



**PECOS
4SMEs**

PERSONALIZED TRAINING
ON CROSS BORDER
e-COMMERCE

PECOS4SMEs

D2.8 Focus Groups
Version 2.1 – 05/04/2013

Project	PECOS4SMEs		
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Referenced Documents

ID	Reference	Title
1	507562-LLP-2012-GR-Leonardo-LMP	PECOS4SMEs Proposal
2	507562-LLP-2012-GR-Leonardo-LMP	Evaluation Comments

Applicable Documents

ID	Reference	Title
1	FAVINOM Consultancies QMS	Quality Management Procedures

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Executive Summary

This document forms the D2.8 Focus Groups for the Implementation of the PECOS4SMEs Project (henceforth, "Project").

Southern Europe SMEs lack the needed knowledge to take advantage of the e-Commerce potential resulting in Southern Europe lagging within the e-Business area. PECOS4SMEs will develop a training programme concentrated on the provision of suitable knowledge and tools, which the SMEs can use to increase cross border e-Commerce revenue. This includes changing sales and marketing strategies and new types of organisation and knowledge about e-Commerce technologies in a future world dominated by pervasive Internet.

The promotion of useful e-Commerce strategies for SMEs includes transfer of knowledge and practices from top performing countries in e-Commerce to lagers thus bridging the cross border sales gap between Northern and Southern Europe and helping the economic recovery of the hard hit South. As a consequence of the introduction of new technologies and concepts facilitating cross border e-Commerce, (e.g. effective link building, search engine user attitudes etc.), SMEs will make their businesses more profitable and improve their ICT and methodological competence for interactive and collaborative learning.

The project is co-funded by the Education and Culture DG under the Lifelong Learning Programme, Leonardo Multilateral projects.

The present document contains information regarding:

- PECOS4SMEs training needs analysis
- Guidelines for conducting focus groups in the project.

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Document Glossary

Term	Description
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
D	Deliverable

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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of the D2.8 Focus Groups

The purposes of the current D2.8 Focus Groups are the following:

- To describe briefly Focus groups as a qualitative research method.
- To provide guidelines to PECO4SMEs consortium on how to conduct focus groups for the project.

1.2. Scope of the project

PECOS4SMEs will develop an innovative training system bringing new types of organisation and knowledge about e-Commerce technologies and trends and concentrated on transforming Internet trends into applicable tools for SMEs to change sales and marketing strategies. The approach to training SMEs is based on their situation (sector, financial capability, educational background, geographical location, existing infrastructure, etc.). After completion of the training, SMEs are expected to be able to engage foreign consumers by successfully implementing e-Commerce strategies designed specifically for them.

1.3. Project Objectives

The specific purpose of the proposed project is the development of e-Commerce oriented material delivered through a training system targeting solely SMEs and the deriving needs (e.g. websites friendlier to the foreign consumer, order tracking process, clear dispatch and return policies, etc.) with respect to effective use of the Internet as a sales channel. This includes changing sales and marketing strategies and new types of organisation and knowledge about e-Commerce technologies in a future world dominated by pervasive Internet.

PECOS4SMEs, in particular, aims to support European SMEs to:

- ❖ Raise awareness and interest about cross border e-Commerce.
- ❖ Learn more about the risks associated with online payments.
- ❖ Learn more about the uses of the Internet as a revenue channel.
- ❖ Analyse the knowledge development in the SME and see the strategic perspectives of this knowledge in the context of the business strategy.
- ❖ Integrate e-Commerce in business planning and innovation strategies.
- ❖ Get the strategies written down, so they are not just ideas, but an active choice, which can be communicated and understood by SMEs.
- ❖ Get the strategies incorporated in practical procedures that can be constantly updated.
- ❖ Be aware of the European cross-border trade legislation and provisions of consumer rights.

An additional goal is to make it easier and less costly for businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to do business abroad and to enable consumers to reap the full benefit of the Single Market. This goal is aligned with the Europe 2020 strategy – launched on 3 March 2010 (IP/10/225) and with which the Commission is currently tackling bottlenecks in the Single Market to drive economic recovery.

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2. PeCoS4SMEs - ANALYSIS OF THE TARGET GROUP TRAINING NEEDS

The overall methodology of PeCoS4SMEs is based on the idea of creating a training plan by following strictly the target group needs. To this purpose an initial investigation of the target group training needs for what concerns e-Commerce proves necessary.

The project combines different methodologies to collect information, materials and data for WP2 deliverables:

1. Data-mining: gathering, selecting and treating information to transform it into knowledge.
2. Questionnaires or standardized forms as they are quantifiable.
3. In-depth focus groups with key actors to obtain contextualized information that allows a correct interpretation of quantifiable data.

Each partner will be responsible to get at least 15 completed questionnaires for each targeted sector, 60 in total.

A questionnaire has been developed to this purpose (D.2.7) that will be available online on SurveyMonkey. The consortium is conscious that it may be difficult to collect 60 questionnaires only by using the online tool and that face-to-face meeting with SMEs representatives may be useful to involve the target. So, in order to facilitate the collection of information from the target groups, the partners are expected to organise focus groups with the participation of SMEs.

A focus group is a tool used to gather information. Its main characteristic is that it provides data for analysis, but data that is gathered in an informal format; therefore a focus group can be like a good conversation. The format of the focus group provides an opportunity for participants and the facilitator to exchange information related to the topic or group of topics for which the data are being collected.

Focus Groups will explore the current conditions with respect to SMEs competencies in e-Commerce with a view to identify their needs. A broad range of users will be invited to express their opinions with respect to their needs and requirements regarding their e-Commerce skills (necessary delivery/return policies to boost cross border sales, web site friendliness for foreign consumer, anti-fraud and security actions, etc.), as well as to outline their expectations of PECOS4SMEs. The analysis of user needs will provide valuable information about the level of skills of the users targeted and it will be used also for defining the entry skills for SMEs to participate in training and take the course.

The partners will be free to organise meetings with SMEs the way they are most confident: some partners may manage to host the focus group at their own premises while others may achieve to obtain the necessary feedback by face to face interviews with SMEs with whom they have personal contact at their work place. They may also approach SMEs and obtain their responses through trusted intermediaries or they may even manage to obtain a vast number of responses by modelling the questionnaire using SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com/) and/or making it available via the project website, as well as their own website.

The partners may also decide to execute more than one focus group until they are content with the feedback trying each time to involve all the four sectors.

The meetings with SMES may take the form of either traditional focus groups or informal conversations with the target groups, not only face to face in the context of an organised event, but also phone conversations or even be taking advantage of casual opportunities such as attending an event where there will be representatives from the target groups.

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For detailed instruction on how to organise a focus group refer to next section 3. FOCUS GROUP – Methodology.

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3. FOCUS GROUPS - Methodology

A focus group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, and idea.

Basically, focus groups are interviews, but of 6 to 12 people at the same time in the same group. It is organized as an informal assembly of users whose opinions are requested about a specific topic. The goal is to elicit perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and ideas of participants about the topic. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members, which allows obtaining a great deal of information.

Individuals come together and express diverse views on the topic: useful not only to find the range of views, but also for the participants to learn from each other, and to generate a sense of social cohesion.

Focus groups can be a powerful means to evaluate services or test new ideas. One can during a focus group session.

3.1. Planning and executing the focus group

The main method that was utilised for the conduct of Focus Groups in Cyprus was mainly via the Internet.

FC made contacts with local e-Commerce SMEs mainly from the retail sector. About 25 SMEs were contacted and the collected responses amounted to 11.

Some interviews via the phone were contacted with some SMEs where this was possible in order to get a more personal sense their individual aspirations from their business and also what problems are facing with regards to cross-border or local e-Commerce.

The results from the phone interviews and the completed questionnaires assisted greatly towards the elaboration of the Country Report as well as all the relevant deliverables related to the Needs Identification phase.

The SMEs were also informed about the general framework of the project and will be constantly notified with the project's new developments as recipients of dissemination materials or participants into the events organised by the project.

3.2. Annex: Flow Chart of the Focus Groups Organisation

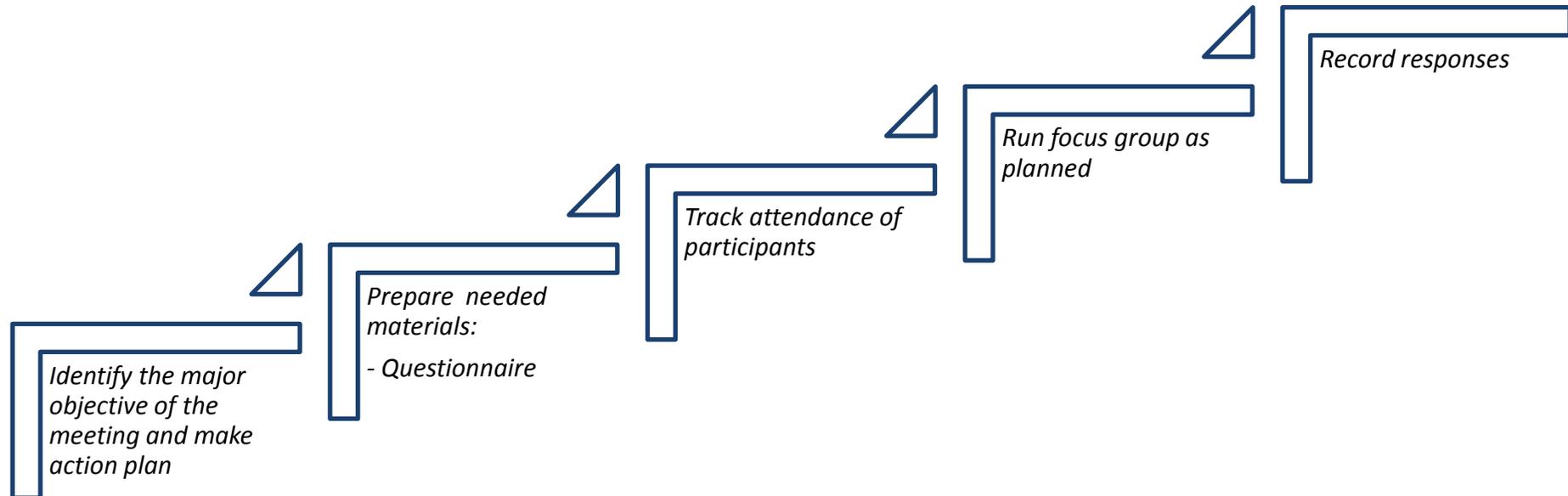


Figure 1: Flow Chart of the Focus Groups Organisation

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