

# AMZN

## Social context

### **Amazon A–Z: Reputation**

**Over the years, despite growing controversy over its activities, Amazon has managed to maintain enormous public trust. However, the management of the company realized that becoming a huge corporation can easily lead to falling into disgrace.**

Jeff Bezos himself focused on a PR strategy to maintain a positive image of the company and turn crises into profit. When the company introduced the \$15 minimum hourly wage in the US in 2018 – under increasing pressure from warehouse workers, supported by Senator Bernie Sanders – Amazon’s CEO publicly called on other businessmen to follow suit. Following in the footsteps of the leader of good wages.

The company has a very restrictive policy regarding public speaking by its employees. Carefully selected people, named by Brad Stone in his book *The Everything Store* as “Jeff Bots”, are allowed to contact the media. They repeat like a mantra the official position of the corporation and avoid answering difficult questions. This is best seen in the reactions of Amazon spokespersons, who, when asked about draconian productivity requirements for warehouse workers, have been responding with one voice for several years, from the USA, through the UK, to Poland: “Like most companies, we have performance expectations.”

The media, from local to international, have been critical of working conditions and other aspects of the company’s operations since at least 2011. At that time, Spencer Soper from the local daily newspaper “The Morning Call” from Allentown, Pennsylvania, revealed the dramatic situation of employees working in the extreme heat inside the Amazon warehouse that summer. As soon as the corporation opened its first facility in Poland, apart from the admiration of some commentators, more critical texts started to appear, such as Aleksandra Brodziak’s material for “Onet.pl” or numerous texts by Adriana Rozwadowska in “Gazeta Wyborcza”. Not to mention many smaller initiatives, such as Strike.eu or articles published by trade unionists from OZZ IP themselves on the organization’s website – as in all countries where Amazon operates.

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However, in a mysterious way this did not affect the company's image. According to data collected in 2018 by researchers from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., Amazon is – right after the army – the most trustworthy institution in the USA. This is no coincidence: for several years, Amazon has been the leader of The Harris Poll, a ranking of the reputation of one hundred of the most recognizable American corporations. However, in the 2019 survey, Jeff Bezos' company dropped to second place. While this may seem insignificant, we can read in the survey report: "America still loves its smiling boxes, but are beginning to grow uneasy with Amazon's reach and power." Although in 2019 it is still the leader in the category "vision for development" and "growth", it fell outside the top ten in the category of "ethics".

It seems extremely interesting how public opinion about Amazon will change in the face of the SARS-Cov-2 virus epidemic. On the one hand, as Julia Carrie Wong writes with concern in the Guardian, "with so much rancor and incompetence on display in Washington DC, Amazon's efficiency and competence has become a source of comfort and security, at least for those of us who can afford a Prime membership." However, the crisis-induced delivery delays and the growing workers' movement blaming the company for playing with their health and lives can damage Amazon's reputation.

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