STRONGER ROOTS

AEVIS:
REDISCOVERING IDENTITY IN THE SHADOW OF ITS OWN SUCCESS

The story of an environmental organisation that had to completely rebuild its identity

Nadace OSF · Nadácia otvorenej spoločnosti · NIOK · glopolis · Batory Foundation

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Photo: Aevis – Aevis team meeting in Senné

Aevis

is an environmental NGO based in Poloniny National Park in northeastern Slovakia. Its influence, however, extends well beyond the region – It actively engages in national environmental discourse, particularly around the protection of large carnivores and the promotion of preventive measures. It is also involved in the development of nature tourism. Aevis initiated the *Poloniny – Unbelievably Real* project and oversees the *We Are the Forest* initiative.

The Aevis team currently consists of fifteen people working on various contracts, including five full-time employees. The organisation also works with external expert consultants.


Photo: Ondrej Kameniar

When success becomes a problem

Aevis found itself in a paradoxical situation: it developed successful projects that eventually outgrew the organisation itself. These initiatives were well received and widely recognised, but few people realised Aevis was the organisation behind them.
The scattered focus had its consequences. The team's capacities were spread across several projects, leaving almost no energy for advocacy, PR, communication, and individual fundraising, which became practically non-existent. The organisation found itself at a point where it needed to reevaluate its priorities, strengthen its brand, and improve its external communication.

Three months of debate and searching for direction

The first step was to expand the team's capacity. Thanks to funding from another project, two new colleagues joined the team and took over responsibility for developing the *Poloniny – Unbelievably Real* destination. This allowed the rest of the team to focus on strategic issues and conservation topics.

Almost three months of intense debate and clarification of priorities followed. These discussions identified conservation issues as the organisation's key focus. The next step was to develop a communication and fundraising strategy.

The decision was clear: Aevis' activities should be communicated under a single brand, which required the creation of a new visual identity.

Getting to know the audience

The Stronger Roots programme enabled the organisation to hire a social media manager and conduct a thorough audit of its communication channels. They identified the typology of their social media followers and website visitors. The results were surprising: most followers were over 40 years old, with very few younger followers. Geographically, they were mainly from Bratislava, followed by Košice and Prešov.
The analysis also revealed the most visited parts of the website – this information was later used to strategically place fundraising links.

Based on these findings, they were able to better target their communication – specifically to younger age groups and particularly women, who often show greater interest in the organisation's activities. The team created specific personas to target with their communication.

Photo: Stronger Roots – OSF Bratislava

New tools and approaches

The organisation launched a new Instagram account called Pre divokú prírodu (“For Wild Nature”). Aevis also invested heavily in paid advertising on social media, as organic reach was no longer sufficient. The ads were regionally targeted, and even their tone could be tailored to different age groups. Advertising was also used to collect contacts through a service known as Facebook Leads, where people could download a guide with advice and recommendations for encounters with bears in exchange for their contact details. As a result, 400 contacts downloaded the guide.

The team began testing the effectiveness of the new communication methods using data analytics, specifically AB testing. In their experience, this method pays off if the investment exceeds EUR 100. For smaller budgets, Facebook can be used, which offers evaluation of several types of ad texts, for example based on length.

Rebranding and reputation building

With support from external consultants, the organization rebranded its logo to make it more modern and appealing. A brand manual was also created. Aevis began to communicate more intensively with the outside world, regularly issuing press releases and building a media footprint. The organisation's reputation gradually strengthened, which could also be leveraged in fundraising.

At the same time, it was necessary to create a functional database for contact management. Older contacts from petition campaigns were also included in the database, and communication with them was renewed. The initial outreach aimed to determine whether they still supported the organisation and was followed with further communication.

Internal processes were automated – a CRM system was introduced for donors, which sets out the process for welcoming and communicating with new donors and new contacts.

Thanks to this, the organisation carried out its first successful crowdfunding campaign.

Photo: Ondrej Kameniar – Campaign visual

Unexpected obstacles

The biggest challenge the organisation faced was the political situation in Slovakia, which unfolded differently after the elections than the team had anticipated. Environmental issues were negatively affected as a result. Frequent changes and emerging situations required constant responses, which delayed the implementation of project activities.

At the same time, the team realised that it had underestimated the human resources needed to implement such fundamental changes within the organisation.

Transformation of the organisation

Throughout the process, the organisation grew and became significantly more professional — largely thanks to the support of the Stronger Roots programme. Now, each team member has clearly defined responsibilities and internal processes are in place. The organisation is also considering working with volunteers in the future.

KEY LESSONS

- **Success can become a challenge**
  When projects outgrow the organisation behind them, a paradoxical situation can arise – the activities are successful, but the organisation remains invisible.

- **First, you must make yourself known**
  If people don‘t know you, they won‘t donate money to you. You may have good causes, but you must first build a name for yourself and be visible.

- **An outside perspective can reveal blind spots**
  It is great to have an outside person when developing strategies. You can do good things on your own, but a mentor or outsider will ask useful questions and can guide and push you in the right direction.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

01

Get to know your audience

Data on who follows you — including age, gender, and location — can be a powerful tool for shaping your communication and fundraising strategy.

02

AB testing is worthwhile for budgets starting at EUR 100

For smaller amounts, use Facebook tools that evaluate different types of ad copy.

03

Old contacts still matter

Petition signers and past supporters can be contacted for renewed engagement.

04

Invest in paid advertising, including regionally

Organic reach is no longer enough, but targeted advertising with regional and demographic settings can deliver results.

STRONGER ROOTS

This case study was developed within the Stronger Roots program.

The aim of the Stronger Roots program is to increase the resilience of civil society organisations and their networks, strengthen their social capital, and integrate them into the communities and societies in which they operate. The program is implemented by the Open Society Fund Prague, the NIOK Foundation, the Open Society Foundation Bratislava, and Glopolis.