



The ECOPRO Project, the successor of the GEF's 2014 project Socioecological Reindustrialisation (SERIND), explores pathways for a transition towards ecological production, as part of a sustainable economy that is low-carbon and fosters an equal society. Nine national foundations from different regions of the European Union are involved in exploring pathways for ecological production. The project is content-wise coordinated by Dirk Holemans of the Flemish green think tank Oikos. Taking into consideration the structural differences between various national contexts, the project aims to explore a multitude of solutions suitable for addressing specific ecological challenges and economic development trajectories. The ECOPRO Event in Brussels will take place on November 20th and will have, among others, Mia Goetvinck (director at Business Excellence & CSR Belux, Ricoh Belgium) as a speaker to discuss Circular Economy and the concept of a sustainable society. We are pleased to offer you the opportunity to read an interview with Mia Goetvinck on Ricoh's Circular Economy.

RICOH'S CIRCULAR ECONOMY, AN INTERVIEW WITH MIA GOETVINCK

Circular economy means a change of the economic system from a linear economy, in which basic elements turn into waste after use, to a circular economy, in which products are used and reused as long as possible. Ricoh is originally a Japanese producer of electronics. The company mainly produces cameras and office equipment, like printers, copiers and projectors. Ricoh developed ambitious goals concerning environment and climate. The founder already stated that the company has a social responsibility, which means the environment should be preserved for the coming generations. Through the years, this idea was embedded and elaborated profoundly in the management of the company. Ricoh's vision on sustainability is based on a principle of, 'no regrets'. The company wishes to prevent environmental problems. Think tank Oikos interviewed Mia Goetvinck, Director Business Excellence/CSR at Ricoh BeLux, about Ricoh as a role model for sustainability and circular economy.

How does Ricoh bring its vision on sustainability into practice?

Sustainability is embedded in all aspects of Ricoh's strategy. The company has a CSR (Corporate Social Responsibilities) charter based on four main principles: integrity in corporate activities, harmony with the environment, harmony with society and respect for people. These four principles make sure that the company acts with care for the environment, keeps an eye on social challenges, creates a pleasant working environment, avoids fraud, guarantees transparency and does its business in a sustainable way. We apply our vision on sustainability both inside the company and externally, towards our customers. We offer our clients a value proposition, in which we explain this vision and guarantee them a premium service quality.

To realize this vision on sustainability, Ricoh created the Green Solutions. These Green Solutions make sure the company puts fixed deadlines to test inside the company how the environmental impact of products and services can be reduced. Ricoh also developed an environmental management system and an environmental accounting system, to calculate the costs of reducing the environmental impact, and also to calculate the profit they can make from reducing this. A commercial company like Ricoh cannot exist without making profit.

Early in the history of Ricoh it was already clear that the desirable and real progress made concerning sustainability should be mapped out clearly. Ricoh has an annual Global Sustainability Report, for which each European branch of the company has to report to at the headquarters in London.

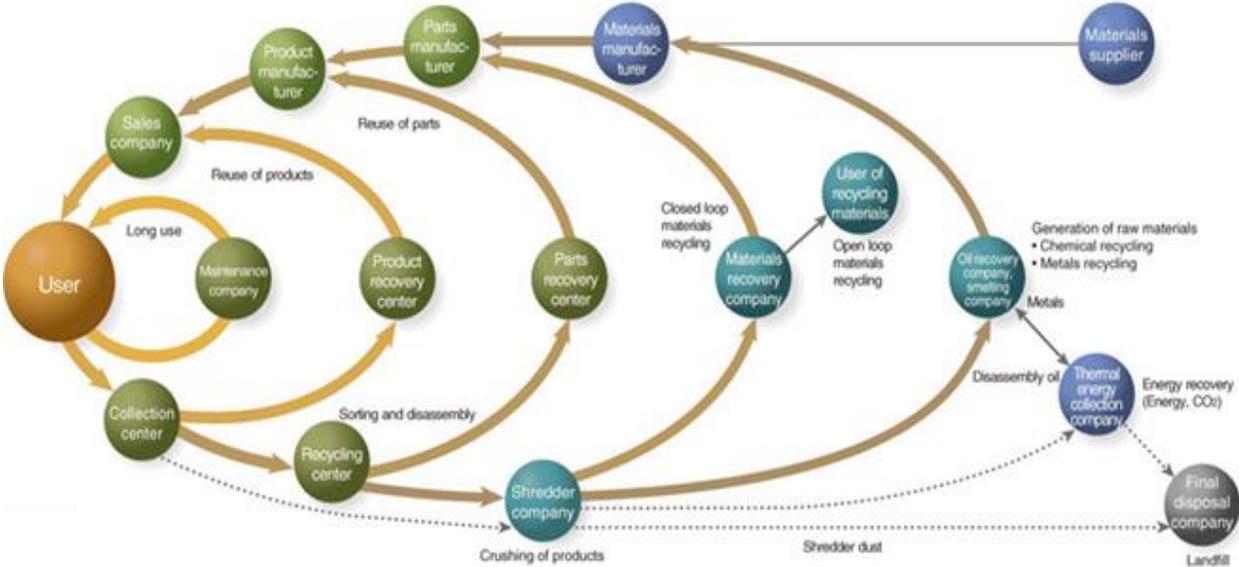
Ricoh also intends to share its vision on sustainability with the whole world. We try to apply our core competences in society, too. To give an example, we're offering workshops about environmental management and information security management to other companies.

We also have a strict system to control the systematic reduce of environmental impact. Everything, from design until finished products, is based on eco-design and lifecycle analyses. We always make very detailed analyses of the manufacturing process. Out of this research we know that sixty percent of the environmental impact is caused by the customer's use of the product. To reduce this, we have to inform the customers about how they can lower their energy-use and environmental impact.

How does Ricoh bring the philosophy of circular economy into practice?

We practice this philosophy by making use of the comet circle, a system that shows the life cycle of a product. Ricoh almost never sells products to customers, but leases them. This business of leasing has existed for over twenty-five years at Ricoh. Clients rent our products, which means Ricoh always keeps the ownership and this way clients run less risk. Most of the time, customers sign a lease contract for about five years. Ricoh is responsible for the maintenance of the products. If a product no longer works as it should, Ricoh first tries to repair it, so the customer can keep on using the same appliance. If repairing is no possibility, the next step is recycling. Ricoh will always try to re-use as many parts as possible. Parts only disappear from the comet circle if there is no option to keep on using them in a sustainable way. As a final

option, appliances can also be donated. This means the comet circle is not a completely closed cycle. When appliances become too old to deliver the same quality and/or they are polluting the environment, they disappear from the cycle. Ricoh’s technical staff, who repair appliances at the customer’s location, also perform a check-up to see if the products are used in the right way. If this is not the case clients can be advised to rent another appliance which is better adapted to their current use.



Comet Circle

Recycled products that are put back on the market become a part of Ricoh’s Green Line. To be allowed on the market these products have to offer the same quality and have the same, low energy-use as new products. We promote this Green Line, and it seems that governments and schools especially are keen to invest in these kinds of products.

How does Ricoh convince customers to rent its appliances instead of buying them from another company?

Customers are convinced by the fact that there are only benefits from renting our appliances. By renting, you can spread an investment, and there is a reduced or no risk for the clients. They can be sure they receive the right material, have access to the newest technology, and that broken machines will always be repaired. Also, Ricoh has more to offer than only office material. We can assist our clients by sharing business expertise, securing documents, and help them with how to put an ambitious vision on sustainability into practice.

The company’s headquarter attracts investors in the same way, by putting spotlights on positive results of Ricoh’s vision on sustainability. Ricoh wins important awards concerning sustainability and environment, and for the tenth year in line, the company has made it on a list of the hundred most sustainable companies in the world. Those are important recognitions,

which are taken into account by investors. Ricoh is a healthy, lucrative company. Our reputation and the recognition we get prove our strategy works.

Does technology play an important role in the evolution towards more sustainability?

Of course, we are always looking for new technologies and better ways to do things. Actually, we evolved from being a pure hardware provider to being a solutions provider. You could say we are a provider of green solutions. We have our own certificates; the Belgian branch of the company, for example, is under control of the headquarters in London. We have to pass on statistics about decrease in energy-use, electricity-use, paper-use, etc.

From the very beginning, “practice what you preach” was an important slogan at Ricoh. We always test new products ourselves before we lease or sell them, so the customer can be sure his material will work like it should. This way we build a relationship of trust, which is also a part of aiming for more sustainability.

How can the company keep its vision on sustainability standing and remain lucrative in an economic world that doesn't always hold on to the same principles?

It's not easy. Ricoh has always invested a lot in decreasing environmental impacts by doing research and producing along the rules of eco-design. Our competitors in the market don't make that kind of effort. During the crisis a couple of years ago, it was very difficult. A company can be very idealistic and always try to do the best it can for the environment, but the competition in the market can't be ignored. An environmentally-friendly way of working has to be lucrative too. It's important to inform our clients that Ricoh's products are maybe not the cheapest on the market, but they offer many advantages and extra service compared to products from other companies. Competing with other companies who don't have a strong vision on sustainability can be difficult. In my opinion the government should put in way more effort to show companies that decreasing the environmental impact is truly important. Today there are certain environmental rules, but it's questionable if these are ambitious enough and if they are implemented in an efficient way. Public tenders for example give marks on certain aspects to which companies have to satisfy. If there is one hundred percent to earn in total, only five percent of it will be for the environment, while keeping the price low almost always counts for fifty percent. As long as the government holds on to this division, nobody cares. This way, a company like Ricoh, who enthusiastically and efficiently tries to decrease its environmental impact, is not rewarded or encouraged to go on like this. The government should make clear that they are serious about saving the environment.

How does Ricoh see itself in the future? Will the company continue decreasing its environmental impact and develop its vision on sustainability even further? Does it have plans to become climate neutral in the future? Will the company be present at the climate summit in Paris at the end of November?

I think Ricoh will specialize further in sharing its competences and expertise with other companies. We can learn from interactions with other companies and with customers.

Ultimately, this is sustainable undertaking, recycling your own competences and learning from others.

Ricoh has large ambitions concerning climate goals. We have imposed ourselves to have 87.5 % less of an environmental impact in 2050 than we had in 2005. Now, in 2015, we have already reached half of this goal. It looks like the company is on its way to climate neutrality, but it's not yet clear when this will happen. A delegation of Ricoh will be present in Paris. We are also a member of The Shift, a new organization which is a reference for Belgian companies and organization in cases concerning CSR (Corporate Social Responsibilities). There will be a delegation of The Shift in Paris, of which Ricoh will be a part.

Ricoh wants to be an example for other companies in the market. If we really want to change things, both companies and the government have to be consistent in their efforts for greater sustainability. There has to be less of a focus on low prices, and more effort than what the government commands today. If the standards stay as they are today, I'm afraid Ricoh will keep on being one of the few companies who really try their best to preserve the earth for the coming generations.