On recent years, the Internet has made it possible for business to come under closer public scrutiny than ever before. Human rights activists and other interest groups concerned with unethical business behavior no longer have to spend years getting organized and soliciting funds to pay for their operating expenses, for distributing literature, and for costly media ads exposing unethical business practices. Today, such groups can plead their causes on the Internet. They can publish online, at virtually no cost, reports about unethical business practices. They can invite other Internet users to donate to their causes or join in their missions in other ways—by telephoning or sending letters to a company, for example, as part of a pressure campaign against the firm to cease its unethical behavior. Indeed, many sites invite users to simply print out letters that have already been drafted, sign the letters, and send them to the targeted firm.

Consider the activities of just one of these online groups—Corporate Watch at www.corpwatch.org. Corporate Watch delves into American companies’ global activities and gives online reports of what it finds. Recent reports at Corporate Watch’s Web site, for example, included those titled “Nike Raises Wages for Indonesian Workers,” “Italy: Benetton Implicated in Child Labour Scandal,” “Indigenous Groups Get Suit Reinstated against Texaco for Rainforest Destruction,” and “Action Update: Firings Halted at L. V. Myles.”

Corporate Watch, like several other online “corporate watchers,” pays special attention not only to environmental issues but also to the welfare of workers in factories located abroad that produce or assemble goods for American companies. For example, L. V. Myles, a factory located in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, assembles clothing for several U.S. firms, including the Disney Company. According to Corporate Watch, workers at the factory were paid about half of the basic living wage, and women were allegedly subjected to sexual harassment from their supervisors. When a flier protesting the abusive working conditions was circulated throughout the factory, the management responded by firing a number of workers who were suspected of being responsible for the flier. The management ceased firing workers, however, after it was bombarded with faxes, letters, and telephone calls from concerned U.S. citizens, who were alerted to the situation by Corporate Watch and other online corporate “watchers.”

**FOR CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

Using the Internet, a small handful of activists can bring significant pressure to bear on a corporation that, in the opinion of those activists, is acting unethically. What are the implications of this development for corporate ethical decision making?