considered were those that are familiar to at least 30% of the general population of the countries surveyed.

In light of this new definition of corporate responsibility, how did Google, just 15 months removed from the release of the now-infamous James Damore [anti-diversity memo](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3914586-Googles-Ideological-Echo-Chamber.html), emerge from controversy with its reputation not only unscathed but seemingly stronger than ever? Google has Sundar Pichai to thank for its rise to the No. 1 spot, with a score of 71.9: “Sundar Pichai is a strong CEO who is also viewed as responsible,” says Hahn-Griffiths. “There’s a humility and a modesty in how he talks publicly.”

Pichai’s unwavering character was put to the test just after the contents of Damore’s memo became publicly known. On a family vacation far from the Mountain View campus, Pichai could have hidden behind Google’s public relations machine. But he returned from vacation early, [addressing the situation head-on](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/07/business/google-women-engineer-fired-memo.html) by firing Damore and denouncing discrimination in a companywide email. In doing so, Pichai demonstrated his commitment to ensuring Google’s status as an equal opportunity employer, not to mention his genuine concern for the well-being of his employees, a sentiment that’s core to the culture and perks for which the organization is renowned.

“Google is celebrated based on its values, culture and commitment to creating a thriving workplace,” says Hahn-Griffiths. “If you can’t treat people who work for your company well, you can’t accomplish the goal of being good at corporate responsibility.” And yet, despite its strong reputation, even Google must be wary of the looming hazards, such as those posed by the recent [Google Plus data breach](https://www.blog.google/technology/safety-security/project-strobe/). “Google should be wary of governance, especially related to data, integrity and usage,” says Hahn-Griffiths. “It needs to be open, transparent and tread carefully.”

When it comes to product transparency, no CR RepTrak company is doing better than Lego. Coming in at No. 3 with a score of 69.4, the Danish toymaker has long been known for creating the colorful building blocks of children’s play. More recently, though, the Lego name has become synonymous with environmental sustainability. In March 2018, [Lego announced plans](https://www.lego.com/en-us/aboutus/news-room/2018/march/pfp) to produce pieces made from plant-based sources. Just four months later, the organization followed through, releasing the first batch of sustainably sourced, [sugarcane-based Le](https://www.lego.com/en-us/aboutus/responsibility/ourstories/plants-from-plants)go bushes, leaves and trees. This is just one of the many steps Lego is looking to take toward its goal of using sustainable materials in all core products and packaging in by 2030. “Lego is a very solid corporate entity, a very purposeful company that drives learning through play while respecting the environment,” says Hahn-Griffiths. “It’s literally putting its sense of purpose and sense of corporate responsibility into its products.”

Another organization aligning product with purpose is Novo Nordisk, ranked No. 5, with a score of 68.7. The Denmark-based business is the only pharmaceutical company to appear in the top 30, perhaps a testament to the trust-based relationships it’s built with consumers at a time when [confidence](https://www.edelman.com/trust-barometer) in big pharma is at an all-time low. “The only way to build trust is to earn trust,” says Hahn-Griffiths. “There’s a strong, deep understanding that Novo Nordisk is driving change and saving lives.” Through innovative, patient-focused offerings like [Ask Sophia](https://www.cornerstones4care.com/)—an AI-powered chatbot built to answer diabetes-related questions—and [NovoPen 6 and NovoPen Echo Plus](https://www.novonordisk.com/content/Denmark/HQ/www-novonordisk-com/en_gb/home/media/news-details.2218400.html)—the company’s first commercially available, smart insulin pens—Novo Nordisk has demonstrated its dedication to responsible, accessible healthcare.

While the name of the reputation game has changed, the key to becoming a business known for corporate responsibility is exactly the same—a united workforce. “Creating a company that is viewed as having high corporate responsibility begins from the inside out,” says Hahn-Griffiths. “When you have internal alignment, the external story becomes much more powerful.”