



Executive Agency, Education, Audiovisual and Culture



# PECOS 4SMEs

PERSONALIZED TRAINING  
ON CROSS BORDER  
e-COMMERCE

## Personalised e-Commerce Strategies for SMEs

Progress Report

Public Part

## Project information

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## Executive Summary

PECOS4SMEs has identified the **learning needs of SMEs from 4 economic sectors** in relation to **e-Commerce** and more specifically with focus on cross border online sales.

The identified needs were used as input for the elaboration of SME oriented **e-Commerce strategies** and a **training/delivery methodology**. Based on the elaborated methodology, the e-Commerce strategies were decomposed to sets of **actions** for materialising each strategy, grouped under **e-Commerce modules** and accompanied by **content** supporting their implementation by SMEs. Delivery is supported by a specialised tool, **e-Commerce “Genie”**, designed to facilitate the delivery of the training to SMEs in a personalised style.

### *Target Audience*

PECOS4SMEs targets SMEs from the sectors of **wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, real estate and construction, but also travel/accommodation**.

### *Project Objectives*

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 develops a training programme concentrated on the acquisition of e-Commerce skills and competences by the targeted SMEs for increasing online sales revenue.

More specifically, the following discrete objectives of the project can be identified:

- **Transcription of online trends into applicable e-Commerce strategies**, which the SMEs can use **to boost sales**.
- **Personalisation of coaching** through provision of **focused training content** developed in response to the specific needs of the target groups.
- Support the **acquisition of e-Commerce related knowledge and skills by SMEs** for boosting online sales.
- **Transfer of innovative and proven SME e-Commerce practices** from online sales “champion” countries to “laggers” from the South of Europe.
- Development of practical **tools (“Genie”) supporting the personalized and phased delivery of action (goal) based hands on training** to the SMEs.

### *Participants Involved*

PECOS4SMEs comprises 7 partners from 7 different countries. (1) a business consultancy from Italy, (2) an international digital media company from Greece, (3) a VET consultancy from the Netherlands providing e-Commerce advice to countless SMEs, (4) a non-profit training and development organization from the U.K. focusing on bringing new technology to E&T, (5) a consultancy from Cyprus offering SEO/SEM coaching services to SMEs, (6) a Business Innovation Centre from Belgium gathering more than 250 BICs and similar organisations, and (7) a technology integrator from Poland, but also an accomplished VET provider which works with many SMEs.

### *Approaches Used*

An analysis-design-development-implementation-evaluation methodology based on the **ADDIE model for e-learning** is applied. Each phase has distinct inputs and results. At the present stage the project has concluded the Analysis and Design Phases and is currently in the Development Phase. A main aspect of the project approach is the action based training approach specifically designed for SMEs belonging to the targeted sectors.

### *Major Results Achieved*

- Study of the e-Commerce state of play in participating countries (Country reports) and analysis under a comparative viewpoint (European Overview) leading to the identification of proven practices originating from the “champion” countries.
- Identification of main Internet trends relevant to online sales and transcription to applicable e-Commerce strategies for SMEs to boost online sales.
- Collection of the learning needs of SMEs from specific sectors and association to the requirements and expectations of consumers.
- Conclusion to a specific set of needs to be addressed by the project’s products.
- Design of a personalisation tool (e-Commerce “Genie”) to facilitate the elaborated training methodology. The tool is currently under development.
- Decomposition of the resulted e-Commerce strategies to sets of actions necessary for their implementation and grouping of the actions under e-Commerce modules.

### *Plans and Prospects*

The plans for the next period focus on the one hand on the finalisation of the supporting content for the actions implementing the elaborated e-Commerce strategies and their translations and on the other hand the delivery of the test release of the PECOS4SMEs “Genie” and portal. After achieving the very important milestone of the test release, the concluding phase of the project will start leading to the testing activities which will result to the pilot release and the piloting exercises with SMEs which will conclude to the final release at the end of the project.

Prospects are very bright for the project due to a partnership agreement with Payvision, a cross-border payment solutions provider and partner in one of the biggest and most prestigious cross-border e-Commerce platforms [[www.crossborder-ecommerce.com](http://www.crossborder-ecommerce.com)]. The partnership encompasses among others:

- Dedicated content creation by Payvision for the PECOS4SMES Genie – especially “how to”-videos and white paper video adaptations.
- Linking from the [CBEC platform](#) to the Genie.
- Introducing the project to the Payvision network.

### *Project Website*

The website of the project is available under: [www.pecos4smes.eu](http://www.pecos4smes.eu)

The design does not follow the project-oriented design which is commonly encountered in publicly funded projects, but is product-oriented, focusing on features and benefits. This captures the interest of SMEs at first sight as it makes immediately obvious how they can benefit. This could not be achieved with a website focusing on project related information which has very little value outside of the partnership. It is the end product that matters and the website should focus on the end product.

An animated video introducing SMEs to the platform is available [here](#).

A brochure is available for download [here](#).

An e-Commerce cheat sheet elaborated based on the conclusions of the analysis phase of the project is available [here](#).

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# 1. Project Objectives

The idea behind PECOS4SMEs is the implementation of a personalised training system for SMEs to improve their e-Commerce skills and be in position to reap the benefits of Internet as a revenue channel. The aim is to offer personalised training to SMEs on cross border e-Commerce strategies capitalising on the use of social media to approach consumers, SEO/SEM techniques and tools, the adoption of features that will make their websites more friendly to the foreign consumer (e.g. usability, personalised products, transparency, security, delivery/return options, etc.), Web 2.0, etc. Following the completion of the training, SMEs should be in position to implement a personalised e-Commerce strategy.

More concretely, the following discrete objectives of the project can be identified:

- **Transcription of Web 2.0 trends into applicable e-Commerce strategies**, which the SMEs can use **to boost sales**. PECOS4SMEs will provide SMEs with the knowledge and skills they need to be in position to take advantage of the Web to increase their business and grow by utilising the full potential of e-Commerce, especially cross-border commerce.
- Personalization of the learning pathways through the provision of **focused training content developed in response to the specific needs of the target groups**. PECOS4SMEs will offer personalised coaching to SMEs depending on their sector and current skills and e-Commerce practices.
- Support the **acquisition of e-Commerce related knowledge and skills by SMEs** for the establishment of marketing/sales strategies that are best for their business leading to increased traffic by foreign consumers, and new leads.
- **Transfer of innovative and proven e-Commerce practices** from more mature countries in the area of online sales to lagers from the South of Europe contributing towards the narrowing of the existing gap.
- Development of practical **tools (“Genie”) to support the personalized and phased delivery of the action (goal) based hands on training** to the SMEs.

*Benefits to a specific community of users and involvement of this community in the project*

PECOS4SMEs targets SMEs from the sectors of **wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, real estate and construction, but also travel/accommodation** (for the identification of transferable practices). The specific needs of these SMEs with regards to personalised e-Commerce coaching capable of increasing revenues through Internet are identified and addressed in the context of the project. The designed training system is personalised, levelled and aimed at both online newcomers as well as SMEs with experience in online technologies and tools. The training material being developed factors in the findings related to the **low percentage of senior consumers buying online and the lower percentage of women buying online than men** in order to elaborate e-Commerce strategies which can attract more senior consumers and women.

SMEs from the sectors addressed by the project are involved from the start of the project either directly in the context of focus groups and online surveys or through intermediaries, such as SEO/SEM experts and e-Commerce coaches who have unique knowledge with respect to the problems faced by SMEs wanting to become more active in e-Commerce. To this end it is important to say that in the context of the analysis phase of the project, the partners did not waste time and resources reinventing the wheel. Instead, the most current e-

Commerce surveys and reports were used as input in order to result to the most important aspects to be dealt with by the project. Then, the pre-selected e-Commerce issues of importance to EU SMEs were validated in the context of the analysis work through the involvement of SMEs, consumers, e-Commerce experts and trainers. The SMEs from the targeted sectors will be deeply involved again during the hands on trainings and piloting. Until then, a critical mass of SMEs is gradually being formed through targeted dissemination actions generating exposure with respect to the project results. The “product-oriented” design of the website (as opposed to a usually “project oriented” design of publicly funded projects), the introductory animated video, as well as the visual material prepared (presentations and brochure) are very helpful and empower the actions executed for generating exposure.

#### *Impact upon and benefits to the target user group*

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 hands on learning.

SMEs that follow and complete the PECOS4SMEs training are expected to be in position to immediately implement new sales/marketing strategies capitalising on the strengths and nature of e-Commerce to increase online sales revenues.

The distinct benefits to SMEs, advertised also through the PECOS4SMEs [website](#), comprise:

- Lower operational costs;
- Wider customer base (no geographical limitations);
- Continuous sales (24 hour sales);
- Customer loyalty (personalised rewards schemes).

## 2. Project Approach

### *Project Methodology*

The analysis-design-development-implementation-evaluation methodology applied (based on the **ADDIE model for e-learning**<sup>1</sup>), is split into distinct phases and sub-phases. At the present stage the project has concluded the Analysis and Design Phases and is currently in the Development Phase.

The **Analysis Phase** concluded to the **identification of cross-border e-Commerce elements & needs** for SMEs. We can identify three sub-phases of the analysis phase:

- **National Phase** during which the partners carried out research and analysis leading to the elaboration of 7 **Country reports** – 1 for each partner country – depicting the e-Commerce state of play in each country. The Country reports also used as input the results from the **survey** for consumers and SMEs (See Needs Identification Phase). In the context of this work, the partners prepared also a **vocabulary** comprising words and phrases most commonly used in e-Commerce and an **online database** of e-Commerce training programmes and courses.
- **Transnational Phase** during which the partners using as input the Country reports made a comparative report – **European Overview** – depicting the situation in the partner countries from a critical viewpoint concluding also to the practices to be transferred from e-Commerce top performers (U.K., The Netherlands, Belgium) to lagers (Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Poland). In the context of this work, the partners produced also a list of **top website features** and identified the **top e-Commerce strategies** facilitating cross-border purchases. The top website features and e-Commerce strategies are also very important in terms of dissemination and are being used to increase awareness among SMEs for the benefits of e-Commerce.
- **Needs Identification Phase** during which the partners initially elaborated two **questionnaires**, one for consumers and one for SMEs, to facilitate the e-Commerce survey for validating the key findings of the preliminary analysis work which used as input the most recent and credible studies and reports on the present state of e-Commerce. The survey was carried out utilizing various channels (online, face to face, email, interviews). Some of the partners carried out **focus groups** with SMEs to acquire perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and ideas of participants about the topic of e-Commerce, leading to added value inputs on top of obtaining clear responses to the SME (Vendors) questionnaire. The concluding output of the current phase and of the Analysis phase at the same time is a **report on the SME needs**, identifying the concrete needs of the target groups and transcribing them to requirements for the functionality and usability of the tools that will support the delivery of the training. This report guided the elaboration of the e-Commerce strategies for SMEs and the design of the tool during the Design Phase.

The **Design Phase** has led to the **establishment of the methodological framework** to be developed and used **for training the SMEs on e-Commerce** and is guiding the development of the actual content which is currently taking place in the context of the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fao.org/docrep/015/i2516e/i2516e.pdf>

**Development Phase.** More specifically, the following work has completed in the context of the Design Phase for the establishment of the methodological framework:

- Elaboration of a **training methodology for SMEs** which sets out the structure, content, methodology, delivery approach and all relevant aspects of the PECOS4SMEs vocational training system. The training methodology describes the complete process facilitated by PECOS4SMEs.
- Establishment of the **training programme structure** and definition of the **training programme specifications**. This work is the outcome from the analysis of the steps and procedures to be followed by the PECOS4SMEs training programme, as described in the training methodology, coupled with the conclusions from the analysis of the interconnections of the various elements of the training programme. The specifications of the training programme comprise also the design of an **interactive e-Commerce “Genie”** tool powering the PECOS4SMEs platform. The designed “Genie” facilitates a delivery approach divided into two layers, the “AS-IS” and the “TO-BE”, corresponding to the current situation of the SME following the training and the envisaged situation following the implementation of a personalised e-Commerce strategy. The “Genie” design is available [here](#).
- Identification of **cross-border e-Commerce strategies** which are selected in response to the identified needs of the SMEs comparing against the practices that need to be transferred as identified by the European Overview report, and the list of Top e-Commerce Strategies. These strategies formulate the framework guiding the action based training to be provided by PECOS4SMEs.

The **Development Phase**, currently in progress, will conclude to the **action based content** that will support the implementation of the e-Commerce strategies by the SMEs. At this stage, the **identified learning needs** have been **grouped under e-Commerce training modules** and have been allocated to the partners. The **learning needs** are **addressed by specific actions** which are captured via a specially designed template which ensures the homogeneity of each **action description** and the level of detail to be provided in support of each action. The partners currently document the actions corresponding to their allocated training needs and develop, when appropriate, the **supporting content** to assist the implementation of the action.

#### *Added value of the approach*

The approach followed has many benefits. To start with, it builds on top of the most recent and credible reports on the current state of e-Commerce, using the conclusions of such works as facts which then validates in terms of their importance to the target groups. So, the project methodology worked within the boundaries of already proven conclusions and carried out an extensive survey to get a feeling with respect to the importance of these conclusions to SMEs belonging to the targeted sectors and wanting to sell cross borders. This way it isolates what is most important from the things that are already proven to be important avoiding side tracking and focusing on the “quick” wins.

Another important aspect of the approach is the clear coupling of each output to the dissemination actions allowing for the designed and executed actions to be targeted and thus more effective for the SMEs. Good examples of this practice which have worked well are the list of top website features and the top e-Commerce strategies facilitating cross border sales. These outputs were elaborated while working on the Country reports and analysing the results of the survey, they were quick to elaborate and comprise information of high quality. As such, they are powerful dissemination items generating awareness to the SMEs and general public with regards to the project. Other outputs are also tightly coupled to the

dissemination strategy, such as e-Commerce vocabulary, the Country reports (at national level), the European overview (at EU level) and the actual strategies boosting online sales for SMEs.

The phased delivery approach adopted is equally important. The phased delivery is facilitated by the e-Commerce “Genie” tool and supported by the action based content which is ideal for SMEs. The strategies resulted to learning needs which are broken down to concrete actions categorised as follows:

- Simple actions that can be implemented immediately without an investment.
- Simple actions that can be implemented immediately but require an investment.
- Actions that have prerequisites (other actions need to be implemented first), but require no investment.
- Actions that have prerequisites and require an investment.

The actions are listed in terms of the e-Commerce modules they conceptually belong to and the SME can choose the actions to implement. This is ideal for SMEs who usually cannot allocate time continuously to follow a traditional training. This way they can focus on specific actions following a step wise approach and they can experience immediate benefits to their sales revenue by adopting the “quick” wins. SMEs that implement certain actions and experience the benefits will be motivated to implement more actions. Hence, starting with the “quick” wins is a proven and successful recipe which will ensure a critical mass of SMEs uses and disseminates the platform.

#### *Evaluation and Assessment*

The evaluation strategy comprises **itemised evaluation** (at the level of individual results), **training evaluation** (assessing the outcome of organizing and executing training activities), and overall **project evaluation** (at project level). The training evaluation leads also to **recommendations** for improving the organization and execution of the activity each time while the overall project evaluation leads to **best practices and lessons learned** as part of a **continuous improvement** process. The overall project evaluation comprises also an **external evaluation** by a contracted quality expert.

The evaluation strategy is embedded in the project methodology, while the elaborated **project quality plan** defines the main aspects of the evaluation approach and the facilitating tools.

Regarding the **itemized evaluation**, each key deliverable provides an insight as to the evaluation approach to be adopted for evaluating the associated work. Typical examples of already completed key deliverables are the training methodology which comprises also **evaluation templates** for evaluating the delivered training and a model **evaluation report** for documenting the findings. These will be used later as input for elaborating an **assessment plan** for guiding the project team to choosing the appropriate instruments (questionnaire, user group, learning log, web log, stats analysis, interviews, etc.) for collecting evidence both from project partners and from target groups.

In terms of assessing **quality** at the level of individual result, the project quality plan has defined a set of **metrics** per type of result. The results from the application of quality metrics to project outcomes are annexed to the quarterly report and also tracked under the QA wiki which is the single point of access to all QA activities taking place in the life of the project. The QA Wiki is available [here](#). Depending on the result type (document, software, event, etc.) a specific set of quality metrics is defined and is applied on the result. The metrics thresholds are used to determine the pass/fail conditions for each result subjected to the

quality assurance process. The results are documented and in case of failure a new version is prepared. The process is iterative and repeats until all thresholds are satisfied.

Quality metrics are defined in the project quality plan for:

- Specification
- Implementation
- Testing
- Project Management
- Assessment
- Valorisation
- Documentation

The metrics are applied to key results every quarter and the results are annexed to the quarterly report. An example application of the quality metrics to the European Overview is available [here](#).

Evaluation at **training level** will be guided by an **assessment methodology** to be elaborated shortly and the conclusions will be documented in an **assessment report**. Basically during the dry-runs which belong to the evaluation phase of the project, a series of piloting exercises will take place and the conclusions from each exercise will be documented in brief reports. The assessment report will present the combined conclusions from the individual exercises and will specifically refer to the weaknesses identified and suggest corrective actions to be taken. These fine-tuning actions will take place during the last month of the project. As part of the established **continuous improvement process**, the training evaluation will lead to a **set of recommendations** for organising and executing successful training events.

The overall project evaluation comprises an internal and an external evaluation. The internal evaluation is facilitated by two questionnaires distributed regularly to the partners to provide their input with regards to the collaboration thus far and the organisation and outcome of project meetings. Both questionnaires have been distributed and collected twice until now and the overall results will be depicted in the quality assurance report. As part of the established continuous improvement process, a **best practices and lessons learned programme (BP/LL)** is established. Based on the BP/LL methodology described in the project quality plan the partners, assisted by a BP/LL capturing template record best practices and lessons learned. Following the outcome of quality meetings, the accepted BPs and LLs are fully documented in the **Best Practices and Lessons Learned report** which is regularly being extended.

#### *Valorisation*

The dissemination strategy is an integral part of the project methodology and is tightly coupled to the products of the project from the very beginning. The completed results of the analysis phase, namely the country reports and European overview, the list of top website features and top e-Commerce strategies, as well as the list of best OSS e-Commerce platforms are valuable dissemination tools. They are results of good quality and are systematically disseminated mainly online through the website, twitter and blogs. The partners had acknowledged the dissemination value of these results already at proposal phase and agreed to the additional effort for preparing them as they would not only ensure the proper design of the PECOS4SMEs tool and complement the training content, but they would also constitute valuable dissemination tools allowing the partners to reach a wider audience.

The dissemination strategy is facilitated by 14 distinct results allowing for the most efficient monitoring of the dissemination progress and eliminating doubts and confusions with respect to roles and responsibilities of the partners. The dissemination results comprise:

- Dissemination Plan (Completed)
- Project Info Site (Completed – Frequently updated)
- Participative technologies (Guidelines provided - Web 2.0 Groups frequently monitored)
- Publicity kit (Completed – Frequently extended)
- Newsletters (Ongoing – 2 newsletters already distributed)
- Press releases (Ongoing – A press release has been distributed)
- Website Badge (Completed)
- Participation to events of interest (Ongoing)
- Hands on Trainings (Not yet started)
- Publications and articles (Ongoing – Numerous publications and blog postings made)
- Promotional Video (Completed)
- e-Commerce game (Not yet started)
- Conference (Not yet started)
- Dissemination reporting (Ongoing – A report is prepared every quarter)

The quality of the already produced dissemination material is rather high as demonstrated by the brochure and the animated video, but also from the product oriented website and newsletters. This proves also the commitment of the partners to the project objectives. The brochure and video were originally scheduled for a later point in time. However, they were produced sooner in order to assist dissemination and ensure the partners would be able to reach a critical mass of SMEs during the analysis phase. Achieving adequate participation numbers of SMEs during the analysis phase was very important, especially since the partners were seeking to introduce **sustainability into the requirements** of the project to maximize exploitation potential.

Another important aspect of the dissemination strategy is the constant monitoring of the executed valorisation actions. Monitoring is facilitated by the valorisation report annexed to the quarterly report and the dissemination Wiki which is available [here](#). Partners use the dissemination Wiki to register all the executed valorisation activities and the coordinator uses the dissemination Wiki to track valorization progress. The constant monitoring facilitates progress tracking and puts pressure on underperforming partners to increase their valorisation efforts as the Wiki makes transparent who does what in terms of valorisation. The wiki is the single point of access to all valorisation activities taking place in the life of the project and will be later linked to the project website via a dedicated Valorisation page.

The overall quality of the valorization activities is assessed quantitatively and qualitatively with the application of the dissemination and exploitation metrics. The results from the application of quality metrics to valorisation outcomes are annexed to the quarterly report and also tracked under the QA wiki which is the single point of access to all QA activities taking place in the life of the project.

### *Sustainability*

The following project aspects contribute towards the sustainability of the results:

- **Creative commons license:** The elaborated strategies correspond to specific needs of SMEs as these were identified during the analysis phase. These needs are a snapshot which corresponds to present SME needs with respect to e-Commerce with

a focus on partner countries. It should be possible for contributors to maintain and extend these needs and to factor in more countries. Thus, the actions materialising the strategies and the supporting content for their implementation will be made available through the project website under a **Creative Commons License** in order to further improve their sustainability through their evolution by other contributors.

- **GPL license:** The PECOS4SMEs platform is being developed using open source software and will be licensed under **GPL**. As such, contributors will have rights to use, modify, add new features, etc. but the result (called “derivative work”) will be made available under GPL also. Therefore, if a critical mass of users is using the PECOS4SMEs tool the OSS community will maintain it for as long as SMEs use it.
- **Spin-offs:** A spin-off blog created by two of the partners is picking up. It has a market-oriented name and is intended to serve as the introduction vehicle for the final product to the market. The blog is named “SECS SELLS” ([www.secssells.com](http://www.secssells.com)) and it stands for “Successful Ecommerce Strategies Sell”. This work was not originally planned, but it was decided that it is desirable to start preparing the exploitation instruments already from the beginning of the project and develop them along the execution of the project in order to minimise the transition from a pilot product to a revenue generating service. Today, the blog is active in English and in Dutch and the other languages of the project will start picking up after the first year.
- **Partnerships:** The Dutch Partner (P3) has already entered into a partnership with Payvision [[www.payvision.com](http://www.payvision.com)]. Payvision is a cross-border payment solutions provider and partner in one of the biggest and most prestigious cross-border e-Commerce platforms [[www.crossborder-ecommerce.com](http://www.crossborder-ecommerce.com)]. The company is one of the most important cross border e-Commerce content providers in the world. Payvision chose to cooperate with our project rather than with Ecommerce Europe [[www.ecommerce-europe.eu/home](http://www.ecommerce-europe.eu/home)]. The partnership encompasses among others:
  - Dedicated content creation by Payvision for the PECOS4SMEs Genie – especially “how to”-videos and white paper video adaptations.
  - Linking from the [CBEC platform](#) to the Genie.
  - Introducing the project to the Payvision network.

The partnership with Payvision will thus ensure additional high quality content creation, additional country-specific content, high visibility and an even better foundation for project sustainability. Part of the agreement with Payvision concerns the take up and funding of the SECS-SELLS spin-off blog at the end of the project.

- **Sustainability Declarations:** Another important instrument for sustainability which is foreseen by the work plan is the completion of sustainability declarations by each partner for each product of the project they plan to exploit providing in the declaration apart from a description of the product, also the “how” and the “when”. The management team will use the declarations for monitoring the execution of the envisaged activity and the quality team for applying the exploitation metrics. Due to the action based training model per e-Commerce area it is possible for the partners to define in detail ownership issues and agree on potential revenue distribution models.

Apart from the partnership agreement with Payvision, discussions are taking place with the “PayPers” [[www.thepaypers.com](http://www.thepaypers.com)] about opening up their whitepapers and other content to the project. There is also contact with a teacher at one of the best Dutch e-Commerce academies [Beeckestijn, [www.beeckestijn.org](http://www.beeckestijn.org)] for creating an English language MOOC on cross-border e-Commerce, dedicated to the Genie.

It is fair to claim that the partnership is doing their best to ensure that the project has a long way to go and it will not end in a year following the submission of the final progress report.

### 3. Project Outcomes & Results

#### *Major achievements and results*

At this point, half way into the project, apart from the Project Quality Plan which was the first milestone, it has achieved the following milestones:

- Elaboration of a European Overview report depicting the state of play with regards to e-Commerce in the partner countries (Milestone 3)
- Identification of the SME needs with regards to e-Commerce (Milestone 2)
- Design of a training methodology for training SMEs in e-Commerce (Milestone 4)
- Preparation of project information site (Milestone 6)

Apart from milestones however which serve more the monitoring of project progress from a managerial viewpoint, the project results have achieved some very important objectives well within the initially envisaged timeline. More specifically, the following objectives have been achieved, or are currently being achieved, through the project results:

- **Helping SMEs utilise the potential of e-Commerce.** The project has identified the main Internet trends relevant to online sales and has transcribed them to applicable e-Commerce strategies for SMEs to boost sales through the online channel.
- **Personalising the learning process.** The project has studied the learning needs of SMEs from specific sectors in relation to e-Commerce and in association to the requirements and expectations of consumers and has concluded to a specific set of needs to be addressed by the project tools and resources. A personalisation tool (e-Commerce “Genie”) has been designed to facilitate the elaborated training methodology which differs per SME depending on certain characteristics. The tool is currently under development. The elaborated training methodology for SMEs is based on an action-based (goal-based) training, very suitable for SMEs, and provides for a phased and step-wise approach, focusing on specific, practical actions and eliminating all unnecessary general knowledge.
- **Facilitating the acquisition of e-Commerce related knowledge and skills.** The project has divided the resulted e-Commerce strategies modules and has identified and grouped under each module sets of specific actions to be implemented by SMEs for materialising the e-Commerce strategies. The actions were elaborated to match the identified learning needs and when appropriate will be supported by dedicated content. The content development process is currently in progress.
- **Identify and transfer innovative e-Commerce practices.** The project has performed a study of the e-Commerce state of play in partner countries (Country reports) which comprise e-Commerce “champions” and “laggers”. The proven and innovative e-Commerce practices from “champion” countries were identified and used as input for selecting the e-Commerce strategies and for the elaboration of the learning needs in response to these strategies. As a result these practices which are embedded into the PECOS4SMEs e-Commerce strategies and supported by actions will be transferred to lagging SMEs following the PECOS4SMEs training.

#### *Impact on target groups*

The current results comprise mainly analysis, design and dissemination results (we refer here to “productive” results, other than managerial and QA results which do not have a direct impact on the target groups).

The analysis results which had/have an impact on the target groups can be divided into those that have direct and those that have indirect impact. The analysis results which have a direct impact comprise:

- **Country reports:** They capture the conclusions from the background analysis and survey and provide insight to SMEs with regards to expectations of consumers. They also provide access to useful e-Commerce resources. As such these reports served as the first level of motivation for SMEs to engage more drastically in e-Commerce.
- **European Overview:** It captures the most successful e-Commerce practices per sector of interest and also serves as a first level motivational material for making SMEs aware of the e-Commerce potential and their current weaknesses in relation to foreign SMEs. Reading the European Overview the SMEs acquire an initial understanding of what they have to achieve to be successful in e-Commerce. Presenting the SMEs with the “To-Be” situation maximises the chances for PECOS4SMEs programme to be used by the SMEs.
- **List of website features:** A comprehensive list of carefully selected website features which are proven to increase online sales. One the one hand it comprises useful knowledge for the SMEs while on the other it serves as a powerful dissemination instrument for the project which has been distributed through websites, blogs and the social media reaching a wide SME audience.
- **Top e-Commerce Strategies:** It presents the top performing e-Commerce strategies per project sector by decomposing each strategy to the various elements of the e-Commerce lifecycle (e.g. ordering, payment, delivery, etc.). It is very useful for SMEs as they can immediately identify their weakest points in e-Commerce lifecycle. At the same time it has served also as a dissemination instrument and was distributed through websites, blogs and the social media reaching a wide SME audience.
- **e-Commerce Vocabulary:** A useful resource for SMEs explaining the most frequently encountered e-Commerce jargon. It was prepared to complement the training programme but it can be seen also as an independent result which can help SMEs interested in e-Commerce independently of the PECOS4SMEs training programme. Based on SME feedback it is very useful as a single reference point to e-Commerce words and phrases.
- **Training Database:** A constantly updated list of e-Commerce related resources and courses. It was mentioned by the SMEs during the needs analysis interviews that they were having difficulty locating e-Commerce resources and trainings (also one of the motivations behind the project). The result addresses this problem to some extent while the final PECOS4SMEs programme aims to fully address it.

The analysis results which have indirect impact on the target groups comprise:

- **Questionnaire/Focus Groups/Online survey:** The instruments facilitating the needs identification process provided the opportunity to participating SMEs to acquire an understanding of what is relevant to e-Commerce. In the process they also interacted with other SMEs (either real time during focus groups or asynchronously by reading the survey results) and coaches. Reflecting on the experience they must have been in position to make a first classification of their current level of e-Commerce awareness.
- **Needs identification:** The concluding result of the analysis phase, even though it indirectly affects the target groups, it has the most important impact. This is because it guided the design work for the PECOS4SMEs tools and resources. The success of the final products depends on the quality and precision of this result. So, the overall impact of the project on the target groups ultimately depends on this result.

The completed design results which impact the target groups comprise results with direct and indirect impact. The design results with direct impact on the target groups comprise:

- **Training methodology for SMEs:** The designed delivery methodology is very important in terms of target group impact as it describes the PECOS4SMEs approach to training the SMEs. The success of the training programme is very much tied to the efficiency of the training approach. As such the impact is very high.
- **Structure of the training programme and specifications:** The structure of the training programme and the design of the e-Commerce “Genie” which will facilitate the delivery approach directly affects the target groups who will be exposed to the final outcome. Naturally the impact is very high.
- **List of actions to facilitate the e-Commerce strategies:** The actual actions which materialise the e-Commerce strategies have considerable impact on the target groups as they represent what the SMEs need to do in order to boost online sales.

The completed design results which have indirect impact on the target groups comprise:

- **E-Commerce Strategies:** These are the strategies which are ultimately implemented by following the PECOS4SMEs training. These are the strategies served by the actions and supporting content. They are “hardcoded” in the PECOS4SMEs “Genie”. So, their impact to the target groups is indirect, but very high nonetheless. They also have considerable impact as a dissemination instrument distributed through websites, blogs and the social media.
- **OSS e-Commerce List:** This complementary work can potentially have a very high impact on SMEs if they decide to adopt one of the open source solutions presented in this work in order to facilitate their e-Commerce infrastructure. It also has impact as a dissemination instrument being disseminated through websites, blogs and the social media.

With respect to dissemination results, the dissemination plan itself does not have a direct impact to the target groups as it is merely a plan comprising all the dissemination actions to take place and the process and tools to be employed for executing the actions. The following dissemination results have a direct impact to the target groups by creating awareness about the project objectives and promoting the use of e-Commerce as a revenue channel:

- **Project website:** It is mentioned on all dissemination material of the project and provides up to date information about the project. Its impact on disseminating the project is rather high as the number of unique visitors proves.
- **Brochure:** The high quality design conveys very successfully the features and benefits of using the PECOS4SMEs training programme for boosting online sales. Hand-outs during events have sparked a lot of interest from SMEs.
- **Animated Video:** A visual and very descriptive introduction to what PECOS4SMEs is all about has received very positive feedback among SMEs and has very high impact as it can be seen as an “evangelist”, opening doors to reaching SMEs easier.
- **Participative technologies:** The impact of the Web 2.0 groups is currently moderate. This is understandable at this stage of the project. There is already a substantial number of followers of the [@PECOS4SMEs](#) twitter group (404 at the time of writing this report). It is expected that it will be at least four times bigger towards the end of the project.
- **Newsletters:** Two newsletters have been distributed thus far. The recipients list exceeds 400 recipients and is progressively becoming wider.

- Press releases: The press release about the project has been distributed through various engines. The combined recipients list of the news distribution tools used amounts to many thousands so it is fair to claim that a substantial amount of SMEs belonging to the target groups have been exposed to the project.
- Website Badge: At this point it has only been awarded to the SMEs that have contributed to the needs identification phase. The plan is to award it also to the SMEs that will participate to the hands on training activities.
- Publications and articles: There is a considerable number of publications and articles relating to or pointing at the project. These efforts will substantially increase when the PECOS4SMEs tool becomes available.

### *Accessing results*

The majority of the results are publicly available under the [Deliverables page](#) of the PECOS4SMEs website (ABOUT -> DELIVERABLES).

### *Issues*

Comparing the current phase of the project with the envisaged time plan provided with the project application we need to take into account the fact that the application time plan envisaged the project to start in November 2012. However, due to the fact that there was a need to change the applicant, the project started on January 2013. Taking this into consideration and shifting all results from the original time plan two months later we are in a situation today where only one item, the supporting content per action, has not been completed on time (was envisaged for middle of December), while several dissemination items (website, brochure, video, badge) were completed much ahead of schedule. The reason the supporting content is slightly delayed is because the second meeting took place about 1 month later than initially expected (October instead of September), pushing content related decisions until then. The reason was that the partner hosting the meeting was unable to host it sooner due to other obligations. On top of this, the project was chosen for a monitoring visit following a somewhat late notification from the Agency. Naturally this had some impact on the work plan by shifting interest from normal project work to fully completing project financials. However, the original work plan anticipated that at some point a delay would occur and has made provisions to allow future activities to be completed sooner thus prohibiting the delay to progress all the way to the end date of the project.

The reason certain dissemination items were completed sooner was because it was deemed necessary by the partners in order to achieve the necessary participation levels for the analysis phase. So, actual dissemination started much sooner than originally anticipated in order to help the analysis phase to engage a wider SME audience.

Overall, it is fair to claim that there is currently no major issue threatening the progress of the project according to work plan and that the work already completed has set solid foundations for the work currently in progress and the work to be carried out in the immediate future.

## 4. Partnerships

### *Partnership*

PECOS4SMEs comprises 7 partners from 7 different countries. The multi-country partnership is a key aspect of the project as it intends to transfer e-Commerce practices from the top performing countries to the lagers narrowing the gap. As such, we cannot speak about added value of the multi-country partnership as the multi-country partnership is a prerequisite for the project. It would not have been possible to carry out this project with the envisaged resources with a partnership spanning to less than 5 or 6 countries. If there were less partners, then more resources would be required to be able to access and research foreign markets for which there would be no local presence and no complete understanding of the functioning of the local e-Commerce market. Hence, the geographical span of the partnership is what makes the project possible rather than simply providing added value to it.

Even though the project subject covers the international market and the cross-border sales focus implies no specificity with regards to location, it is not easy to devise a project methodology to identify the expectations of a consumer from one of the top performing countries without involving a partner with direct access to the local market. It is this specific consumer that the SMEs from the lager countries want to convince to buy from them. To do this they will need to consider the practices of SMEs from a top performing country. So, direct access to consumers and SMEs from several countries is required.

Having established that a multi-country partnership is what makes this project a reality, it is important to mention that the actual geographical coverage is ideal comprising 3 top performing countries from the north and 4 lagers from the south. It is thus easy to understand the added value of the geographical coverage and its impact on the potential of the project. Already the initial exploitation opportunities such as the partnership with Payvision and the discussions with eCommerce Europe support this.

### *Experiences Acquired*

As always, working with organisations which are complementary has mutual benefits. When these complementary organisations are geographically dispersed and cover different local markets under a global market connected by the Internet, the benefits are elevated.

Typical examples of the experiences acquired thus far comprise the following:

- Insight provided by the Belgian partner (Business and innovation centre) on how to approach and engage with SMEs while providing international access to SMEs belonging to the target groups. The feedback of the partner on how to execute the demonstration event for the PECOS4SMEs platform was critical and as a result it is expected that the demonstration event will achieve a very high impact.
- Motivation by the Dutch partner on how to reach out to external entities and achieve strategic partnerships with “game-changers”, such as Payvision already had a very positive on both the project and the partners. Partners at individual level seem now more confident they can cross the “valley of death” and exploit results in a more commercial manner.
- Know-how by the Greek partner on the importance of instructional design and personalisation of content to target group needs allowed the partners to see the

content development process through a different, more creative viewpoint, rather than treating it as a typical content generation exercise or low creativity.

- Industrial expertise on product-oriented quality assurance process promoted by the Cypriot partner are expected to help the partners even after the current project to continuously improve and differentiate from competition through quality.
- Systematic approach toward financial management and reporting established by the Italian partner helps the partners prepare sound financial reports while focusing on the actual work to achieve the project objectives.

#### *Benefits from external collaborations*

The obvious benefits of interacting with SMEs from the target groups and SME coaches comprise among others:

- Direct access to representatives of important economic sectors which experience specific learning needs and have huge training needs.
- Needs analysis skills enhancement.
- Knowledge acquisition for SME coaching approaches.
- Insight to the currently available, most prominent, authoring tools for educators and their strong and weak points.
- Understanding of SME attitude towards ICT in E&T and determination of approaches for breaking their natural resistance towards training tools.

The benefit from the partnership with Payvision is also expected to be huge to the project and the partners at individual level. Already the Greek partner is discussing with Payvision an instructional design/content transcription/edutainment project for transcribing financial resources of Payvision to more publicly accessible content addressed to the general public.

## 5. Plans for the Future

The major work carried out currently is on two fronts:

1. Completion of the supporting content for implementing the actions;
2. Development of the PECOS4SMEs “Genie” and portal.

The supporting training content should be completed towards the end of January, while the first release of the PECOS4SMEs “Genie” should complete around the middle of February.

Following the completion of the supporting content in English, translations will start while in parallel, following the completion of the first release of the “Genie” tests will take place. Based on the conclusions of the tests, the final release of the “Genie” will be prepared in the months of April/May 2014 with the multi-lingual content.

A demonstration meeting should take place towards the end of May for the presentation of the complete training programme to the instructors/trainers and then the hands-on exercises will take place until November 2014. Following the completion of the pilot exercises, an assessment meeting will take place and an assessment report will be prepared from the conclusions driving a final release of PECOS4SMEs for December 2014.

A key event is the envisaged conference which will take place in Athens around October 2014.

## 6. Contribution to EU policies

Contribution to EU policies, objectives and priorities:

- *Help promote creativity, competitiveness, employability and the growth of an entrepreneurial spirit:* The work already concluded (e-Commerce strategies for boosting online sales) actively contributes to the competitiveness of southern Europe SMEs which indirectly impacts employability (creation of more jobs through increase in revenues) and growth of entrepreneurship (promotion of innovative e-Commerce practices).
- *Help improve the quality, attractiveness and accessibility of the opportunities for lifelong learning available within Member States:* The work already completed includes the establishment of a product-oriented quality assurance process based on specific quality metrics applied to individual project results prior to an overall evaluation. The aim is to ensure the outmost quality of the final results of the current project, but also future projects through the adoption of a “continuous improvement process” facilitated by the recommendations and best practices and lessons learned programmes. The attractiveness and accessibility of the learning opportunities are equally affected positively by the personalised, hands-on approach facilitated by the actions based training specifically designed for SMEs. Specifically for the attractiveness, this is assisted further by the delivery tool “Genie” while the accessibility is promoted through the PECOS4SMEs open content and platform.
- *Support participants in training and further training activities in the acquisition and the use of knowledge, skills and qualifications to facilitate personal development, employability and participation in the European labour market:* PECOS4SMEs will improve SME ICT skills and competences and elevate e-Commerce awareness and knowledge leading to increased sales and thus revenue. At the same time, non-SMEs individuals can utilise PECOS4SMEs to acquire e-Commerce knowledge and skills useful to SMEs and thus make themselves useful to SMEs and increase their employability.
- *Support improvements in quality and innovation in vocational education and training systems, institutions and practices:* Innovation is accomplished through the personalization of the training for SMEs and the phased approach of the hands on training facilitated by the delivery platform and Genie. Quality is improved through the establishment of a product-oriented quality assurance process under a continuous improvement viewpoint.
- *Facilitate the development of innovative practices in the field of vocational education and training other than at tertiary level, and their transfer, including from one participating country to others:* An innovative aspect of the project is the action based customised training delivered to SMEs in a personalised manner which transfers innovative and proven e-Commerce practices from top performers to lagers.
- *Support the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning:* Based on an SME-centred delivery methodology, PECOS4SMEs develops practical tools for SMEs to explore the e-Commerce potential, including changing sales and marketing strategies and new types of organisation and knowledge about e-Commerce technologies with a view to achieve short term cross-border sales revenue goals.

- *Developing Vocational Skills considering the labour market needs – New Skills for New Jobs:* PECOS4SMEs promotes the development of personalised e-Commerce skills for SMEs as an inexpensive antidote to the shrinking of the business due to recession and competition. If WEB 2.0 was all about getting all the content on the web and making it accessible, Web 3.0 will most likely be about finding the most efficient ways of using this content. In this respect, personalised VET training for the acquisition of e-Commerce skills will make VET more responsive to labour market's needs. This statement originates from the project application and the partners continue to back this claim 100%.
- *Promoting equality between men and women and contributing to combating all forms of discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation:* An effort will be made for 50% of the SMEs that will participate in the PECOS4SMEs pilots to be women. The open content (creative commons) and open source tool (GPL) are by definition open to all.
- *Making provision for learners with special needs, and in particular by helping to promote their integration into mainstream education and training:* An effort will be made for the pilots to include SMEs which are owned or employ seniors (55+) and SMEs with close ties to disabilities groups.
- *Education and Training 2020 Work Programme:* PECOS4SMEs objectives are aligned with the objectives of ET2020 by addressing the objective to improve the quality and efficiency of education and training, as well as to enhance entrepreneurship. PECOS4SMEs makes VET more attractive and efficient (by improving the ICT competencies of SMEs while at the same time increasing their revenue), helps SMEs acquire key competencies (digital competence, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship) and creates partnerships between enterprises & training organisations.

With respect to e-Commerce policies, PECOS4SMEs helps the growth of cross border e-Commerce and boosts confidence in the Digital Single Market of e-Commerce [SEC(2011) 1641 final, COM(2011) 942 final, SEC(2011) 1640 final].

