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# WeRskills project recommendations: skills competitions deliver value for money

Zalecenia projektu WeRskills: konkursy umiejętności to korzyści finansowe dla przedsiębiorców i gospodarki

**Keywords:** skills competitions, vocational education programs, young professionals, co-operation among sectors, benefits

**Abstract:** WeRskills Project Recommendations include different aspects of vocational education and focus on five areas of expertise. They are a result of the project entitled *WeRskills – informational and consulting platform supporting the process of acquiring talents to participate in skills competitions at national and European level*. The project was run in the international partnership of Polish, Hungarian and Cyprian institutions which advocated that skills competitions are instruments to innovate vocational education programs in order to meet the European needs of today. WeRskills Project proposed an enhancement strategy to support the process of acquiring talents to participate in skills competitions at the national and European level and raise the attractiveness of VET. With this publication we would like to inspire vocational teachers and trainers as well as training providers and employers to use skills competitions as a means to boost the structural development of talents and excellence in VET. The first part of the WeRskills recommendations was published in "Journal of Continuing Education" (3/2022), while the following article demonstrates that vocational skills competitions have a number of benefits, including financial ones.

**Słowa kluczowe:** konkursy umiejętności, programy kształcenia i szkolenia zawodowego, młodzi profesjonaliści, współpraca międzysektorowa, korzyści

**Streszczenie:** W poniższej publikacji proponujemy strategię doskonalenia wspierającą proces pozyskiwania talentów do udziału w konkursach umiejętności na poziomie krajowym i europejskim. Chcielibyśmy zainspirować szkoły zawodowe, centra szkoleniowe i pracodawców do wykorzystywania konkursów umiejętności jako sposobu na rozwój młodych talentów. Zawarty w artykule zestaw rekomendacji jest wynikiem projektu *WeRskills – platforma informacyjno--doradcza wspierająca proces pozyskiwania talentów do udziału w konkursach umiejętności na poziomie krajowym i europejskim*. Projekt ten był realizowany w międzynarodowym partnerstwie instytucji polskich, węgierskich i cypryjskich, które opowiadają się za tym, że konkursy umiejętności

mogą być instrumentem innowacji w programach kształcenia zawodowego. Rekomendacje projektu WeRskills obejmują różne aspekty kształcenia zawodowego i koncentrują się na pięciu obszarach. Pierwsza część zaleceń projektu WeRskills została opublikowana w „Edukacji Ustawicznej Dorosłych” (3/2022). Natomiast w poniższym artykule udowodniono, że konkursy umiejętności zawodowych przynoszą szereg korzyści, w tym finansowe.

## **INDUSTRY BENEFITS FROM SKILLS COMPETITIONS**

Events like skills competitions can provide companies with incredible opportunities to market their brand, reach new customers, improve their public perception and increase their sales. Through business sponsorship, you can provide attendees with a unique experience that fosters trust and credibility. In this article, we explain what exactly a business sponsorship is, describe how it works and provide a list of some of the most compelling advantages of sponsorship advertising.

### **What is business sponsorship?**

A business sponsorship is an organization's support of an event or activity, like a nonprofit, organization, group, trade show or local sports team, which usually comes in the form of a financial contribution. Organizations use sponsorships as a marketing tool so that they can gain a competitive advantage and reach business goals.

Unlike advertising, which shares specific messages about a company or product in the hopes that it will increase sales, sponsorships improve a brand's recognition and reputation because they support specific events that your target audience cares about. As a result, prospective customers associate your company with the event or activity.

### **WorldSkills beginnings**

After the Second World War, there was a dynamic reconstruction of economies and the development of broadly understood manufacturing. In the 1950s, the first practical Skills Competitions in individual countries began, and later international competitions in various industries. Competitions grew rapidly. For example, young people from Germany, Great Britain, France, Morocco and Switzerland went to the competition in Spain unannounced and at their own expense. At the end of the 1960s, international competitions were already held in Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands and Switzerland. The situation has become so dynamic that a respectable competition has arisen and many countries are applying for the granting of rights to organize competitions for each edition. It should be noted that, based on the ratification of the decision by the WorldSkills Europe General Assembly, during the meeting in Krakow in June 2022, the date and venue of EuroSkills 2023 in POLAND will be decided. In this situation, we have to prepare Polish national team for the international competition as soon as possible. It is important to organize qualification events, being formal national competitions. It

should be noted that the EuroSkills competitions are popular, cyclical international events whose task is to promote professional skills for young people in many countries. Entry is based on performance in national or regional skills assessment events in which sponsors are crucial.

Therefore, taking into account the type and importance of national or international Skills Competitions, the goal and motivation for their organization is similar. The difference lays mainly in the scale of the project, the number of participants and the number of viewers, which translates into measurable values of the accompanying marketing programs. However, when considering the motivations and benefits for sponsors (industry companies), the mechanisms are similar in each case, many sponsors are guided by their strategic motivations and investment calculations.

An important element is also the involvement of state owned institutions in providing institutional patronage to the event. On this basis, the reputation of the event is created, constituting real conditions for the support provided by sponsors. For example, the Golden Trowel competition has some support from central institutions, e.g. by obtaining exhibition space during the BUDMA fair in Poznań and the patronage of many official institutions (i.e. Ministry of National Education). In addition, decisions on the level of companies' involvement in the competition are also influenced by the strategy of promoting the event/or its competition carried out on the Internet, adopted by the organizer, reaching the target audience.

The analysis of materials published by the organizers of Skills Competitions resulted in the formulation of the following main strategic goals that should be adopted in order to organize practical Skills Competitions:

- Encourage young people to improve the quality of their professional skills in close cooperation with employers, and to promote the latest solutions in vocational education and training.
- Inspire young people to develop a passion for skills and strive for excellence through competitions and their promotions.
- Develop skills through global training standards, systems and benchmarks, increasing industry internal involvement.
- Influence industry sectors, official institutions and the skill level of teachers compared to corporate trainers.
- Build a global skills platform for all interested audiences through collaboration, consultation and research.



- Create an opportunity to exchange experiences and good practices, promote achievements.
- Establish contacts and building educational and market partnerships with economic sectors.

## **SKILLS CREATE OPPORTUNITIES AND CONNECT SOCIETIES. THEY ARE THE FOUNDATION OF ECONOMIC PROGRESS**

This maxim has always been relevant, especially in the era of innovation and competitiveness. Without the quality of work and high skills we cannot count on a dynamic development leap. The quality of work in the construction sector is becoming more and more important. It is known that, depending on the market and its specificity, Skills Competitions organized on national levels have natural differences, while international events strive to unify the requirements and develop an appropriate competition profile for a given industry and its professions.



## **SPONSORING SKILLS COMPETITIONS IS AN ADVANTAGE**

Participation of company representatives as experts, judges and sponsors facilitates the preparation of the technical level of events, with a significant impact on the rank of the industry event. Without the participation of leading industry companies, it is impossible to achieve the expected organizational result, and thus obtain the expected popularity and viewership.

### **The question is: Why should companies sponsor Skills Competitions?**

Benefits for companies are obvious. The fact that Skills Competitions are popular all over the world attracts sponsors. This state of affairs is limited by trade secrets and internal company strategies, especially nowadays when entrepreneurs experience tough market competition. Sponsoring activities have to be included in long-term marketing goals. To attract sponsorship costs, a company has to be offered various types of sponsorship and advertising rights in the form of, for example, General

Sponsor, Sole Sponsor, etc. In our opinion, companies interested in cooperation or supporting Skills Competitions in the construction sector may include:

- Entrepreneurs from the construction industry,
- Manufacturers of building materials,
- Local and central authorities.

Significant arguments justifying the support of competitions by companies were gathered on the basis of the activities of KBiN and its members, with direct participation in the organization of Skills Competitions like the **Drywall Systems COMPETITION 2021** in Radom.

Companies that actively support the organization of practical Skills Competitions and train competitors:

1. Increase the level of teaching practical skills in school professions, which has an impact on the quality of students' work. High level of teaching practical skills in the vocational education system is obtained by:
  - introducing a level of the market quality of work, higher than the school level;
  - supporting the competitiveness of innovative technologies on the mass customer market,
  - teaching students about new technologies and properly used tools,
  - using modern materials and equipment at schools,
  - introduction of new professions, materials and products, tools and technology,
2. Increase the quality of work on the labor market.
3. Attract a qualified modern workforce, ensuring the level of practical skills. Well trained graduates of vocational schools are attractive staff of every employer.
4. Evoke patriotism of use in the form of the subconscious being associated with a specific brand, company or construction product. It is all about remembering the names of products and their characteristic attributes for practical use. Competitors, trainers identify themselves with a specific brand. A similar situation applies to machines, devices and professional tools that are remembered as selected equipment for the performance of professional tasks.
5. Introduce new professions or qualifications, resulting from the development of the level of technology in the industry and market demand, e.g. electromechanics for hybrid cars.

## VOCATIONAL TRAINERS vs INDUSTRY TRAINERS

Skills competitions motivate industry and entrepreneurs to cooperate with the vocational education sector. WeRskills project assumes vocational education and practical training to be the basis for the preparation of competitors for the Skills Competitions on different levels. The trade school should be an area of cooperation with employers and a dual system of training for professional staff in a modern, innovative country. Basic support for schools is crucial here. Therefore, the cooperation of companies with vocational schools should be carried out on the basis of sponsorship agreements for the construction of practical laboratories, along with equipment and materials for classes.

- Industry trainers should lead the training of a competitor, implement modern training methods and meet the requirements of the labor market.
- In the process of vocational education and training, cyclical training of VET teachers is necessary (updating their knowledge of methods, materials and technologies). It should be conducted by professional industry trainers with qualifications.
- WorldSkills experts/trainers play a key role in all international competitions. By representing their country or region they share their knowledge and experience. They need to meet WorldSkills strict requirements to become members of the international body. Once they are approved these persons are entered into the WorldSkills database and have a status of official national experts in their skills.
- It is necessary to introduce the DUAL vocational education system, taking into account practical training in real work conditions.
- It is advisable to establish PRACTICAL EDUCATION CENTERS (France, Italy, Germany) for practical training in, for example, the construction industry. Ultimately, the centers will prepare participants for Skills Competitions on different levels.



On top of that, sponsorship gives companies invaluable exposure by allowing them to reach and connect with quality audiences, which often results in business growth.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SPONSORING SKILLS COMPETITIONS? WERSKILLS RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendation 1. Increase return on investment

Though they usually require some financial commitment, sponsorships provide businesses with excellent exposure, which typically results in a great return on investment (ROI). Sponsorship roles are usually negotiable, meaning you can work out an agreement that gives your company the level of exposure you're hoping for. Before the event, you should determine what goals you're hoping to achieve. Being a sponsor can provide your company with long-term benefits that extend further down the line, and may potentially offer an ROI far beyond the initial requirement of time or effort it would take to secure the deal. Being a sponsor for Skills Competitions generate one more positive effect: you participate in fulfilling important social goals.

### Recommendation 2. Foster a positive reputation & promote a positive brand

Your brand is the most important commodity your business has. Your brand is your company's identity in the marketplace. It's what you're known for and how your customers perceive your company. It goes without saying that every company strives to maintain a positive brand image, respected identity and favorable public opinion – whether the brand is local, national or global. When your brand is associated with WorldSkills positive image, you will benefit from its identity and share its credibility. Perhaps one of the biggest benefits of event sponsorship is that it can strengthen your company's image. People typically enjoy supporting brands that invest in their community and spread positive messages. By sponsoring an important cause like Skills Competitions, you can attract media attention, set your company apart from larger brands and inspire brand loyalty.

### Recommendation 3. Increase brand awareness

The main purpose of brand awareness is to generate preference in the mind of the consumer and increase customer loyalty. By sponsoring Skills Competitions, you can gain exposure to prospective customers and highlight the human side of your company. Taking up sponsorship can directly influence brand awareness, because if the sponsor's brand is popular and has a stable position in the marketplace, that favorable brand would improve the possibility of customer loyalty for the partnering company.

Many businesses struggle with getting their brand out there in a bigger way. Most corporate sponsors have already conquered this hurdle. If you are a small business owner, you will gain more followers and greater visibility when you hook your little caboose to the WorldSkills initiative. If you are a big business do not waste an opportunity to confirm your status and join WorldSkills events.

### Recommendation 4. Reach a wider demographic

Sponsorship allows to reach a wider audience. When a company buys permissive rights to be associated with a brand, or in our case the WorldSkills initiative, it is lending its

credibility to your company through association. Therefore, people who are attracted to WorldSkills will undoubtedly be attracted to your brand. Any time your company can secure new customers through an association with WorldSkills, it's a win.

#### **Recommendation 5. Enhance customer experience**

The customer experience is golden when it is positive. People want empathy. They want a fair price. They want great service. They want an experience. Nothing is better than having your customers act as an unpaid sales force for your company. When a customer has a favorable experience with a brand, they tell everyone they know and encourage others to patronize that business also. Likewise, when customers have a negative experience, they tell everyone they know and discourage others from patronizing that business. The customer experience can be improved as long as there is money being spent to address the customer interaction with a given organization or initiative, i.e. WorldSkills competitions.

#### **Recommendation 6. Build relationships with non-competing businesses**

Sponsoring an event or trade show can help your company make connections with non-competing businesses, giving you opportunities for collaboration in the future. Aside from having a strategy for engaging new customers, you should also prepare a plan to introduce yourself and your company to other sponsors and professionals in attendance.

#### **Recommendation 7. Gain valuable insights**

You can learn a lot from sponsoring Skills Competitions, including the:

- Newest industry trends or business ideas,
- Unique selling proposition (USP) of other companies,
- Strategies other businesses use to attract new customers.

#### **Recommendation 8. Expand its content strategy**

Sponsorships can provide a great source of new material for a company's content strategy. By promoting your involvement in an event or activity, you can drive traffic from the event and increase your engagement. A great way to do this is by creating content themes and hashtags. Additionally, you can connect with the host on social media and find new target audiences.

Aside from the content your company creates, you can also benefit from the exposure you gain from the social content of WorldSkills competitions. Most of their attendees share blogs, videos, quotes and photos during event, potentially exposing your brand to a much larger audience.

#### **Recommendation 9. Benefit from association**

You can often grow your company's positive reputation through branded event marketing. When a company sponsors events or organizations, people often assume

that it is reputable and reliable. As a result, consumers have a higher likelihood of purchasing services or products associated with the brands sponsoring high-profile events.

#### Recommendation 10. Boost brand visibility

Sponsorships can increase brand recognition before, during and after the actual event by giving your company exposure to new audiences. This often happens through mentions in the press or social media and event advertising, like radio spots, signs and featured ads. You can take advantage of this exposure by offering attendees free branded materials through promotional giveaways. By choosing WorldSkills events, you can ensure that you're connecting with high-quality leads that are interested in your solutions or products.

#### Recommendation 11. Showcase a service or product

WorldSkills events provide a great setting for launching feature updates, new products or new technologies. You can increase your traffic by promoting launches and other incentives, like giveaways, on social media before the event.

#### Recommendation 12. Gain a competitive advantage

When you sponsor an event, you automatically gain an advantage over your absent direct competitors.



WorldSkills is a partnership between educational institutions, government and employers whose overarching goal is to accelerate development of skills to achieve world standards.

The most important thing in this endeavor is the cooperation of all parties. Considering the purpose of the skills competitions, the main recommendation of the team is to implement activities that will result in close cooperation of all actors involved in skill competitions. WorldSkills activities reinforce each other

to support skill development among young people. WorldSkills International – an organization that brings together 85 countries that take part in the biennial Skills Olympics. Key WorldSkills' activities are a nationwide program of skills competitions each year the country's national skills team is selected and trained. WorldSkills brings together leading national employers and provides tailored solutions, experiential career events and tips. It would also be good practice to invest in research and innovation in skills and influence skills development through a variety of publications (e.g. blogs, reports, etc.). WorldSkills supports development of educational staff by sharing international best practices to ensure high quality training and evaluation.

### THE VALUE FOR MONEY OF WORLDSKILLS COMPETITIONS IS GENERATED THROUGH SEVERAL CHANNELS:

#### Upskilling effect

The greatest benefit is the direct effect of improving the qualifications of people participating in skills competitions (national or international) and gaining additional skills by observing and learning from other competitors. Medal winners, winners of non-medal teams and national competitors) have experienced a direct increase in their lifetime earnings as a result of upgrading their qualifications in connection with participation in competitions.



#### A mindset of high performance

National, international and associated skills competitions and training programs improve the skills and confidence of young people and stimulate a mindset of high performance. This applies not only to the people taking they part in the competition themselves, but also their peers.



#### Sharing knowledge

Trainers who take part in international competitions are exposed to international best practice and benefit classrooms and workplaces they return to through improving qualifications and sharing knowledge.

### International influence of WorldSkills

By being a key member of the WorldSkills network, a country is in a position to raise profile and prestige of national skills.

### Career prospects and career guidance

The benefits of participating in skills competitions also extend to peers as participants share their knowledge and inspire other students to perform in WorldSkills competitions. Students participating in the competition program provide skills benefits for their peers by sharing knowledge and/or inspiring their colleagues to perform at a higher level. More information on career prospects and career guidance is likely to lead to a better match of education and work for students receiving career counseling, once again leading to the improvement of education outcomes (e.g., decreased dropout probability and higher probability complete technical education), earnings and lifelong employment opportunities.

### Skills mismatch

Preparing for and participating in WorldSkills is very likely to have an impact on reducing the skills gap and the skills mismatch in the domestic labor market.



**International Labour Organization**

**Skills gaps**  
When workers lack the skills necessary to do their jobs effectively

**Skills obsolescence**  
When workers lose their skills over time due to lack of use or when skills become irrelevant due to changes in the world of work

**Skills shortages**  
When employers cannot find enough professionals with the right qualifications and skills

**Over/under skilling**  
When workers have skills above or below those required for the job

### Connect with top employers.

Competitions can also be a way to connect with top employers, that are otherwise difficult to reach, in a setting that puts skills in the spotlight. Regardless of previous formal educational background, if you have the skills to win a competition, you have the ability to connect. Applying through traditional recruitment channels can often be a drag, and many talented people fall through the cracks and never

reach their dream companies. Traditional application criteria are based mostly on the level of academic excellence, which may or may not showcase true talent and skills set. If you are skilled enough to get invited to the finals, you may have the chance to contact dream employers and impress them with your determination and passion in person.

### Build a résumé the fun way!

Rock stars are instantly recognizable because they are not afraid to show off their talents and embrace who they are. If you win a large competition, you can claim your own 'rock star status' in the talent recruitment community! Winning skills competitions is a great way to stand out from the crowd and build your résumé, both the traditional way and via your social media profile. Show off your achievements on LinkedIn and Facebook. We assure you that the "Likes" will start rolling in, and job offers won't be far behind.



If you are passionate about a subject that is outside your major, skills competitions can also help show off additional strands of your knowledge and interests. If you are a mechanical engineer passionate about environmental sustainability or a chemist deeply committed to human rights, find those competitions and compete! Don't be put off or intimidated by a lack of "formal" qualifications. Passion and interest can get you a long way, not just in competitions, but in life more generally.

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