

There are business opportunities in climate change

12-02-2021

Swiss Post has again made sustainability a major priority in its new “Swiss Post of tomorrow” strategy: as of 2040, the company is aiming to be carbon neutral. In this interview, Anne Wolf, Head of Corporate Responsibility, offers insights into what measures have already been implemented, what action is still planned and whether the climate goal is too ambitious.

Anne Wolf, since 1 January 2021, our customers have generally had their carbon emissions offset when sending items, thanks to the “pro clima”-shipment label. What does that mean exactly?

We’ve got some experience when it comes to climate-friendly delivery. Since 2012, we’ve been offsetting carbon emissions when sending letters in Switzerland with the “pro clima” label. The change since January is that we’re also offsetting carbon emissions when delivering all consignments (including small consignments) abroad, not just in Switzerland. The carbon emissions continue to be offset with climate protection projects of the highest quality, both in Switzerland and abroad. Our customers do not incur any additional costs for this. The costs are borne by Swiss Post.

On the same day, the new “Swiss Post of tomorrow” strategy was launched. What role do sustainability and corporate responsibility play under the new strategy?

A key one. The new strategy determines how Swiss Post will carry out its services and develop over the years from 2021 to 2024, and also looks ahead to 2030. A central component of this new strategy is corporate responsibility. Swiss Post is living up to its entrepreneurial responsibility, i.e. the direct and indirect effects of its business activities

on its various stakeholders and the environment. The aim is to enhance positive impacts, while minimizing undesirable effects.

What measures have already been implemented? Are further measures planned?

For decades, Swiss Post has been concerned both with environmental and social sustainability. The implementation of our climate efforts can best be seen and heard in our daily letter deliveries – although in fact, they sometimes can’t actually be heard, because we’ve been using electric scooters for years. With the new strategy, Swiss Post management has approved a whole package of measures that contribute towards the goals of Corporate Responsibility. Examples of this include Swiss Post’s role as a socially responsible employer, the integration of sustainability criteria in management and support processes such as in procurement. And there are also the climate goals and the development of recyclable customer solutions. To reach the climate targets, for example, all vehicles are progressively being switched over to environmentally friendly drive systems. Of course, our optimizations do not stop in front of our buildings: we’re also systematically replacing fossil-fuel heating sources with renewable energy alternatives. And Swiss Post also operates one of the biggest photovoltaic systems.

What areas of activity have the biggest development prospects?

These are clearly in the societal area, creating added value for our customers. At Swiss Post, we do everything to ensure that our services conserve as many resources and are as socially acceptable as possible. The services over the “last mile”, such as taking back Nespresso capsules, are popular. The concept of renting rather than owning is also part of our portfolio. For example, I can use a bicycle from the PubliBike service that is available throughout Switzerland, rather than buying my own bicycle. In addition, all services should be as accessible as possible for everyone to use. In all Swiss Post units, teams are working to review new ideas that will bring more sustainability, to pilot and rapidly implement them throughout Switzerland. They’re doing this to support the growth strategy that underpins the Swiss Post of tomorrow.

Our goal is ambitious: as of 2040, Swiss Post is aiming for net zero, i.e. to be carbon neutral. Is this a realistic goal?

The goal is ambitious, that’s true. There are a number of measures we’ll need to implement on the journey to 2040. At Swiss Post, we will need to effectively reduce 93% of the CO₂ that we currently emit. Just recently, the Federal Council confirmed that Switzerland will be carbon neutral by 2050. Reaching this goal will not just generate costs, it will also require a new way of thinking. We need to integrate climate protection more heavily in our existing infrastructure and see new products and services as an opportunity to add value. At Swiss Post, we will play our part in this. Particularly as a logistics provider, the goal of carbon neutrality is ambitious. But this also applies to other sectors that are based on fossil fuel technologies, such as the car

industry. I’m sure that many companies will set themselves ambitious goals in the coming decade that will at times turn existing business models upside down. Only by doing so can we avert, or at least mitigate the dramatic impact on the climate, some of which is predictable. Let’s be frank: if we continue to manage our business in the way we’ve done until now, we will not create a future that wards off climate change. But there are always two sides to the coin, because there are always business opportunities in climate change. Of course we need to emit less CO₂ and use resources more efficiently. But we will achieve this with creative solutions, new approaches that all contribute towards economic growth.

Given the current pandemic, we all need to stay at home and do without travel. Local products are rising in popularity. Haven’t we done enough for the environment this year? Wouldn’t a focus on social sustainability be more appropriate at the moment?

The two concepts are not mutually exclusive. If we look at things from a holistic point of view, it’s about people and the environment. It’s up to all of us to deal with COVID-19 and the profound consequences of the pandemic as best as possible. It may sound a little dramatic, but just as human beings have had to be patient during COVID-19, it’s our responsibility to take the long-term impact on the climate seriously on behalf of future generations and to take action against it. The numbers show that the pandemic may have given us breathing room from time to time, but over the whole year emissions have in the end largely remained the same.

Aren’t sustainable development and economic growth a contradiction?

On the contrary, they go hand in hand. With an eye on our climate targets, at Swiss Post

we have made focusing on the growth strategy a priority. The search for sustainable solutions will open up new business areas and markets, such as in the circular economy. Often an assumption is made that sustainability only causes costs. In this respect, when evaluating an individual measure in economic terms, we need to consider the total lifetime and not just the investment costs. Particularly when replacing equipment, you can set a higher standard that also means more energy is saved and the item often lasts longer. An additional factor is that the demand for sustainable services is heavily increasing: projects such as the “Recycling at Home” and “Take Me Back” collection services and the “Kickbag” packaging solution are generating great interest from our customers and show that sustainability is not just short-term hype, but a long-term trend.

What do you have planned for 2021 in terms of ecology and sustainability?

On the personal side, our family is already well prepared: we’ve long since brought our apartment up-to-date in energy terms, including all of our electric appliances and lighting, and we never use the standby options. We share common spaces. Two years ago, I largely became vegetarian and where possible I buy direct from farmers or buy organic. And we also try to use the car as little as possible, even if it’s electrically powered, in favour of walking and cycling. Finally, when we do take a flight, we offset our emissions. This year I again want to make a strong personal commitment to sustainable development and to use any opportunity to continue doing so.

Source: [Swiss Post](#)