

# Sberbank Employee Fired for Tweet

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Sberbank's reputation for long lines persists despite modernization talk. **Sergei Porter**

Sberbank on Friday fired an employee who made a badly received joke on the company's social networking sites about pensioners, and the bank apologized for the "inappropriate" attempt at humor.

The controversial comment appeared on the official Twitter account and Facebook page of Russia's biggest lender Wednesday, causing a polarized response and prompting Valery Ryazansky, chairman of Russia's Pensioners Union, to send an official complaint to Sberbank president German Gref.

"A people's life hack: If you write "Sberbank" in chalk on the wall, then a line of 30 pensioners forms immediately," read the remark that cost its author his job. "Has anyone tried? Does it work?"

Sberbank, the savings bank of the Soviet Union, is widely used by Russia's pensioners and has not shaken its reputation for long lines despite the recent attempts of senior management, led

by Gref, to modernize the bank.

"Sberbank has always been lovingly disposed towards our faithful and true clients — pensioners," said deputy chairman Bella Zlatiks in a statement on the bank's website.

The decision to fire the employee responsible for posting the comment was immediately criticized by Sberbank shareholder and anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny, who is an avid user of social networking sites.

"Look at the idiots," Navalny wrote Friday on Twitter. "Somebody decided to use Twitter normally and he was fired."

The incident illustrates some of the tensions between Sberbank's traditional social functions — 5 million people visit its branches every day — and the reform agenda that Gref has endeavored to push through since his appointment in 2007.

Senior managers at Sberbank liken the task of modernizing the bank to "making an elephant dance."

Gref is himself a proponent of social media and has used his position to highlight the power of "crowdsourcing," or using the Internet to perform tasks for free.

He even introduced then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to the self-proclaimed inventor of crowdsourcing, U.S. journalist Jeff Howe, last year.

But Sberbank is not the first Russian state-owned giant to take action against staff who have taken online liberties.

National carrier Aeroflot fired flight attendant Yekaterina Solovyova in May after she joked about the crash of a Russian Superjet in Indonesia on her Twitter account.

Solovyova was hired as a manager by Vkontakte, Russia's most popular social networking site, a month later.

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