

PECOS4SMEs

D2.8 Guidelines for 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 Guidelines for 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 Guidelines for Focus Groups

The purposes of the current D2.8 Guidelines for 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.

The online survey will be available until 16th May 2013.

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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 a focus group

How to prepare a session:

1. *Identify the major objective of the meeting.*

Always first ask yourself what problem or need will be addressed by the information gathered during the session, e.g., examine if a new service or idea will work, further understand how a program is failing, etc. Focus groups are basically multiple interviews. Therefore, many of the same guidelines for conducting focus groups are similar to conducting interviews.

2. *Carefully develop five to six questions.*

The moderator should prepare a script or list of issues which need to be tackled. It is wise not to be too prescriptive, to allow spontaneity in the group. The programme of a focus group sessions may be planned to cover a wide range of responses.

The questions will act as introductory remarks and should either originate from the original questionnaire or relate to the questionnaire, in order to guide the respondents and obtain their feedback. Candidate questions from the questionnaire can be the ones below:

- Q1: Are you familiar with the concept of e-Commerce?
- Q2: How many of you are, or have been actively involved in e-Commerce and how?

3. *Plan your session.*

A focus group session should feel free-flowing and relatively unstructured. Focus groups often bring out users spontaneous reactions and ideas through the interaction between the participants. Meetings should last between 1 to 2 hours. A video, a short demonstration, or putting on the table examples of artefacts relevant to the focus group topic may be used to start the discussion.

A good practice is to show videos/supportive material (Youtube videos maybe) that are in line with the scope of the project, such as maybe the Obermutter video. This practice could raise participant's interest on the project and trigger their eagerness to participate.

4. *Call potential members to invite them to the meeting.*

Try to avoid selecting all the participants from the same industry sector, industry, occupation. Diversity is useful. Usually about 6 to 12 users participate in any one focus group meeting session. A selection of users should be individually invited to each focus group session. The

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invitation should explain that this is to a focus group, and if necessary, a few words about what will be discussed and what the format of a focus group meeting is. Hospitality may be offered (e.g. tea or coffee). Plan to provide a copy of the report from the session to each member and let them know you will do this.

For more ease in planning and tracking on the attendees, an invitee tracking form could be developed, with the following information:

- Full Name:
- Organisation:
- Email:
- Phone number:

About three days before the session, call each member to remind them to attend. Mark on the invitee form any cancelations that may occur.

Hold sessions in a conference room, or other setting with adequate air flow and lighting. Configure chairs so that all members can see each other. Provide name tags for members, as well.

As a reminder, the project budget under "Other" costs makes a provision for the organisation of focus groups. The current provision is for 800 Euros and can cover printing of hand outs, the rental of rooms, equipment, F&B, etc. As the organisation is a budgeted item, it can be also increased without problem if more funds are required simply by decreasing the budget of any other operational item (e.g. decrease production of dissemination costs or subcontracting or travels and increase focus groups organisation costs). No formal request is necessary.

3.2. Running a focus group

It's critical that all members participate as much as possible, yet the session move along while generating useful information. Because the session is often a one-time occurrence, it's useful to have a few, short ground rules that sustain participation, yet do so with focus.

The participants should be provided with hand outs with the following information:

- Welcome and introductions
- Purpose of the meeting
- Basic Ground rules (e.g. There are no wrong and right answers) see Annex 4

Consider the following three ground rules: a) keep focused, b) maintain momentum and c) get closure on questions.

The session should be run by an experienced moderator who is responsible for maintaining the focus of the group on the issues of interest to the addressees of the focus group results. Moderators can gain experience from participating as delegates in other focus groups: no amount of reading is a substitute for experience.

It is usual to spend a few minutes of introduction time, going round the table. Participants may be given name tags or desk labels to assist in identifying who is who.

The purpose of focus groups is not consensus building - rather, it is to obtain a range of opinions from a representative set of target users about issues to hand. Each user's point of view is of interest and it is the moderator's task to encourage each user to express their unique points of view.

The end of a focus group may be wound up with a slight hint of formality, and the participants should be thanked for their time and showing their interest. See Annex 3.5

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The meeting coordinator should document the general views and impressions of the participants. At this point a short answer sheet (with multiple choices) could be provided in order the participants to voice their opinions on the meeting. Some of the questions are:

- What did you like in this meeting?
- What did you not like in this meeting?
- What you believe it could be made, in order SMEs to gain maximum benefits from the use of the Internet? See Annex 5

As a closing action the participants should be informed about the project's website in order to be kept informed about the projects' future activities.

3.3. Reporting a focus group

Focus groups are mainly designed to obtain people's opinions and not to determine the exact strength of their opinions. Notice that focus group interviews do not generate quantitative information and the results strictly speaking should not be generalized or "projected" to a larger population although in fact they often are - hence the use of a programme of focus group sessions.

Major goal of facilitation is collecting useful information to meet goal of meeting.

The results of focus groups can be used as a basis for generating hypotheses for further evaluation and user validation using both qualitative and quantitative methods, e.g. the results can assist in the development of questionnaires, surveys, and items for tests by identifying response categories and constructs that evaluators might not have otherwise considered. Focus groups can make questionnaires and other evaluation methods more language sensitive, because vocabulary that is common to the users can be discerned in the focus group interview and then incorporated into the measure.

3.4. Focus group data analysis

The analysis of focus group data presents both challenges and opportunities when compared to other types of qualitative data. Some authors have suggested that data should be analysed in the same manner as interview data, while others have suggested that the unique features of focus group data - particularly the opportunity that it provides to observe interactions between group members - means that distinctive forms of analysis should be used. Data analysis can take place at the level of the individual or the group.

Focus group data provides the opportunity to analyse the strength with which an individual holds an opinion. If they are presented with opposing opinions or directly challenged, the individual may either modify their position or defend it. Bringing together all the comments that an individual makes in order can enable the researcher to determine whether their view changes in the course of discussion and, if so, further examination of the transcript may reveal which contributions by other focus group members brought about the change.

At the collective level, focus group data can sometimes reveal shared understandings or common views. However, there is a danger that a consensus can be assumed when not every person has spoken: the researcher will need to consider carefully whether the people who have not expressed a view can be assumed to agree with the majority, or whether they may simply be unwilling to voice their disagreement.

The responses of the answer sheet could be "uploaded" to survey monkey afterwards for automated analysis.

3.5. Annex: Flow Chart of the Focus Groups Organisation

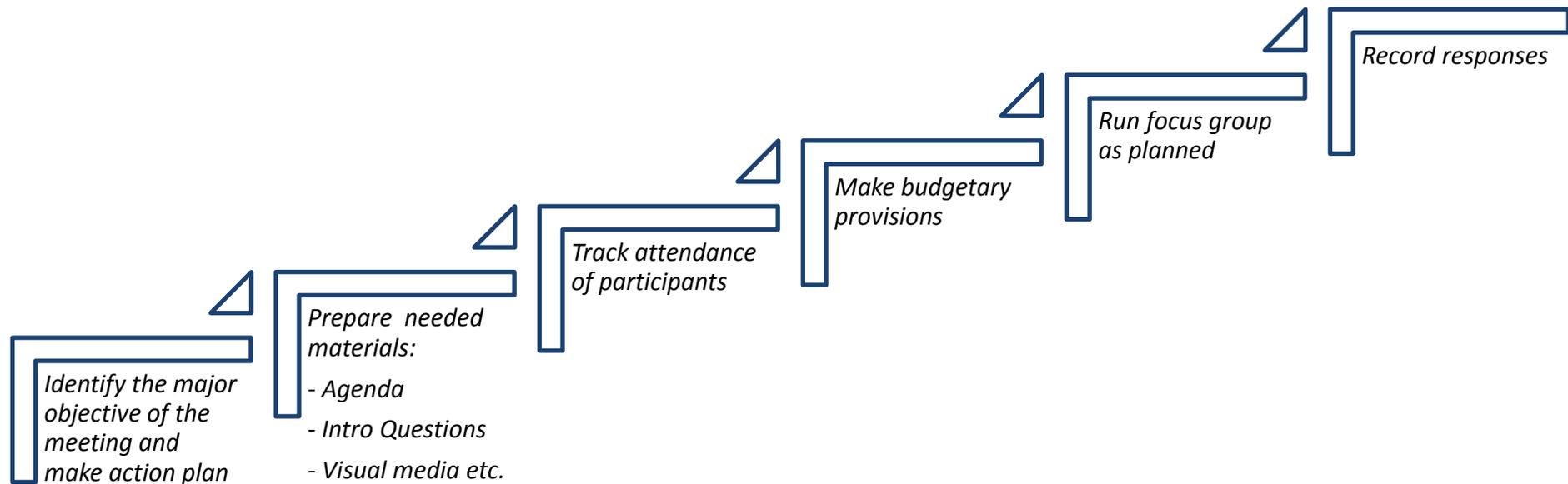


Figure 1: Flow Chart of the Focus Groups Organisation

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4. Annex - *Introduction* to PECOS4SMES Project Focus Groups

Date:

Place:

Duration of the meeting:

Your moderator's name is:

Purpose of this meeting: Focus Groups will explore the current conditions with respect to SMEs competencies in e-Commerce with a view to identify their needs.

Ground rules:

1. Please share your honest opinion
 2. There are no wrong or right answers
 3. All responses that you will provide are confidential
-

Thank you in advance for your contribution,

Your moderator,

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5. Annex- PECOS4SMES Project Focus Groups *Closing* *Questions*

Purpose of this answer sheet: Please provide us with some final feedback about the meeting you participated.

1. What did you like in this meeting?

2. What you didn't like in this meeting?

3. What questions you had, remained unanswered?

4. What more you believe it should have been done, in order this meeting to meet its purpose?

5. What you believe it could be made, in order SMEs to gain maximum benefits from the use of the Internet?

6. Are you willing to participate in future activities of the PECOS4SMES Project?

- Yes
 No

7. Would you like to receive the PECOS4SMES Project Newsletter?

- Yes
 No

8. If **Yes** please fill in your e-mail address:

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