Help for flood victims

Last August, a flood catastrophe threatened the existence of hundreds of thousands of people in the eastern part of Germany. Commerzbank branches and their staff were also affected.

Four branches were complete write-offs, namely the main branch in Dresden and the branches in Döbeln, Meissen and Pirna. Eight others were partially damaged or temporarily had to suspend their business activities due to lack of electricity. The financial loss to the Bank was altogether €950,000. By mid-October, all the branches were able to operate again on at least a provisional basis. The final repairs were carried out during the winter. In one instance alone, work will probably continue until end-April.

The flood catastrophe also destroyed the possessions of many employees and their families. In addition to the many support measures privately initiated by colleagues, the Board of Managing Directors organized an “employees help employees” donation scheme, through which the Group and about 4,000 Commerzbankers raised €1.3m. €87,000 of this amount was paid out during the first days after the catastrophe to provide immediate assistance, a further €860,000 was distributed when reports of the actual damage came in.
Commerzbank – partner of Germany’s national parks

The protection of nature, and consequently of human beings and of the foundations of their existence, is the prime task in securing our future. Thanks to the creation of thirteen national parks, large sections of ecologically valuable areas have been placed under protection in Germany, providing endangered fauna and flora with a habitat and at the same time preserving national parks as recreation areas for human beings.

It was against this background that the German national parks and Commerzbank joined forces in 1990 to introduce the “environmental internship”. The point of the pedagogical work performed by the young people gaining practical experience is to make both tourists and local residents aware of the importance and also of the special features of these natural landscapes. At the same time, this activity is designed to give young people who are interested in protecting nature and the environment valuable on-the-spot experience.

Pictures by courtesy of m-r kartographie, processed by Pro Natur GmbH, Frankfurt
The concept of sustainability has been redefined in recent years. It now no longer merely stands for environmental-friendly behaviour for the benefit of coming generations, but also for behaviour geared to the interest of society and the benefit of business over the long term. We want to report on such activities in the following, where we present not only instances of ecological sustainability but also examples of the social and economic type, as illustrations of sustainability as practised at Commerzbank.

Ed*ucation and knowledge

Education and knowledge are set to increase in importance over the next few years. For Germany as a business location in particular, the topic plays an important role. At Commerzbank as well, this has been reflected for many years, in basic training, in-house advanced training, and also in the promotion of innovative ideas.

Suggestions scheme

The knowledge of a company’s employees is the key factor behind its success. Studies have revealed that staff who swap their experiences in their place of work or are able to put forward new ideas for improving work processes are far more motivated and committed and can therefore provide fresh impulses for the company. For this reason, COMIDEE, Commerzbank’s internal suggestions scheme, was created in 1998. Since then, over 13,000 innovative ideas and proposals for improvement have been submitted. In return, cash prizes amounting to roughly €1.1m have been distributed among the Bank’s staff. The benefit realized through the suggestions is many times greater.

Environmental protection in basic training

Since 1998, the topic of environmental protection has formed part of basic training. Our trainees have taken on various environmental themes in numerous projects. The results range from suggestions for improving work procedures to questions of image and motivation and to the development of new products.

Knowledge manager of the year

Under the patronage of the German Ministry of Economics, the “Knowledge Manager of the Year” prize was offered by Commerzbank, the magazine impulse and Financial Times Deutschland for the first time in 2002. Out of 60 or so applicants, the winners in three categories were awarded prizes totalling altogether €30,000. The new competition begins in April 2003.

For more and more companies, knowledge management is proving to be an increasingly important aspect in competing successfully. Our hypothesis in developing the prize, namely that knowledge-oriented management boosts commercial success and the ability to cope with the future, was impressively confirmed by our prize-winners.
Teachers’ information club
As part of our commitment to education policy, we have founded a teachers’ information club. Here, teachers may obtain free of charge via internet teaching materials on the topics banking and business. Commerzbank cooperates closely for this purpose with the German foundation Stiftung Lesen.

School project
For several years now, in order to ensure an intake of younger staff on a long-term basis, Commerzbank has pursued alternative routes to the traditional recruitment of young people. One of these is the project “So mobil ist Schule”. In an attempt to get pupils at school interested in training to become bank employees, Commerzbank has become a sponsor of this nationwide school competition. The competition aims to promote action and project-oriented lessons in the 11 to 13-year-old age group throughout Germany. Through this commitment to social policy, Commerzbank is helping to improve school education in general, and to teach pupils to assume responsibility for their actions, acquire knowledge on their own initiative and to think in a cross-disciplinary manner. These are the qualities which we expect of young bankers.

Commerzbank’s work environment
For us, a climate of fairness, transparency and accepted responsibility creates the basis for a sustainable and employee-oriented personnel policy. In this spirit, we have introduced a number of personnel measures over the past few years in order to create working conditions geared to the needs of our staff and, at the same time, to lay the foundation for our corporate success. Even in difficult times, we set store by living up to this guiding principle.

Equal opportunity
Since the eighties, we have occupied ourselves intensively with the topic of equal opportunity in implementing a personnel policy in the interests of our employees. In the areas of family and career, women in modern banking and role diversity in career and private life, we have produced a series of innovations and measures which Commerzbank has combined under the heading “consens”. Above all, three points are relevant here:

- making it easier to combine family and career,
- training more women to take over higher specialist and managerial positions,
- creating a broadly-based awareness and openness for the topic of equal opportunity within the Bank.

The possibility of combining family and career in particular represents a central task on the way to equal opportunities. We have managed to make great progress within our company thanks to a series of different schemes. These include measures within the Bank to promote childcare, such as financial
subsidies towards the cost of having children looked after, regulations covering special leave and the provision of advisory and agency services by special companies (Familienservice). The success of these efforts is underlined by Commerzbank being voted a family-friendly company.

**Kids & Co.**

One novelty in the field of company support for childcare is Kids & Co. – an idea that has since been taken up by many other companies in Germany.

If the normal childcare arrangements break down or there is a clash with professional appointments, many parents find it difficult to combine family and career. This is why Kids & Co. – a cooperation between Commerzbank and Familienservice – has specialized in spontaneously taking care of the children of employees at short notice. If temporary bottlenecks occur at home, a team of trained pedagogic experts look after children between the ages of six months and twelve years at special day-care facilities. This service is free for Commerzbank parents.

Since its launch in Frankfurt, this childcare service has been constantly extended; in the meantime, Familienservice has set up similar facilities at seven other locations within Germany.

**Change management**

In virtually all sectors of the economy, restructuring processes and far-reaching changes are everyday affairs. It is striking that in many companies only a small number of all changes live up to expectations. The reasons for this are complex and many-faceted. It is certainly the case that many transformation processes fail because staff are not sufficiently involved in the process of change and are therefore unable to generate the necessary willingness to accept change or the ability to cope with it.

For this reason, Commerzbank has devoted intensive study to the topic of change management for over half a decade and attaches key importance to related activities. These range from strategic advice before the process of change begins, to the development of a change-management architecture and active involvement during the implementation phase. The objective is to put units in a position to shape the process of change themselves.

Workshops for employees and executives, measures for developing newly formed teams, counselling and coaching to improve the level of qualifications and to help individuals are further aspects of our change-management philosophy. Thanks to these activities, we have been able to guarantee the quality of the measures related to necessary restructuring measures and also to make our staff more willing to accept change and able to deal more successfully with it.
Product design

Taking account of environmental business risks and opportunities in product design is also a contribution towards sustainable development. In this way, ecology and economics can even be combined in traditional banking business.

Risk becomes opportunity

The environmental risks of a borrower represent a credit risk for the Bank. In order to avert this risk, Commerzbank has worked out its own assessment system for business customers, who have to provide information on environmental indicators. These are reflected in the creditworthiness and credit ratings.

However, it is not only a matter of measuring and avoiding risk, but also of seizing opportunities. Our branches in northern Germany are specialists in the financing of wind-power plants, making Commerzbank the leading bank in this area, thanks to their market share of over 30%. The renewable energies centre of competence has become an interface for the spread of expertise.

Commerzbank also plays a leading role in putting customers in touch with government programmes for promoting environmental protection.

Investing in sustainability

The market for financial investments devoted to sustainability is still a niche market. The need for information continues to be great as a result. This is why Commerzbank supports the internet platform www.nachhaltiges-investment.org, which came about through an initiative of the Institute for Environmental Management and Business Administration at the European Business School, with the support of the German Ministry of Education and Research. The Commerzbank share itself is currently represented in three sustainability indices.

Our investment funds

By developing and marketing ecological and ethical investment funds, we support companies whose activities promote sustainability. At the same time, we are able to offer our customers attractive investment products. Commerzbank’s UK subsidiary Jupiter Asset Management can draw upon many years of experience in this area. At end-2002, it was managing €853m of such funds. In Germany, too, interest in ecological funds has grown considerably. In the form of ADIG Fund NewPower (German securities code no. 591 978), we offer an equity-based fund focusing on the development and realization of renewable energy conceptions. Its assets under management had reached €18m by end-2002. Since March 2002, customers in Germany have been able to buy Jupiter Global SRI Fund (German securities code no. 764 935), a fund which invests worldwide, applying environmental and ethical criteria.
Commitment to environment and nature

Protection of nature
Since 1990, Commerzbank has been a partner of the German national parks. We have concentrated on providing support for the creation of greater environmental awareness and PR activities. Through our many projects in these areas, we pursue a selective approach which substantially helps improve the acceptance and development of Germany’s national parks.

Our “environmental internship”, through which over 60 students per year help increase the enthusiasm of both tourists and local residents for these valuable natural landscapes, has proved very successful.

Our special exhibition designed to promote the use of solar energy, which can be seen throughout Germany at Commerzbank branches, presents practical environmental protection by showing ways of conserving energy.

Ecology at company level
Our appointment of the first environmental officer at a major German bank in 1990 marked the start of our activities in the area of environmental protection at company level. The aim is to save resources and to cut costs.

Even when buildings are being constructed or their fittings are being installed, guidelines and standards apply which prescribe environmentally-friendly materials and furniture, for example. The results of our eco-audits, however, also lead to new contracts for managing premises and sites. Facility management evaluates the energy and water consumption of large buildings, seeking specific weak points. By means of ecologically sound techniques, we attain a level of energy consumption at our new Commerzbank head-office building in Frankfurt am Main, completed in 1997, that is about 35% lower than for traditional towers.

Paper is one of the major consumer goods in a service-industry company. Thanks to the use of modern information technology, fanfold lists can be printed on both sides or paper can be eliminated entirely; Listen-Online, for instance, supplies data directly to monitors. Complemented by our electronic form system, this enables us to save 95 million sheets of paper and €4m per year. Consumption will be reduced this year by a further 23 million sheets through the use of electronic circulars.

A large amount of intranet information on this and further topics related to the environment and nature encourages staff to behave in an ecologically responsible manner. This is complemented by regular information in the staff newsletter Commerzielles.

Commerzbank is supported in this area by Bundesdeutscher Arbeitskreis für Umweltbewusstes Management, B.A.U.M. (“the German working group for ecologically-aware management”) in Hamburg, of which we have been a member since 1988.

Building on our existing basis, we intend to devote more attention to sustainability. In the future, a new centre of competence will coordinate all the activities and develop more ambitious goals and programmes.