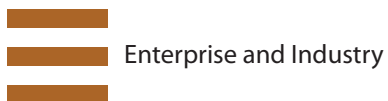




Supporting the internationalisation of SMEs

Good practice selection





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European Commission
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR ENTERPRISE AND INDUSTRY

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FOREWORD


This booklet contains a selection of 27 national programmes collected during the BEST project 'Supporting the internationalisation of SMEs'. The project runs from November 2007 to October 2008 and is based on the contributions of a group of experts from the European Union, European Economic Area, and candidate countries. These selected practices were chosen out of the more than 90 programmes from 23 different countries presented by the experts.

The different practices are presented in nine areas devoted to topics identified as essential with regard to the internationalisation process of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs):

1. Raising awareness
2. High value information
3. Human resources' development programmes
4. Supporting the financial needs of internationalisation
5. Promotion of networks
6. Supporting the internationalisation of services
7. Using internationalisation to enhance competitiveness
8. Individualised support
9. Border zones and cross-border cooperation

The main criterion used for the selection of practices in each of the nine areas was the capacity of each chosen programme to support SMEs to effectively tackle one or several of the issues highlighted in that area. In addition the practice had to be existing and operational and should be easily transferable.

This does not mean that the programmes are area specific. In most cases the practices cover a wider spectrum of SME support that is not merely confined to the area for which they were chosen.



These practices and many others presented for this project can also be consulted in the Enterprise and Industry Directorate-General's good practice searchable database, to be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/enterprise_policy/charter/



INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest successes of the EU has been the creation of a vast single market of over 450 million consumers. And beyond Europe, the current wave of globalisation, characterised by sharp reductions in trade barriers and in transport, communication and information costs, has opened vast opportunities.

Yet for many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), national frontiers still represent a significant barrier to expanding their business and they still depend largely, or solely, on their domestic markets. Current estimates indicate that only one fifth of European SMEs have exports and only 3 % of SMEs have subsidiaries, branches or joint ventures abroad. Even more worryingly, **internationalisation is still not even considered by a substantial percentage of European SMEs** despite the fact that SMEs are already exposed to strong international competition even within their own internal markets.

Studies have already demonstrated the direct link between internationalisation and the increased performance of SMEs. Proactive internationalisation reinforces growth, enhances competitiveness and supports the long-term sustainability of the company.

Despite its advantages, going abroad is still a big step for most small companies. They simply do not have the resources and the contacts which could alert them to suitable business opportunities, potential partners and openings in foreign markets. In addition, the financial investment needed to launch into the international arena can be a significant barrier to many SMEs. Also **the dynamic character of barriers** means that difficulties will evolve with the degree of internationalisation of the company.

In order to overcome this, numerous support programmes have been developed by national and regional governments to support the internationalisation of SMEs. The First Trade Promotion Agency was created in Finland in 1919 and, for many years, government support programmes focused exclusively on promoting exports using instruments such as export finance credits, trade missions, joint trade exhibitions, etc. The character and content of these **export support measures** have experienced an evolution with the new challenges and new demanding environments but still these programmes **represent over 70 % of SME internationalisation support measures worldwide.**

These programmes will not feature in this brochure. Despite their pre-eminence, their effectiveness in promoting exports and the fact that they cover an important SME need (particularly with small and beginner SMEs), all governments have a wealth of experience and have developed identical or quasi-identical solutions for their national companies.

This brings to the fore the fact that **internationalisation is not only exporting**. For instance, cross-border cooperation, participation in profitable networks, search for competitive inputs or new technologies are important elements in the modern SME drive into internationalisation. Also **internationalised SMEs combine different mutually supporting approaches in their international strategy**.

This underlines the fact that **individualised support to SMEs is the most effective support to internationalising SMEs**. This means the company is analysed in its entirety and an individual plan is prepared using a range of support measures that sometimes go even beyond internationalisation. This is the case of Austria's 'Go international' programme of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and the Austrian government, where, in addition to individualised support, the perspective is the internationalisation of an economy as a whole (holistic approach) which implies taking into account other areas such as social corporate responsibility or innovation. In the case of the Irish organisation 'Enterprise Ireland', support mechanisms are designed to take account of all the companies' needs, in order to better position them for internationalisation.

Studies have already found strong links between **innovation and internationalisation: they both share a positive and causal effect in competitiveness**. Some countries such as Norway are already implementing integrated policy measures, offering programmes that combine innovation and internationalisation as the mix of instruments that allows companies to increase their value creation and their competitiveness. These types of programmes have the additional advantages of addressing those companies for which the main driver to internationalisation is better access to innovation, high technology or know-how. They also offer a better platform to tackle directly an important and relatively new phenomenon, the 'born globals'.

This brochure would like to highlight the fact that **it is fundamental for Europe to increase the capacity and effective internationalisation of SMEs, which is well below its full potential**. In addition to enhancing the awareness of SMEs of the need to internationalise, European national and regional institutions must facilitate easier and more widespread access to support programmes and access to relevant and usable information. Also, internal issues such as lack of sufficient and sufficiently trained human resources to tackle internationalisation and the need for direct support in finance for internationalisation have to be addressed. All this will have to consider the heterogeneity of SMEs, which will require an individualised approach to each company.

Internationalisation has become the condition for SMEs to survive in today's greatly competitive environment. This brochure aims to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and the dissemination of good internationalisation programmes that are currently put into practice by different European nations.



1. RAISING AWARENESS

Europe needs more internationalised SMEs. A big proportion of SMEs, and most of those with fewer than 10 employees, have all their activities concentrated in their local or national markets. More worryingly, according to international studies, a high percentage of SMEs have never considered 'going international'.

Extending their activities abroad is still considered either unnecessary or too costly and risky. Yet internationalisation offers access to an extended customer base, additional suppliers or exposure to new technologies. In general, it offers a route to increased performance, long-term sustainability and higher competitiveness, which are the main benefits of a successful internationalisation strategy.

Advocating greater internationalisation amongst SMEs is important but raising awareness is not only about the awareness of the benefits of internationalisation, but also about the awareness of existing programmes to support SMEs when they decide to go international.

Sometimes this lack of knowledge of support programmes or the confusion created by too numerous and overlapping support schemes leads to the SME being lost when it is time to carry out its intention to go international.

This is particularly true of the smallest SMEs, potentially the ones with the largest need for support. So, an important effort needs to be coupled to the programme in order to communicate with the target SMEs.

Programmes inviting SMEs to look beyond their natural borders for imports, exports, cooperation, etc. with a strong and effective communication to SMEs must be coupled with user-friendly systems (a one-stop-shop for example) to collect and translate initial interest into the SMEs taking their first steps towards internationalisation.

KiVi — Kilpailukykyä viennistä ja kansainvälistymisestä: distribution of information on internationalisation services and instruments

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

SMEs in Finland are not sufficiently aware of the variety of the internationalisation services and instruments available. The KiVi project aims to join public, semi-public and private organisations in creating platforms where information and contacts for these services are provided.

Brief description of the practice

The KiVi project is coordinated by the Confederation of Finnish Industries EK and Employment and the Economic Development Centres (TE-Centres) in cooperation with chambers of commerce and the Federation of Finnish Enterprises. All national and a number of local organisations promoting internationalisation are partners in the project.

The project provides a concept and platform for organising events where information concerning internationalisation services and instruments is distributed. Each seminar is organised locally and ideally all local actors join in at the planning stage in order to include all relevant experiences about the needs and preferences of local enterprises.

Nationally the project is coordinated by an Internet-based platform where all upcoming events are listed, and the programmes and presentations after the event are published. This makes communication more efficient and provides a service for all local organisers. In the same platform there are number of instruments available, namely the project document describing the process and content of the events, pre-designed template for the programme/invitation, feedback form and Excel worksheet for analysing the feedback information.

The events themselves consist of a half- or full-day seminar, where information is distributed in the form of presentations, company cases (emphasised), as well as in the mini fair where all interested service providers have a stand in the lobby of the seminar venue. All the presentations are posted on the national platform for later use.

Target group

Primarily Finnish SMEs but representatives of large companies are welcome. The secondary target group includes public, semi-public and private organisations promoting the internationalisation of Finnish firms.

Results expected or achieved

The project aims at improving awareness of the services and financial instruments available for internationalisation among entrepreneurs and company representatives.

In the first round of seminars, 1 379 persons participated in the 18 events: an average of 77 participants per event, which is considered very good for seminars of this kind. Similar participation levels are observed on the second round.

Feedback questionnaires gave 4.0 points for content; 4.1 to organisation and venues; and 3.9 to presentations on a scale of 1 to 5. Overall the events were considered very good and some individual presentations received excellent ratings.

In the feedback meeting with the partner organisations, evaluations were very good and the project was considered very useful and beneficial; consequently, a second round of seminars was initiated.

Additional information

www.ek.fi/kivi

Testimonial

Anne Linnonmaa, Managing Director, Anne Linnonmaa Ltd

'[The] KiVi project is an excellent tool to bring the information closer to companies. Furthermore it is most interesting to hear other companies' experiences in their path to internationalisation. New ideas are generated by networking both with organisations and other enterprises.'

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Centres of Entrepreneurial and Technological Development — C.E.TE.DE network

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

Increasing awareness, provision of information and organisational assistance on efforts to export goods and services. The measure covers all regions and prefectures of Greece.

Brief description of the practice

The initiative is implemented by the Centres of Entrepreneurial and Technological Development (C.E.TE.DE), a regional network of non-profitable organisations coordinated and supervised by the General Secretariat of Industry, Ministry of Development. The 13 centres operate in the capital of every prefecture of each region and provide a one-stop-shop service for the provision of information on export of goods and services, organisational assistance (advice) and information for activities aiming to support export efforts.

Information provided is usually classified according to information units creating an 'Exports tool box'.

In addition, the centre promotes the stimulation of groups of companies ready and able to embark on export activities to participate in common efforts for the promotion of their goods and services in international markets. This is activated in coordination and cooperation with the Hellenic Foreign Trade Board.

Target group

Mainly SMEs with particular emphasis on small and very small enterprises which have not developed export activities, are beginning to develop export activities, or have small-scale export activities measured as a percentage of their annual turnover.

Results expected or achieved

Varies depending on the prefecture. Official collective results are not yet available.

Additional information

This initiative is vibrant and flexible. It provides decentralised activities within a specific but not rigid framework. In each individual centre, the initiative has the ability to build on and take advantage of local comparative advantages. The measure is welcomed and supported by all major actors, such as the Ministry of Development, local authorities, professional associations, the media, and most important of all, SMEs themselves.

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BusinessInfo.cz — portal for business and export

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

For an SME, searching and accessing relevant information can be difficult. SMEs have insufficient resources and there are too many state and NGO institutions involved in the provision of information and services. Also, cross-related or inter-agency agendas were not described because no single institution/agency was responsible for it.

The BusinessInfo.cz portal has been designed mainly for the Czech business audience. But any foreign SMEs can find information needed for establishing a business in the Czech Republic.

Brief description of the practice

BusinessInfo.cz (www.businessinfo.cz) is an official Internet portal for business and export. It is a one-stop-shop window that integrates information from state administration bodies, agencies and non-governmental associations and chambers, and covers a whole range of information from an 'easy read' and use to quite complex electronic forms.

Target group

Individual SMEs. Special target group: export companies — beginners.

Results expected or achieved

Each year, the results of the previous year have almost doubled.

Number of visitors (per month)

2002: 6 642
2003: 20 124
2004: 34 325
2005: 60 120
2006: 146 472

Number of registered users

2002: 306
2003: 430
2004: 1 994
2005: 8 230
2006: 15 958

User satisfaction: above 7.5 (out of 10 points) every year.

Additional information

www.businessinfo.cz

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2. HIGH VALUE INFORMATION

This is repeatedly cited by SME surveys and studies as one of the key concerns of would-be or budding international SMEs. Many companies, particularly the smallest ones and those at the early stage of internationalisation, lack the resources and expertise to identify foreign business opportunities, potential partners, foreign business practices, export procedures, import regulations, standards and product specifications, laws and regulations, marketing requirements, etc.

In order to increase the number of internationalised SMEs, it is essential to provide easier access to this kind of information so that the company can minimise the relatively high initial costs and risks of going international. The availability of this relevant information is essential for the decision-making process of SMEs as it allows them to plan an internationalisation strategy.

Providing relevant internationalisation information to SMEs is a vast area. In this brochure we would like to highlight three individual aspects:

- programmes supporting matchmaking;
- providing information on foreign markets;
- cross-border cooperation and networking in information services.

The following section presents three separate practices whose ultimate goal is to provide high impact and high value information that can be directly used by participating SMEs.

Programmes supporting matchmaking

Business opportunities

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

Business opportunities was launched with the objective of simplifying entrepreneurs' access to information about new business/export opportunities and internationalisation of services. It is applicable in any geographical area throughout the Czech Republic.

Brief description of the practice

Export opportunities, gained via CzechTrade offices abroad, Czech embassies and online forms on the CzechTrade website, are collected in the inner database, translated into Czech, classified by sectors and then published on the website. When a more concrete and specified demand from a foreign company is received, it is checked against a list of existing Czech manufacturers and the demanding company is supplied with a list of potential Czech suppliers.

Target group

SMEs, companies ready to export.

Results expected or achieved

Quantitative results: every year around 5 000 export opportunities/enquiries by foreign companies are published, 4 000 tenders and 700 offers. The number of website visits is estimated to range from 20 000 to 100 000 per month. There is no aggregate information on the number of successful cases, i.e. contracts concluded on the base of published and/or treated information, since those cases have only been followed in a limit group of respondents.

Additional information

www.czechtrade.cz

www.czechtradeoffices.com

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Providing information on foreign markets

German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHK)

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

The AHK-network offers information services and consultation for SMEs concerning external markets worldwide.

Brief description of the practice

There are about 120 offices of German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AuslandsHandelsKammer — AHK) in 80 countries on every continent. They are mostly independent institutions which earn a major share of their income through the services they provide. The services of these institutions include information on import and export regulations, customs duties, investment conditions abroad, currency regulations, market opportunities and marketing strategies for German companies. They advise firms *in situ* and help them establish international business contacts. Basic information is free of charge but detailed analysis and specific individual consulting have to be paid for. In addition, they are the first port of call and a key intermediary for firms in the host country wishing to do business in Germany. At the same time, the AHKs perform important tasks in the interest of the German government that would otherwise have to be performed by state institutions.

The main advantages are that SMEs can get professional consultation and information on external markets by a local German organisation on site. The continuous support from home of exporting SMEs abroad is therefore possible. The service they provide in the field of foreign trade is especially useful for SMEs that do not have their own export departments.

Target group

Exporting and interested German companies, particularly SMEs.

Results expected or achieved

AHKs mediate about 100 000 business contacts per year. They are integrated into the economy of their host countries and are able to offer perfect business opportunities via their contacts in the local business community. The fact that about 40 000 firms are members of these chambers, of which two thirds are of non-German nationality, is evidence of this.

Since 2006, the new service concept 'DEinternational' (www.deinternational.de) has been built up. Under this name the AHKs offer the basic services in a more comparable form worldwide, and expand the range of their special services. Through cooperation with additional partners, they have also enlarged the range of services to include promotion of foreign trade. The services of DEinternational are varied, flexible and tailor-made to suit the special needs of different sized companies from different business sectors. For German SMEs this means better market access, better client orientation as well as a higher degree of transparency and value of the network.

Additional information

www.ahk.de

Testimonial

Jörg Fischer, Knöpfe & Fischer Fensterbau OHG, Blumberg

'While on a fact-finding trip to Dublin and Cork in November 2005 I obtained a first overview about the interesting Irish market. The presentation of the Chamber of Commerce Abroad in Dublin was professional, topical and applicable directly. I would like to cooperate with the Chambers of Commerce Abroad again.'

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Cross-border cooperation and networking in information services

b2fair — www.b2fair.com

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

b2fair is a supporting instrument in the field of cooperation and company matching. It covers SMEs all over Europe and is open to all.

Brief description of the practice

International cooperation is becoming more and more important as an instrument to access foreign markets. In particular, international trade fairs are an efficient platform for meetings between companies since both exhibitors and visitors are already present and well-prepared business meetings can add value to both companies. Numerous SMEs receive requests for business contacts from foreign companies.

b2fair offers the possibility to check the company profile, prepare the meetings, accompany the SMEs to trade fairs and supply them with booths, interpreters and other services.

This measure is based on an online database and information on events. It enables European companies to publicise their company profiles on the Internet and match them at international trade fairs in Europe. This entry can be assisted by those business organisations involved (b2fair partner network). b2fair is administrated by the Euro Info Centre Stuttgart and the Euro Info Centre Luxembourg and was initiated by the European Commission. Some of the advantages are:

- an international network with more than 30 partners;
- sustainability of a European co-financed project by the Commission;
- high rate of company meetings and client satisfaction;
- lesser participation fee;
- high public relations effects during an international trade fair.

Target group

Companies from home and abroad in all sectors.

Results expected or achieved

About 2 500 companies participated in 10 international trade fairs like the Hanover Messe, the ELMIA in Sweden, the Midest in Paris, the AMB in Stuttgart, the MSV in Brno and the HI in Herning. More than 15 000 business meetings were arranged, of which 30 % were remarked as good first meetings. The participants fill in a questionnaire right at the end of the meetings as well as approximately six months later.

Additional information

www.b2fair.com

E-mail: info@b2fair.com

Testimonial

Bernhard Traube, Alfred Bolz Gerätebau GmbH, Argenbühl — Eisenharz

'b2fair brought us some valuable contacts that led to two concrete business collaborations. Our Slovakian partner visited us recently. We'd gladly come back to it anytime.'

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3. HUMAN RESOURCES' DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

SMEs are characterised by flexibility and great capacity to innovate and adapt, but engaging with international markets requires additional competencies, management skills and long-term availability of human resources in order to develop an internationalisation strategy without compromising the day-to-day business.

Even though sometimes it is not fully grasped by the SMEs themselves, this is one of the main barriers facing an SME when they consider internationalisation: many SMEs lack some of the skills and, most of all, the time required to start international operations. Programmes that support the transfer of these skills to SMEs and the provision of additional specialised human resources will greatly facilitate SMEs to assume a long-term commitment to go beyond their borders. In many cases these programmes will help solve a critical pre-condition to go international.

Mentoring of SMEs by other SMEs, long-term coaching programmes, provision of trainees or graduates with internationalisation experience, etc. are some aspects of this issue. We underline this issue by highlighting three different and complimentary approaches:

- training programmes;
- enterprise programmes;
- graduate programmes.

Training programmes

Regional programme to promote the export and internationalisation of SMEs

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

This regional programme is aimed at increasing the competitiveness of SMEs by encouraging and supporting export and internationalisation.

Brief description of the practice

The programme is based on a concept developed for SMEs who have the potential and capabilities to increase their global competitiveness through innovation and internationalisation. It is a business development programme where companies participate in a development process over 12 to 14 months. The companies are granted financial support from Innovation Norway to a business development project.

The programme is divided into four phases:

- (1) identifying and assessing the needs and life phases of interested companies, i.e. if they are willing, able and ready and can benefit from the programme;
- (2) analysing the company's ability for innovative market and technology development; this constitutes the basis for the market and technology projects to be implemented during the programme;
- (3) planning: assisting the company in developing a plan for its market and/or technology project;
- (4) implementing: helping the companies implement their projects through tailor-made support using different competence, advisory, networking or financing services.

Additional information

In 1999 the counties of Sør-Trøndelag and Nord-Trøndelag took the initiative to set up a stronger and more coordinated programme supporting the internationalisation of the companies in the region. On the basis of a pre-study, a three-year programme started in 2001 financed by the counties and Innovation Norway. The programme was continued after 2003 based on the positive evaluation of the first three years. The programme has set up and is running a number of sector networks in the counties. By the end of 2005 there were five different networks: environment, health, energy, ICT, oil and gas.

Evaluation/results

During 2001–03, over 300 enterprises participated in one or several activities in the programme, and more than 170 companies have undergone an in-depth analysis. The participating companies have shown a total average increase in their export sales of 7 %. The close cooperation between the regional chamber of commerce, export associations, Innovation Norway, private consultants, research and education institutions, communities and county councils has resulted in a higher quality and more targeted support of the internationalisation of SMEs.

Additional information

www.innovasjon Norge.no

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Enterprise programmes

Globaali evaluation and development programme for SMEs. Branded expert service supporting the internationalisation of Finnish SMEs.

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

The objective of Globaali internationalisation programme is to help Finnish SMEs succeed in international competition with as little risk as possible by producing a development plan for the enterprise.

Brief description of the practice

Globaali is a nationwide evaluation and development programme to assess the preparedness of SMEs for internationalisation. It is a financially supported specialist service. The programme is individualised on an enterprise and/or product and is country-specific. The quality of the programme is assured by trained and certified Globaali consultants who are specialists in the internationalisation of enterprises. The objectives of the Globaali internationalisation programme are to:

- assess the prospects for the internationalisation of an enterprise by analysing the current status of the products, the distribution channels, operating methods and resources;
- establish the reasons, prospects and visions of the enterprise with regard to internationalisation and produce an assessment of the international competitive situation of the enterprise; the Globaali specialist will also address the competitive advantages and international opportunities of the enterprise;
- produce an internationalisation model for the enterprise, a strategy that will ensure success in the target market, as well as launch a related internationalisation programme outlining areas of investment and development, actions to be taken, the key personnel to take responsibility for the process, as well as schedules and financial resources.

Target group

SMEs (EU definition) in all sectors including services. These SMEs will be in the process of initiating or expanding international operations (non-internationalised companies, beginners, advanced companies).

Results expected or achieved

Through Globaali more than 700 companies have improved their readiness for internationalisation. The Employment and Economic Development Centre provides a yearly evaluation for which the average rating for Globaali was 8.1 in 2005 and 7.8 in 2006, on a scale of 4 to 10.

The Globaali concept was evaluated by Net Effect Oy in 2004. The evaluation states that Globaali fulfils a clear need among Finnish SMEs and is of high quality according to participants who were interviewed for the study. Follow-through was seen to be sufficiently flexible and to give clear ratings of companies' potential for internationalisation.

Additional information

www.te-keskus.fi

www.yrityssuomi.fi

Testimonial

Markku Hakkarainen, Managing Director of FinnKatalyt Oy

'[The] Globaali programme helped us to analyse and identify our resources and possibilities to start international business. The consultation during the programme made clear the need to focus on two main business sectors on the international market.'

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Graduate programmes

INOV Contacto

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

Economic structural measure aiming at the training of qualified human resources to help Portuguese companies compete in the global economy. The measure has a national scope.

Brief description of the practice

The competitive success of national companies in any internationalisation process also involves a commitment to training their human resources. The improvement of human resources skills permits the development of internationalisation strategies, which in turn promote sustainable competitiveness. This also leads to the reinforcement of technical, technological and marketing capacities, innovation of products and processes, and organisational readjustments required by the evolution of international markets. INOV Contacto pursues the improvement of young trainees' skills and promotes their recruitment by companies. The programme also provides research and dissemination of strategic information, gathered by Network Contacto. Through Network Contacto, trainees also have the chance to participate in all the events organised by the network, start debates and forums, and to join an employment exchange. The programme consists of:

- a course in international management (CGI), taught by university teachers and leading individuals in the national and international business worlds; it combines practical aspects with theoretical and thematic sessions, offering training in the areas of international management and culture management;
- placement of trainees for two months (four weeks for the technological section) in Portuguese companies in order to gain contact with the operation and organisation of the company and acquire specific knowledge in exports and the international management of companies;
- placement for six months (nine for the technological section) in companies abroad to initiate their international professional career and to stimulate knowledge acquisition suitable for international economic activity; in many cases, the programme facilitates the start of a professional career abroad or in Portugal in internship host companies.

Companies and organisations wishing to participate in INOV Contacto's international traineeship programme are selected according to the interest they represent for the development of the productivity and competitiveness of the national economy and the Portuguese business community.

The programme is funded by incentives granted by the EU's European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF) and by the Portuguese administration

Target group

Portuguese and multinational companies with a significant presence in Portugal; also foreign companies which, although not represented in Portugal, have a high strategic importance for the country's economy and multilateral organisations like the World Bank, European Commission, European Investment Bank, etc.

Results expected or achieved

INOV Contacto has inspired new ideas and suggested providing a number of young graduates, who had practical training in several countries in addition to their university degree, to internationalised companies. Also to create and manage an informal knowledge network of national graduates (independently of the country of residence), that could consider their experience and skills achieved during internship, and advise and disseminate the benchmark approach in SMEs' internationalisation.

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www.networkcontacto.com

www.portugalglobal.pt

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4. SUPPORTING THE FINANCIAL NEEDS OF INTERNATIONALISATION

Internationalisation lays additional financial strains on the company. All SME surveys point to the fact that this issue, jointly with obtaining access to 'high value information' tops the list of SME priorities as the main problems to consider when considering starting international operations.

In general, financial matters are usually not an area of expertise for SMEs and will require a lot of energy and time. And, when considering internationalisation, the financial aspect is much more than an issue of cash-flow management or guaranteeing access to additional finance. Internationalisation brings a swathe of specific factors such as exchange rate risk, guaranteeing payments from abroad, difficulties with granting credit facilities to foreign customers, etc.

This makes finances for internationalisation a two-fold problem: on the one hand, gaining information on the new problems and financial mechanisms of internationalisation and, on the other, having access to the additional funds required to finance international operations. Obtaining those funds will bring additional costs and difficulties due to the enhanced level of risk perceived by the financial institutions and, in some cases, require the use of internationalisation-specific financial instruments.

This section presents practices that offer solutions to some of the problems highlighted above.

Short-term export credits insurance

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

This programme contributes to the effective promotion of Greek SME exports as it covers up to 95 % of the export value, in case of non-payment due to commercial or political risks. The period of the insured export credits can be up to 180 days. For some specific products it can be extended to one year. The programme has national geographical coverage.

Brief description of the practice

The programme is implemented by the Export Credit Insurance Organisation (ECIO) which encourages Greek SMEs to start selling abroad by insuring the export credits granted to foreign buyers. An exporter willing to obtain cover fills out an application form and submits it to ECIO. If ECIO approves the exporter's request for insurance, the two parties sign an insurance policy, setting premium rates depending on the risks covered, the country of destination and the terms of payment respectively. In case the risk covered under the insurance policy actually occurs, ECIO, following the customer's request, and if the time period specified in the insurance policy has elapsed (three to nine months depending on the covered risks), indemnifies the exporter and at the same time assumes all of the exporter's rights and claims against the foreign buyer-debtor. Although ECIO does not make any financing for exports, it indirectly helps SMEs which face difficulties in obtaining banking finance for their export orders, by allowing every insured exporter to assign his or her right for indemnification to a bank or any other financing institution as 'collateral'.

Target group

Every exporting Greek SME which sells its products or services abroad 'on credit terms'. ECIO welcomes SMEs with export activities without any restriction regarding the volume of their annual export sales.

Results expected or achieved

Approximately up to 2 000 insurance policies have been signed and almost 700 Greek export SMEs have benefited since 1988, when the programme started.

Additional information

www.ecio.gr

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Royalty scheme to support innovative new business and business growth in new markets

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

This initiative is intended to facilitate financing the 'proof of concept' stage for an SME based on expected turnover, thus facilitating the start-up period of any activity.

Brief description of the practice

Many inventors and product developers face a dilemma when looking for finance when they are in the 'proof of concept' stage. Equity investors, whether they are business angels or venture capitalists, often demand a big piece of the company because of all the risk they incur. Royalty financing eliminates the dilemma. Instead of selling equity, the inventor simply pledges a piece of the future sales against an advance provided by the investor. The measure provides access to finance for projects that are considered too risky for support through loans. This is usually because returns are seen to be generated in the longer term. Through royalty financing the enterprise will pay the investor a percentage of sales or gross profits instead of monthly debt payments or equity ownership in the business. The following activities are covered under the incentive:

- development of new products/processes;
- innovative, knowledge-based start-ups;
- significant improvement on existing products/processes;
- significant design improvements;
- expanding enterprises within the target sectors identified in the strategy of Malta Enterprise;
- 'proof of concept' projects;
- SMEs undergoing a market penetration strategy based on internationalisation.

Target group

Enterprises wishing to develop new products or to develop their existing products so as to address the requirements of a new market.

Results expected or achieved

This is a relatively new scheme; currently one royalty agreement has been signed and others are in an advanced stage of evaluation.

Testimonial

Peter Delia, Ricston Ltd

'Ricston Ltd provides consulting, support and training services for open source technologies, currently specialising in enterprise integration technologies. We are privately funded and applied to Malta Enterprise for assistance under the royalty funding scheme in September 2006. The funds made available to Ricston under this scheme are of great assistance in contributing to the financing of the development of our team and the services we are offering the international business community. We have experienced great growth, success and change in these short months and look to the continuing support of Malta Enterprise in meeting these challenges. Since the royalty scheme is payable back on turnover generated, this facilitated the start-up period of our operation.'

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SME and cross-border finance

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

Information on financial products and issues is fragmented and non-transparent. That is especially a problem for SMEs that want to internationalise and need financing as well a roadmap on how to prepare for that.

Our goal is to improve access to finance for SMEs by gathering the information available and to offer it in a web file. To realise this we cooperate with the private sector including our confederations of banks (NVB) and SMEs (MKB-NI), so its demand-driven. The web file is applicable worldwide and targeted at Dutch SMEs and their partners.

The practice was initiated by the Dutch Trade Board, DTB (a public–private advisory board to the government) and implemented by our agency for international business and cooperation, EVD.

Brief description of the practice

The web file (www.internationaalondernemen.nl/dossiers/mkb.asp) presents on the Internet the products of the private financial sector, the state, the EU and multilateral institutions as of October 2006.

Included are special products like export credit insurance and international credit ratings but also factoring, venture capital, payment habits, leasing and checklists, which can be very useful for cross-border finance. Seemingly heterogeneous products are homogenised, i.e. grouped together and presented in a simple and user-friendly way, compared with regard to terms and pricing.

The visitor should find the information as quickly as possible. This is realised by using short but detailed pages and 'deep links' to the right page on the website of the providers. EVD is still upgrading the information: simple checklists, business cases and, soon, references to financial/legal advisors for SMEs (auditors, lawyers), etc.

Target group

The target group is Dutch SMEs that export, invest and are engaged in cross-border cooperation. It consists of about 75 000 firms (of which about 70 000 exporters). The overall majority (estimated at 80 %) has no need for external information/advice on financing as they can manage on their own or together with their foreign clients. So the potential target group consists of about 15 000 SMEs. Our experience is that advisors to SMEs (auditors, chambers of commerce, lawyers, etc.) also find the information very useful.

Results expected or achieved

The response from the financial sector, chambers of commerce, the SME confederation, etc. is very positive. We seem to have discovered a niche in the market. This is confirmed by:

- (1) the fact that EVD has refined its instruments for measuring the number of visitors in order to correct the 'hits' from web crawlers (search engines). This allows for a clear picture of the number of unique visitors. The results: approximately 3 600 unique visitors in 2007 (up to September only). This is a good result in relation to other parts of the website, especially when taking into account the 'specialist' niche that it covers;
- (2) the page rank at Google. The file has about 80 pages and in 85 % of cases you will find them at the first three hits when 'Googled'. This indicates its popularity. It also means that a 'customer' finds the issue in the web file almost at once.

Additional information

www.internationaalondernemen.nl/dossiers/mkb.asp

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5. PROMOTION OF NETWORKS

By their very nature, networks facilitate the interaction between different companies and organisations sharing common goals or interests and represent a source of profitable synergies: cost sharing, better or faster access to new technologies, enhanced access to potential business partners, etc.

This is the reason why experts and studies coincide in mentioning networks as one of the most conducive tools to a more successful international activity and why governments and business organisations alike are involved in their promotion and support.

The character of the network can be varied, involving both SMEs and large companies, different sectors, even different regional or national areas depending on the core focus of the network. One of the key advantages of networks is the low cost for participants in comparison with the advantages they offer.

The relationships created inside or through these networks have traditionally been a key instrument to help SMEs extend their activities abroad and an excellent tool for searching for technology and know-how.

In this section we present two practices whose main goal is promoting the interaction of participants in search of commonly supporting goals.

Finpro export partnership

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

Finpro export partnership is a market entry tool for groups of SMEs, using the synergies between the participating companies. It is applicable for companies based in Finland, but the target market can be any country.

Brief description of the practice

This is a cooperation project of SME companies, heading together to a selected target market(s), with a minimum of four companies forming a synergetic offering. Finpro will recruit an external export manager for the group, who acts as an extra resource to the companies and offers a local presence in the target market, alongside their network. The export manager may also be based in Finland, if the operation mode supports that. The participating companies have an active role in the project. The way of working also offers them an excellent learning and growth opportunity. The job description of the export manager can be designed according to company needs. Primarily it is about door opening, market study, partner search and sparring. Finpro has the role of project management, and manages approximately 30 export partnerships annually to various target markets and different lines of industry. The maximum duration of government aid is three and half years. However, the commitment and financing are always for one year at a time. In the early phase it is possible to carry out a six-month-long preparatory period.

Target group

Finnish SME companies with a special emphasis on growth companies. Larger companies may participate as well.

Results expected or achieved

The way of working prompts the companies to enhance their understanding of international trade and helps them evaluate their competitiveness and build their internationalisation strategies. It is also expected to foster business on a tangible level: find partners, distributors, build subcontracting relationships or even start one's own operations in the target market. Finpro has run export partnerships since the early 1990s with over 1 200 participating companies. According to a survey carried out in 2005 by the Turku School of Economics, a clear majority of the companies regard the impact of the export partnership as significant.

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www.finpro.fi

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Setting up a networking system for SMEs to promote their exports

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

Set in the West Transdanubian region, one of the most developed in Hungary, this initiative aims at promoting the creation of SME business networks with the final goal of supporting greater exports. The creation, relationship and exchange of knowledge and work experience are the main tools of this programme.

Brief description of the practice

'Setting up a networking system for SMEs to promote their exports' has been a well-known programme in Hungary since 2003 and the West Transdanubian region is the third in which it has been introduced. This programme focuses on business knowledge development training in order to provide an impact on the cross-border activities of SMEs.

The reason for setting up this regular SME networking event is to promote the exchange and spread of business knowledge and practices that lead to changing the behaviour of SMEs, thereby creating the basis for export development into the single market and extension to third countries.

The practice combines learning, networking and alliance building with the operational goal of increasing turnover as well as exports for the participants. The project has three phases:

- (1) selection of active SMEs in the region to form a group of 25 to 30 entrepreneurs and first consultation about their cooperation intention and targets; selection of large enterprises/mentors who can help the SMEs: people with considerable experience in export promotion and management;
- (2) team building among the SMEs and large enterprises by trainings, workshops and exchange of experiences for one month;
- (3) consultation in workshops every month during one year to increase the professional knowledge to manage SMEs and simultaneously create a relationship among the participants; workshops are led by consultants that can be managers of large enterprises or experts from the Ministry of Economy and Transport. Presentations are given by experts from the Ministry, Chambers of Industry and Trade, European Information Centres (EIC) and also by experts from the Hungarian Investment and Trade Development Agency. The subject of the monthly workshop can be selected by the SMEs' team. The financial support is provided with the coordinated effort of the Ministry of Economy and Transport and regional Chambers of Industry and Trade. These sessions give the SMEs the possibility to create cooperative links with each other, particularly in terms of common exports to third markets.

Target group

SMEs with more than 10 employees and an annual turnover of EUR 150 000. The selected SMEs may not be international companies, but must be capable of developing an international presence and/or be, or have the potential to be, subcontractors.

Results expected or achieved

Improving modern management and business knowledge of SMEs and simultaneously increase the capacity of local SMEs to export via the exchange of experiences, networking and relationship building between SMEs and large enterprises, and among SMEs themselves.

Additional information

www.gkm.hu

www.itd.hu

www.plato.hu

www.mkik.hu

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6. SUPPORTING THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF SERVICES

Despite the fact that over three quarters of the European gross national product is created by services, most of the internationalisation support programmes focus on products either explicitly or by default.

It is evident that services have some particularities that distinguish them from products and can make them more difficult to internationalise but there is a definite lack of programmes focused specifically on service support. This can be partially explained by the lack experience or expertise of most trade promotion agencies in the area of supporting the internationalisation of services.

Yet this is one area where growth potential is greatest and where intervention could potentially bring higher returns per euro invested: trade in services has been growing substantially faster than trade in products for the last number of years, a tendency that will continue in the future.

At European level, the full implementation of the services directive in 2009 is going to increase the number of opportunities and competitors in the near future.

In the following section we present two practices that support the export of services which may serve as inspiration to develop similar or complimentary programmes to support the internationalisation of services.

PIPEnet

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

To promote the strategies of international business for each company by using personalised consultancy services and the most appropriate technology tools. PIPEnet optimises new information and communication technologies (ICTs) for participating SMEs. The measure covers the whole of Spain.

Brief description of the practice

The measure has been developed and is run by the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade with the financial backing of the European Commission (co-financing). It provides a strategic plan to the companies structured through meetings with the company carried out by a consultancy service. The plan includes two research projects: the first refers to the situation of new technologies in the targeted countries and the second to companies of reference within the Internet sector. It also contemplates the needs of the company concerning technologies, budget and personnel.

During the first year after the delivery of the final documentation, the consultancy service is at the disposition of the SME to offer technical assistance in relation to the plan.

Participating companies pay only 20 % of the cost of the customised consultancy service and ICEX funds 80 % of the remaining cost, up to a total of EUR 6 000.

Target group

All sectors, services included, and companies from all regions within Spain. Only for SMEs that export less than 30 % of their turnover.

Results expected or achieved

In just over the two years that PIPEnet has been running, around 1 500 companies have completed the initial consultancy meeting with an expert and more than 300 have completed the full consultancy programme.

Additional information

www.portalpipe.com

Testimonial

Julio Gabriel Esteban, Export Manager, NIKAI

'We were aware of the possibilities offered by [the] Internet, yet we ignored how they should be implemented (...) It is an asset for gaining efficiency, helping the commercial network, building a strong brand and eventually differentiating ourselves from competitors.'

CREYCONFÉ, Madrid

'It has been a remarkable experience for the company. It will help us to take advantage of [the] Internet more efficiently (...) We are currently improving our website with new content. In the near future we are planning to implement B2B tools.'

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Diffusion of specialised services on foreign structures

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

Creation of a network of foreign professional contacts, primarily of SME support organisations, in order to deal in the most effective way with European SMEs' requests regarding internationalisation projects. This measure is applicable throughout Italy.

Brief description of the practice

Results have shown that, by creating this important network of experts, the attitude of exporting customer-oriented services is promoted and also new models, suggestions and best practices of the other partners of the group are carried over.

The skills of the networking group have increased the quality of the services and oriented the efforts towards customer satisfaction. Moreover, this internationalisation methodology has educated the staff of each network partner.

Target group

Qualified organisations, Italian or local chambers of commerce, Italian Trade Commission offices, Euro Info Centres, local experts, private consulting companies and associations whose mission it is to provide specialised services to SMEs.

Results expected or achieved

In the last four years, operative services were often copied by other national and foreign chambers/structures, producing an export/internationalisation of services.

Presently, this network of experts is composed of 9 direct foreign offices, 19 Italian chambers of commerce and 13 qualified consultants in various sectors in targeted markets, plus some of the 242 Euro Info Centres.

Additional information

Once a year, the foreign partners involved in the services (direct offices, local experts, private consulting companies, chambers of commerce, EICs, etc.) gather together in a convention. This opportunity is used to discuss new systems for the implementation of services for the benefit of SMEs.

Additional information

www.promofirenze.com

Testimonial

dott.sa Beatrice Tenca, General Secretary, Italian–Polish Chamber of Commerce and Industry

'...as a result of the collaboration with Promofirenze, and the developing services planned by the specialist services for internationalisation, we have assisted several Italian companies to enter stably in the market. The success of this assistance service operation allowed us to gain good results for our companies and to broaden at European level the "tailored services" approach, more and more useful to provide personalised services.'

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7. USING INTERNATIONALISATION TO ENHANCE COMPETITIVENESS

Recent studies have definitely shown evidence on how internationalised SMEs perform better than non-internationalised companies, proving a direct link between internationalisation and competitiveness. These studies had a strong bias in understanding internationalisation as just exports but other forms of internationalisation can also prove a very valuable instrument in enhancing the competitiveness of the local economy.

Helping companies outsource some low value or non-core operations, or helping them find alternative cheaper suppliers, will not only mean a more favourable competitive position for the company but may also mean the long-term sustainability of the company and its jobs in the local economy. This will only become a greater issue as globalisation further progresses.

Other forms of support could be supporting the search and facilitating the import of foreign technology or foreign experts or in general policies that focus directly and specifically on increasing the competitiveness of the local enterprises. This could provide valuable solutions particularly in those sectors/regions under extremely competitive environments.

This is a substantial break from the traditional activities and scope of most trade promotion authorities and bodies but some are starting to delve on this issue and shedding some light on potential avenues. In this section we show three of these cases.

'Move or stay and improve' — a tool for profitable calculation of SME internationalisation

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

This measure aims to give SMEs deeper information on more variables than just labour cost in other countries in order to create more secure decisions in international business. The calculation tool in combination with consultancy advice has been used in manufacturing companies all over Sweden.

Brief description

'Move or stay and improve' was created by the Development Agency ALMI and 35 consultants have been trained on how to use the tool. It is a computerised tool where the SMEs' own result report and balance sheet is the basic document. Figures for 18 different factors are filled in to compare the situation in 10 different countries. In the calculation it is possible to see how the company's revenue will change if they move the business to different countries. The tool is currently being developed to simulate different improvement activities if the company chooses to stay at home and to see what effect these activities should bring to the company's revenue. The figures in the tool are updated every year.

This tool makes companies work with their productivity instead of moving production. This strengthens the European dimension because the companies are encouraged to think about ways of cooperating with European companies instead of focusing on Asian production.

Target group

SMEs thinking of moving their business outside Sweden or companies wanting to check their international competitiveness.

Results expected or achieved

A whole total of 104 companies have used the computerised tool to evaluate if they would win or lose by moving production. Out of those 104 companies, 52 have chosen to make their production more efficient and 12 have chosen to move all or part of their production abroad. Forty companies have used the tool for other purposes like competition analysis, profitability analysis or simply as a document for internal strategic discussions.

A total of 128 events were carried out to inform people about the tool.

Testimonials

'We now have an excellent decision basis to take the next step in our development.'

'This should be a useful tool for many companies even if they are not thinking of moving their production.'

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Industrial research and development contracts (IRDCs)

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

The aim of this programme is to stimulate and strengthen the ability of small and medium-sized suppliers to carry out market-oriented research and development of new and innovative products and services in close cooperation with a demanding customer. Since foreign activity in terms of collaboration on innovation generates higher innovation input, foreign companies are particularly welcome as partners.

Brief description

There is a growing international awareness of the great business potential that lies in close cooperation between a supplier and a large demanding customer with a common interest — to develop a unique new product or service.

An industrial research and development contract (IRDC) is a binding agreement between two or more companies to cooperate in the development of a new state-of-the-art product, process or service. The customer must be a market leader, professionally acknowledged and with a broad market access. The parties themselves will define the contents in such a way that they get the maximum benefit from the support scheme. An IRD contract can only be granted to projects of an exceptional level of innovation and value creation, clearly defined market potential and high additionality.

Enterprises are required to complete and submit a formal application to Innovation Norway. In an IRDC project one party, called the supplier, must ordinarily be classified as a smaller development company (SME). If a company meets these requirements, a contract may be granted up to 35 % of the eligible costs. Given that the supplier is a non-SME, only up to 25 % of the project costs may be granted.

Target group

SMEs with domestic and/or foreign customers.

Results expected or achieved

An evaluation in 2007, based on more than 1 200 financed projects in the period 1995–2005, showed that 44 % of the projects were commercial successes. Only 12 % of the projects failed. Companies with a highly educated staff, innovation strategy and international partners were the most successful ones. The projects have created substantial turnover and exports equivalent to at least the total grants over the last 10 years (over NOK 1.4 billion in 1995–2005). IRDCs are considered to be one of Innovation Norway's most successful support schemes encouraging both innovation and internationalisation at the same time.

Additional information

www.innovasjon Norge.no

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Grant scheme to support businesses' internationalisation via product certificates

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

The scheme was introduced after a questionnaire sent to exporting companies showed that product certificates can constitute a genuine barrier to entering a new market. This applies especially to countries like Russia, Belarus and Ukraine which are traditional export markets for Polish companies.

Brief description

The company can apply for a grant to cover 50 % of the cost of obtaining a product certificate that is required by the regulations of the given export market. This does not cover certificates required by the single market regulations or process certificates.

The company has to finance the whole price of the process before being supported with a grant. The grant covers only 50 % of the certification process costs. After signing the grant agreement and running the whole procedure of preparing and obtaining the certificate, the company is paid back 50 % of the total bill by the Ministry. The support level is limited to some EUR 13 000 per company per year and is based on the *de minimis* rule of EU public aid granting.

The following costs of obtaining a certificate or extending its validity are covered under the scheme:

- consultancy connected with obtaining the certificate;
- preparation and translation of technical documents required by the certifying body;
- transportation and insurance of samples and technical documents sent to certifying body;
- certification procedure;
- obtaining and issuing of the certificate.

Target group

SMEs wishing to invest in new markets for their products when those markets require specific product certificates.

Results expected or achieved

Number of grant agreements signed: 370 since 2002.

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8. INDIVIDUALISED SUPPORT

Many internationalisation programmes are 'need or event specific', i.e. they support or solve a very specific problem related to internationalisation, such as supporting the participation of local firms in foreign exhibitions. Many are fundamentally a grant, consisting of the exclusive provision of financial support. In most cases, support is non-segmented and very rarely adjusted to the specific needs of the recipient.

Yet SMEs come in different structures and sectors and with very individual problems. Most importantly they can be at very different stages of internationalisation and, consequently, show different needs, challenges and risks. Internationalisation support programmes should adapt to the individual reality of each SME and offer a customised 'internationalisation route' for each participating SME.

This type of programme usually involves a long-term commitment, which sometimes can go beyond a year. Despite, or possibly because of this, SME surveys show that levels of satisfaction and efficiency of these programmes are high and greatly enhance the possibility that the SME will be able to be involved long term and successfully in internationalisation.

This individual support is of great help to companies that are considering internationalisation for the first time. These programmes tend to start by a comprehensive and strategic analysis of the company in which the SME is viewed as a whole and subsequently try to tackle the individual issues that may be required for the development of a long-term, sustainable internationalisation strategy.

A number of European organisations already offer these consolidated and integrated SME internationalisation (usually export focused) programmes. Four such programmes are presented henceforth.

First flight

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

'First flight' is aimed at assisting companies — by assessing and developing key capabilities — to manage the risks, time and expenses associated with going international.

Brief description of the practice

'First flight' is a process designed to assist clients with their international development needs, as developing new markets is an essential aspect of business development which is expensive and time consuming. The 'First flight' programme assists the company's management team to structure the planning process into a systematic and consistent order by introducing the broad range of issues to consider.

A questionnaire evaluates the company in the following areas and is completed by the company with the assistance of a development adviser (DA): overview of company, company's performance, management resources, market knowledge, the business case, and budgets and funding.

Following this, an action plan is developed with the company and can draw on a wide range of Enterprise Ireland (EI) supports, including:

- access to EI service offer from overseas network, e.g. market research;
- development of management capability through participation on various training programmes
- access to the 'mentor network' on areas identified, e.g. financial planning, market development, etc.;
- participation in trade missions;
- injection of key people (with required skills) if appropriate.

Target group

'First flight' is an Enterprise Ireland service aimed specifically at companies who are new exporters or early stage exporters (exports of less than EUR 30 000).

Results expected or achieved

'First flight' provides high impact and high value information that can be directly used by participating SMEs. The process is managed in order to minimise risk to the company and is tailored to the needs of the company. 'First flight' is viewed as the first step to a long-term internationalisation and exporting strategy.

Additional information

www.enterprise-ireland.com

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Incubation programme

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

This programme is an innovative approach to SMEs' needs, starting with a direct contact with companies through a 'listening campaign' and then offering to share with them the risks and successes. This measure is applicable throughout Italy.

Brief description

The Specialist Assistance Service (SAS) is aimed at providing assistance completely tailored to the client's needs: searching for clients, selecting partners, market and competitiveness analysis.

The Service of Incubation for Internationalisation (SIPI) is aimed at supporting SMEs unable to afford the challenge of internationalisation.

The services offer to share the risks and successes. In particular, they aim to act as 'temporary incubator', developing the companies' sales on the target market.

A cooperation agreement exists with national associations of managers with the aim to form well-trained experts/mentors.

Target group

The most frequent users are small and micro-sized companies, with no limitation on sector, dimension or turnover.

Results expected or achieved

Since the services started, 261 companies have been assisted in internationalisation services: 249 SAS, 10 SIPI and two assisted manager associations.

Additional information

www.promofirenze.com

Testimonial

Dott.sa Barbara Calvani, Export Manager, Centerglass Line, spa

'...following the trade mission in Casablanca, arranged through the support of the specialist services for internationalisation, Centerglass Line is developing a business with some Moroccan operators and selling its products in the market. Let me express my satisfaction with the specialist services staff and I hope to continue this collaboration.'

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Passport to export

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

The programme was introduced following recommendations from research commissioned by UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) to identify the gaps in our support for 'new to export' SMEs. This practice is applicable in England.

Brief description

'Passport to export' is delivered locally by international trade advisers (ITAs) with private sector experience, based in the English regions. The delivery varies from region to region but it includes an IT-based diagnostic which establishes a firm's main trade-related weaknesses, expert tailored advice from ITAs, an agreed action plan created from the diagnostic, help with training and consultancy tailored to needs, and assistance with preparation for market visits. Some free advice from up to three UKTI offices overseas and advice on other UKTI services as appropriate is included. A small amount of matched funding is also available for activities agreed in the action plan. This may include non-government services if appropriate.

To ensure quality of delivery and that all the aspects of the programme are delivered, an 'audit' is carried out every six months looking at evidence of actions in respect of a sample of companies at different stages of the programme.

Target group

Businesses whose proactive exports do not exceed 10 % of turnover and whose combined proactive and reactive exports do not exceed 25 % of its turnover. R & D intensive SMEs between one and five years old who may be 'born global' and hence do not meet the 'new to export' criteria.

Companies may be in any sector including service sectors. However, we target our ITAs to recruit a high proportion of innovative companies to the programme.

Results expected or achieved

Almost 10 000 SMEs have passed through or are on the programme since November 2001.

'Passport' is measured and evaluated by the performance impact management system (PIMS). Results for April/June 2007 are:

- Quality 91 %
- Overall satisfaction 87 %
- Changed behaviour 77 %
- Increased R & D 14 %
- Barriers overcome 73 %
- Estimated benefit GBP 244 000

Additional information

www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk ('our services', 'support to succeed')

Testimonial

Ian Campbell, Business Development Director, Akubio

'We were looking to sell directly to scientific hubs in both Europe and North America and also wanted to identify a potential distributor in Japan. "Passport" has contributed to commercial sales — within the next couple of months we will be selling our new product to a customer on the US east coast. We are also close to finding a distributor in Japan, thanks to UKTI's Overseas Market Information Service (OMIS) report that we commissioned through the programme.'

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PIPE

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

PIPE provides specialised consultancy and financial support to new exporters in Spain. It aims to increase and consolidate the number of exporters and solve the concentration of exports in a few numbers of companies.

Brief description of the practice

The management of the programme involves the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade, all 85 Spanish chambers of commerce, the 17 regional governments and the European Commission.

Any SME willing to export can obtain all the relevant support to start its foreign activities through this programme. The company will benefit both from the advice of the Spanish institutions for foreign promotion (the aforementioned responsible organisations) and the help of a specialist consultant. The services provided include:

- financial support covering 80 % of expenses incurred during the two years of the programme;
- individualised and specialised advice, done by external consultants;
- complementary services designed especially for the SME such as technology translation, insurance, financial services, information, training and promotion.

The programme is structured around three stages that last two years:

- (1) self-diagnosis of competitive position and internationalisation potential (two to three weeks);
- (2) definition of the internationalisation process and market research (three to four months; 30 hours of individual tutorials);
- (3) implementation of an internationalisation plan (20 to 21 months; 70 to 100 hours of individual tutorials), plus a junior specialist to start the export department.

Once the three stages have been completed and participant SMEs have started exporting, PIPE offers them a monitoring programme aimed at guaranteeing their consolidation as regular exporters.

Target group

It is aimed at companies from all sectors, services included. Only for SMEs that export less than 30 % of their turnover.

Results expected or achieved

An initial goal was to turn 2 000 Spanish SMEs into regular exporters by the year 2000, which was met. The second goal was to increase this number up to 4 500 Spanish SMEs by the year 2006 and this was also met; 4 994 companies have benefited from it since 1998. On average, exports increased by 71.1 %, total revenues by 24.8 % and personnel by 13.5 % in the participating companies.

Additional information

www.portalpipe.com

Testimonial

José Ignacio Miguel Pampliega, General Manager, Lyssolen

'The "New exporters programme" (PIPE) enlightens the importance of the whole company as part of the export process.'

Alfonso Schlegel, General Manager, Bodegas Viña Extremeña

'In life, success does not only rely on the effort one makes to make things work. It is crucial to plan in order to succeed. The "New exporters programme" (PIPE) helped us to clear ideas, to design strategies and to focus on the priorities of the export activity.'

Javier Domínguez, General Manager, JOLCA

'We have decided to take part in the follow-up stage of the programme to strengthen our export strategy in key markets: we believe it is about time the company approaches the United States and some Asian countries.'

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DOUANE
ZOLL

9. BORDER ZONES AND CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

There are 14 200 km of internal borders inside the EU. Even if we define border regions as the area covering just 25 km of the actual border, this would still represent over 710 000 square kilometres — twice the size of Germany.

Companies tend to self-limit their potential market, suppliers, potential collaborating partners, etc. to their national or sometimes even regional area — even if those companies are located at the border itself. This self imposed limit reduces the company's potential. This situation affects particularly very small companies and those in the services and crafts sectors. Thinking beyond the borders means opening the doors to new customers, new suppliers, new technologies and new cooperation ventures: possibly the best support for the SME's future continuity. Border zones can and should breed more 'internationalisation apostles'.

The full implementation of the services directive expected for December 2009 will provide even more prominence to this subject.

Some authorities are already taking a proactive role in promoting greater SME engagement across the border. The programme 'Österreich Service' of the Munich Chamber of Crafts helps local SMEs comply with Austrian regulations and forms to provide their services across the border.

Other programmes promote greater interregional cooperation between SMEs at both (or several) sides of the border. These programmes are an example of international SME cooperation and also of cooperation between the authorities. Four such examples are presented in the following pages.

Marketplace Baltic Region

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

In order to promote and facilitate trade in the Baltic Sea region a trade focal point was created to provide information on Swedish markets and trade rules and facilitated business enquiries.

Brief description of the practice

The Swedish Trade Council was assigned by the Swedish government to establish Marketplace Baltic Region in order to promote and facilitate trade within the region. The Association of Swedish Chambers of Commerce and Industry was in turn subcontracted to assist in facilitating Swedish imports from the Baltic Sea region.

In order to meet this objective, the Association of Swedish Chambers of Commerce and Industry set up a cost-free help desk to provide qualified advice, market information and answer direct questions related to Swedish import rules and procedures. In addition, the help desk facilitated business enquires either via direct matchmaking (if possible), providing lists of Swedish importers, or via a tailor-made database — Chamber Trade — where traders could register and post business proposals as well as search for potential trade partners.

The second pillar of the Marketplace Baltic Region, which was managed by the Swedish Trade Council, provided support primarily to Swedish SMEs that wanted to establish a business presence in the Baltic Sea region. This was executed by providing business advice as well as hands-on assistance by the Council's regional offices in the partner countries.

Target group

SMEs in Estonia, Kaliningrad, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Sweden and Ukraine.

Results expected or achieved

The help desk distributes approximately 400 contact lists of Swedish importers, answers approximately 80 detailed business enquires and 70 less-detailed business enquires per year.

Additional information

www.chambertrade.com

www.balticsea.swedishtrade.se/english/index.asp

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Transnational network — Skilled crafts in the Greater Region

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

The goal of this programme is the development of cross-border activities of SMEs in the skilled craft sector through information, support, network activities and accompanying skilled craft enterprises on cross-border markets, namely the Greater Region: Saar–Lorraine–Luxembourg–Wallonia–Rhineland Palatinate, including the border regions of Luxembourg, Germany, France and Belgium.

Brief description of the practice

The geographical location of the Greater Region involves German, Luxembourgish, Belgian and French regions, and is adjacent to two other important border regions: one comprising Maastricht in the Netherlands, North Rhine-Westphalia and the province of Liege, the other including Alsace, Baden-Württemberg and Basel (Switzerland). This large variety represents a competition-specific and commercial challenge to skilled craft businesses. Entrepreneurs have to adapt to administrative, legal, technical, linguistic and cultural difficulties, which form part of the individual trades of the craft sector.

This project, by means of a comprehensive concept, draws on modern communications technologies to develop an 'information and advice network'.

For this purpose a CD-ROM and a website for skilled crafts in the Greater Region have been designed. They include the procedures, regulations, and application forms that skilled craft businesses should be aware of in their specific trades, in order to gain access to the abovementioned cross-border markets. Main areas:

- developing a common 'diagnostic method' for chambers of skilled crafts to provide businesses with information, based on network-related, individual advice;
- implementing awareness campaigns through theme-related 'exchange forums';
- making use of an accompanying system for the surveying of companies with cross-border experiences (structural surveys and comparative cyclical surveys);
- structured and summary presentation of thematic information content related to skilled crafts in the Greater Region.

Target group

SMEs of the skilled craft sector in the five regions of the Greater Region, totalling 156 975 enterprises: 4 258 in Luxembourg, 11 155 in Saarland (Germany), 47 027 in Rhineland-Palatinate (Germany), 27 535 in Lorraine (France) and 67 000 in Wallonia (Belgium).

Additional information

www.cicm-irh.eu

www.artisanat-gr.eu

www.handwerk-gr.eu

available in both German and French

CD-ROM: 'Transnational markets — Skilled crafts without borders'

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Econet platform: Business cooperation for Austrian, Czech and Slovak SMEs within the Vienna–Brno–Bratislava triangle

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

The aim of the Interreg IIIA Austria–Slovakia and Austria–Czech Republic programme is to improve the situation of SMEs in the border regions by providing or increasing the levels of information, consulting, training measures, cross-border networking and cooperation. The areas involved are: Vienna and Lower Austria (Austria), South Moravia and Brno (Czech Republic), and Bratislava and Trnava (Slovakia).

Brief description of the practice

Econet platform is an Interreg IIIA project in Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia to foster innovation and competitiveness in the area through intensive business cooperation.

Type of measures:

- business clubs in Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia;
- Internet cooperation platform (www.econet-platform.at) and EU;
- seminars on business environment and practices in the region;
- consulting for SMEs and business studies;
- consultation days with the commercial counsellors of Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia;
- business cooperation meetings in Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia;
- presentation of the enterprise on the website (www.econet-platform.at).

Target group

SMEs in the Austrian–Czech–Slovak border regions; especially:

- innovative SMEs and start-ups in the areas of production, industrial services and research in new technologies;
- female managers in the project's region;
- commercial enterprises and exporters/importers;
- consultants.

Results expected or achieved

More than 1 800 registered members, more than 3 900 participants in business clubs, seminars, consultation days and cooperation meetings. All activities are subject to evaluation by the firms by means of questionnaires.

Additional information

www.advantageaustria.org

Testimonial

Thomas Berger, CheckPoint Unternehmens & Finanzierungsberatungs GmbH, Vienna

'Even as a small company you can successfully enlarge the extent of your business activities into a market across the border. To do so you may need someone who shares his experience and knowledge in the new market and helps to establish the first business contacts. The Econet platform has proven to be the ideal network to facilitate the internationalisation of our company making sure we did not run unmanageable risks.'

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Competence network Netherlands/ North Rhine-Westphalia INTER-NED

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

Comprehensive information and advice for German and Dutch SMEs to support cross-border foreign trade business relations.

Brief description of the practice

The project connects about 20 chambers, business development organisations, technology centres and universities on both sides of the border. It bundles their specialised knowledge and makes it usable for the expansion of the business contacts. Several instruments have been developed to support the foreign trade activities of SMEs in the cross-border zones of Germany and the Netherlands:

- online platform with comprehensive bilingual information of several organisations for SMEs;
- information conferences;
- training for the consultants of the partner organisations;
- knowledge pool with bilingual expert information for SMEs;
- bilingual newsletter with business information of the neighbouring country for SMEs;
- consulting centre for questions concerning Dutch or German businesses where companies get answers free of charge to their specific questions.

The main advantages for the participants are:

- updated and professional information on the website;
- information conferences related to practice;
- image improvement for participating institutions towards their members;
- elimination of the need for consultants thanks to the service offered by the website;
- one-stop-shop to inform companies comprehensively and for the institutions involved.

Target group

German and Dutch SMEs and freelancers.

Results expected or achieved

- About 800 professional articles have been published on the online platform.
- Increasing number of qualified visits to the website (about 110 000 in 2006).
- Constant increasing number of consulting enquiries to the central contact point (about 360 in 2006); also some 100 enquiries to the project partners.
- Very good participation of the SMEs in 25 information conferences.

Additional information

www.inter-ned.info

Testimonial

Alfred Marx, MEM Maschinenbau GmbH, Ahaus-Ottenstein

'I have conducted business with the Netherlands for 15 years. Patience and endurance are required but certainly solid information about the country and the market are also necessary. Repeatedly I have been supported by the competence network NL/NRW. On this basis a close collaboration with Dutch enterprises has been developed and therefore I have become their partner instead of being their customer.'

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