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Google Wins the Reputation Sweepstakes

By STEVE LOHR



Google may have some quirky ideas about [company-sponsored day care](#), but an eccentric policy here and there will likely do little to dent the Internet giant's sterling reputation.

In a new [survey of public opinion](#), Google ranked No. 1 among the 150 largest corporations in America in corporate reputation, whose key elements include perceptions of a company's products and services, innovation prowess, leadership qualities and citizenship.

These image assets, are extremely valuable in the currency of corporate credibility in policy debates or when explaining its actions to the public, said Anthony Johndrow, a managing director of the Reputation Institute, a consulting firm that developed the survey. Increasingly, Google has to do that in realms ranging from privacy to telecommunications policy to antitrust.

"Given the public esteem that Google enjoys, it is going to get the benefit of the doubt, time and again when things come up," said Mr. Johndrow.

This is the third year the consulting group has conducted the poll, a survey of more than 25,000 people, but it is the first time Google has been included. In 2007, Google's continued rapid growth pushed the Silicon Valley company into the top 150 companies, based on annual revenue.

"Google is in the great place of giving away its core product — a service of enormous utility — for free," Mr. Johndrow observed. "People understand that Google is making a lot of money, but their view is, 'Well, that's fine because they're not making it on me.'"

Yet products and services, Mr. Johndrow notes, are only one ingredient in a company's reputation. Other factors, he said, are also important, and becoming more so, like corporate citizenship ("supports good causes and does not harm the environment"), governance ("behaves ethically and is open and transparent in its business dealings") and workplace ("treats its employees well"). Google ranked at the top in those three categories as well as its reputation for being an innovator.

The biggest technology companies, it seems, are all pretty well regarded by the public. All of them placed in the top half of the 150 companies. At reputational rock bottom? Halliburton ranked 150, while Countrywide Financial, the troubled mortgage lender, was 149.

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