

Practice Name:

#FraudOff!

Practice category:

- Anti-fraud culture



Contact:

- Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Latvia
- <https://atkrapijs.lv/en/>
- info@fm.gov.lv

Country:

Latvia

Fraud risk(s) countered

This practice does not aim at a specific fraud risk but is rather an initiative to raise awareness about fraud in the country.

Context and objective(s)

#FraudOff! is an anti-fraud movement created in 2017 which raises awareness about fraud via a social information campaign. The campaign focuses on preventive measures, including raising public awareness about the shadow economy and fraud, and their negative consequences on an individual level and on the overall country-wide prosperity. The long-term goal of the movement is for Latvian society to have zero tolerance for fraud.

The campaign is based on the combined efforts of public institutions, businesspeople, social partners and everyone in society in the fight against fraud. All Latvian citizens, businesses and organisations are invited to participate in the anti-fraud movement. #FraudOff!'s main tool is the use of its logo by public and private institutions. Supporters of the movement are invited to use the campaign brand in everyday communication.

It was created following an initiative of the EC and OLAF to create a European “anti-fraud-day” which inspired the Latvian Ministry of Finance to develop a broader national communication campaign. Detecting and investigating fraud is often a lengthy and costly process, whereas investing in prevention, communication and awareness might have greater and more long-term effects, all the while being less costly.

Description of the practice

#FraudOff! is the first initiative of its kind in Latvia. The campaign was designed to reach a great number of people using social media and other communication channels. The focus during the first year was fake goods because this topic is well understood by the majority of society and easily draws people's attention. In 2018 the movement specifically addressed people aged 16 to 24, informing them about fraud risks and what they should consider when entering into an employment relationship. In 2019 the main focus of the campaign was reporting fraud, because it was also the year when the Whistleblowing Law was adopted in Latvia.

The Ministry of Finance initially ran a survey about people's perception of fraud. The results showed that people assessed dishonesty levels in the country as high, while fraudulent activities were often accepted as being commonplace. This was a principle argument to invest in a campaign in order to change people's attitudes towards actively rejecting fraudulent behaviour.

With the support of the Minister of Finance and funding of €10.000, the Ministry hired a PR company to develop the campaign and undertook the following steps:

Definition of the term “fraud off”

#Atkrāpies! ("fraud off!") is a neologism which is formed by replacing the prefix ne- with the prefix at- which indicates that the action is directed back or aside. The exclamation mark shows that the verb is in the imperative form. The neologism "fraud off!" is a call to resist and prevent fraud and was chosen as the name of the campaign.

Definition of a strategy

In close coordination with the Minister's Cabinet, together with the PR company, the #FraudOff! team developed a communication strategy and a 4-year-plan.

The main aim was to use simple messages and examples that are close to people's lives and catch their attention. Instead of teaching them about fraud definitions, the campaign emphasised the impact of fraud for individuals and the entire country.

Creation of a network

Using the existing network of the Ministry, the campaign was able to quickly win over more than 20 public institutions and partners to join the anti-fraud campaign.

The main partners in the initiative are ministries and State authorities, e.g.:

- the Ministry of Finance,
- the Ministry of the Interior,
- the Ministry of Economics,
- the State Revenue Service,
- the State Police,
- the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau,
- the Competition Council,
- the Procurement Monitoring Bureau and others, as well as
- Transparency International Latvia.

In 2018, the #FraudOff initiative was additionally supported by Latvian law enforcement authorities.

Press conference

In order to distinguish the campaign from previous government projects, the #FraudOff! team refrained from disclosing any information about the initiative in the form of press releases or articles before organising a press conference to launch the campaign. The press conference received a lot of attention due to the surprise factor, while the provocative use of the slogan guaranteed broad media coverage.

Website

The #FraudOff! campaign created a dedicated website, which contains information about the goals of the initiative and the level of fraud and corruption in Latvia. It also gives practical advice to the public on the areas sensitive to fraud in day-to-day life, e.g.:

- What one should know when entering into an employment contract with a potential employer;
- How to check whether one's employer is paying tax;
- What occupational safety regulations one should consider;
- How to recognise a fake branded product;
- How to recognise fake money;
- What one should know about food labelling.

In addition, the campaign explains how to report fraud to the relevant law enforcement authorities if someone suspects or knows about a specific case of fraudulent activity. It is also possible to report fraud via the #FraudOff! website.

Social media and communication campaign

In order to raise awareness and reach a maximum number of people, the #FraudOff! team reached out to influencers who agreed to support the campaign by speaking about it on their social media accounts and in videos showcasing the products and slogan.

During Fashion week in Latvia, various national celebrities were asked to wear fake goods and draw attention to them using stickers with the #FraudOff! logo in order to raise awareness to the counterfeiting of goods.

Citizens were also encouraged to use the hashtags #Atkrāpies! and #Fraudoff! as well as #viltotaiszaķis, which translates to #fakechic.

Other communication included posters with “superheroes” and QR codes which linked to a video relating to the campaign once scanned. The video was created by the State police to further raise awareness about the topic of how Police find fake goods. The link also directed people to an online competition where they had to correctly identify fake goods and received products from the campaign as a prize.

Involvement of private companies

The anti-fraud movement also included private organisations that showcase their zero-tolerance for fraud and fake goods. On the movement’s website, it is possible to download campaign posters, visual materials for websites and social networks, as well as to apply for a special sticker that can be placed on doors at a company, institution or shop. The organisers emphasise that the movement’s brand will not serve as a quality mark, but rather will demonstrate an organisation’s or an individual’s attitude about zero tolerance for fraudulent activities. For traders, it is also an opportunity to show that they sell original products and not counterfeit ones.

Participation in public events

The #FraudOff! campaign participated in the form of information stands in various public events, e.g. the Democracy festival LAMPA or the Youngsters conference to inform people about the issues.

Participation in educational initiatives

The #FraudOff! campaign got involved in schools and universities, e.g. in a school initiative where pupils produced and sold their own goods and also received information from the #FraudOff! team about fake goods and fraud in general.

Unique features

- Use of social media and influencers
- Involvement of different public and private institutions
- Communication campaign using posters, stickers, hoodies etc.

Outcomes and results

The #FraudOff! movement has been considered a success in Latvia and abroad. It was honoured at the IPRA Golden World Awards 2018 for the best concept and communication campaign.

#FraudOff! has been successful in uniting public authorities, entrepreneurs, social partners and the wider society in understanding and combatting fraud. It has also raised public awareness of the shadow economy and fraud, and their negative consequences on individuals and the economy in general.

Key success factors

- Support from the Minister of Finance
- Use of the network to have support from various public institutions
- Press conference used as “surprise element” to kickstart the initiative
- Support from influencers and celebrities

Challenges encountered & lessons learned

At first, the initiative faced some resistance from some who claimed it was a waste of money. However, overall it was perceived very positively.

After the successful launch and very positive feedback, it proved difficult to maintain people’s attention. The #FraudOff! initiative has chosen a different focus every year in order to keep its momentum; it might become less present in the public eye and rather focus on educational initiatives in the future.

One of the lessons learned is that a successful campaign does not need a significant budget. The choice of communication channels and networks, many of which are free or very cost-effective, that are used to disseminate messages are key.

Potential for the transferability

A similar communication campaign can be very impactful if a country can ensure a similar outreach using various networks and social media.

Every country should first assess which issues to address. A survey can be launched to define a clear target group and engage communication experts in the development of the appropriate means of communication.