A concept marketing-communications approach

For the European Business Support Network

Content

1. **Introduction**

The cooperation between the two Interreg projects Baltic Supply and North Sea Supply Connect, has blended together so well that the two projects have been able to deliver a mutual result: a business development platform that aspires to the fulfillment of the goals that both projects have set for themselves within the projects cluster approach; maritime industry, energy and public infrastructure and food and health industry. The goals within these three clusters are as follows:

- Extend knowledge for better SUPPLIER performance on Northeast European SME supply markets
- Enhance competitiveness of Northeast European region suppliers on NE European supply markets
- Increase impact of regionally economic innovation policy on supplier involvement in Northeast European supply markets
- Promote Northeast European integration
- Build economic bridges between the North Sea Region and the Baltic Sea

In order to comply with the challenge of meeting these goals, the projects in conjunction have developed a Business Development Platform that now goes by the name of the *European Business Support Network*; quite a self explanatory name, that represents our partner network and offers their on- and offline services, to the businesses in our respective regions. These services have been developed specifically to help companies overcome the thresholds that impede their competitiveness and performance on European markets. It is now up to our partners to bring the platform alive and to make it a success, and contribute to the strengthening of our regional economies.

The aim of this marketing plan is to be instrumental in the support of the partner network to do just that.

We would like to thank all partners for their extremely valuable contributions that they have provided by filling out the questionnaires and the partner record sheets. We will use their contributions in the next elaborated version of this marketing plan.

Allan Nordby Ottesen
Communications Manager
Baltic Supply

Mirjam Spaans
Communications Manager
North Sea Supply Connect

Groningen/Brussels, January 2012

2. Marketing objectives for the European Business Support Network

The ultimate purpose of the website is, to support and sustain businesses and companies from our designated areas, to become more competitive in the European market and to increase their access to supply chains.

The ways in which this can be done, is to offer all kinds of information and services to these businesses, that contribute towards these goals. It is up to each individual partner in the network to decide which specific services and information will accomplish these objectives. ***Because they know…***

They know their markets; they know their companies as well as the problems they encounter. They know where they can find the right information and they have access to a network of even more partners in similar situations in other European countries, who also know.

> The network represents a chain of knowledge, connections, and access.
> It is exclusive to companies who want to cross borders, find partners and meet new business opportunities. The network will help you find them.

This is what the European Business Support Network ***IS.***
It is represented online by Eubizz.net.

For the purpose of this plan, we need to distinguish clearly between the network and the website, because the goal of the marcom plan is primarily to promote the website; and only indirectly, by promoting the website, promoting the Network/Partnership.

The purpose of the website (www.eubizz.net) is to (1) offer and (2) promote the services offered on- and offline by the project partners. It is an additional channel for our project partners to do so.

The purpose of this marcom plan is to promote this channel. (ww.eubizz.net) In this marcom plan, we will speak of **eubizz.net** when the website is referred to.

Promotion of the actual Network is secondary, and only as a prerequisite to the promotion of the website. We strive for ownership by the partner organizations, which we can only achieve when they themselves take responsibility for the content of their services (like they would on their own websites).It interferes too much with the core business and methods that partner organizations use, for marcom professionals from outside their organiziations to be able to account for.

3. Marketing Communications Strategy

a. The Proposition sets the standard

The Marcom strategy defines a message to the target groups, which is also known as a proposition. It specifies what *it does*, in terms of meaning to the target audience.

This *meaning* needs to match a *perceived need* by the target audience.

In our questionnaire, we have asked our partners what proposition we should claim for the network (in this case: equals the website). Which are the USP's (Unique Selling Points), and what competition are we up against? Which advantages do we offer, when compared with our competitors?

To provoke reactions, we gave a proposition example in the questionnaire:

> *"The eubizz.net provides a reliable and personalized service network throughout Europe that supportsbyers and suppliers alike to find each other, to find new partners, find new clients, and be found by them as well. '*

This is just an idea and it rendered reactions such as:

> *`One Stop Agency for information about activities in project partner countries, related to SMEs (exhibitions, networking/business promotion events for SMEs etc.)'*

> *`Tenders / Matchmaking events (trade fairs) / one stop consultant point in the country'*

> *EUBIZZ: It should offer individual – tailored – services based on a direct contact between business organizations. This could form part of an economic diplomacy on a day-to-day basis.*

> *EUBIZZ: Transparency in the information provided and local support through the local partners.*

> *The idea is that the network acts as a reliable guide since it has access to key organizations which will deliver results.*

> *Eubizz.net: Your Strategic European Services Network*

After discussing several options at the coordinationgroup meeting (16/01), it has become clear that terms like OEM and SME should be avoided in communications about the European Business Support Network. Which makes sence; terms like buyers and suppliers are much more common and understandable for everyone.

actionplan| Also, it has become clear that the slogan for the Eubizz.net should reflect that the network offers tailored services to help companies to find new partners and/or contacts across Europe. With this in mind, we will have another evaluation of the partners' contribution and come up with a proposal in the action plan that will derive from this strategy.

We appreciate the valuable contributions everybody delivered and will certainly evaluate them for the final decision. The proposition should define the meaning to the target group, that matches their needs. We define it so that we have a mutual understanding of the function of the website, and how we want to communicate it. It serves as input for a creative slogan or pay-off, that is catchy and short, and will in a few words catch the value of the site (which is a product) for the end-user.

b.   Minimum requirements define quality

Whichever proposition we choose, the site/Network needs to live up to its' promise because we want first time visitors to come back and stay longer with each visit. The next step we want them to take is to get in touch with one of the service providers presented on the site. That's what will make it a success to partners.

So we cannot afford for first time visitors to be disappointed. This means that there's a set of minimum requirements that the site needs to meet. These *minimum requirements* are **properties** of the site that altogether determine its *quality*. These properties will not only be recognized by users/target groups when they visit the site; they will *also* attribute these properties to the sender behind the site (corporate communications). In this way, strong positive quality will rub off on the owner(s) of the site and simultaneously reinforce the desired corporate reputation of the projects and the projectpartners.

This *also* is marketing. Partners that have made the effort to fill out the questionnaire have confirmed what these properties/ requirements should be. We have included an attachment that specifies them even better. We define those requirements as *recommendations* that the technical and functional design needs to take into account, for optimal quality:

Quality defined:[1]

- Credibility
- User friendliness
- Clarity on its purpose
- Functionality
- Relevance

---

[1] Refer to attachment for the recommendations on quality.

4. Target Groups

The target groups for the network completely coincide with our partner-organizations target groups. We have asked our partners which groups to target, and according to the feedback, it seems that they know who quite well. Target groups differ somewhat from country to country, but the common denominator seems to be that all partners target SUPPLIERs and smaller companies, although some do target OEMS. The partner sheets that we received require a bit further analysis to see how the defined target groups might affect the Eubizz.net.

actionplan| Target groups will largely determine where to direct our marketing efforts; they determine channels and media. We are going to have to look for places where they go. In the actionplan that will derive from this marketing strategy, we will include an analysis of target groups according to our partners, in order of quantity and importance. A table will be added to the action plan that sums up all the different target groups that partners have identified .

5. Marketing Communications Mix

The Marketing Communications Mix is a set of media that we develop to support the promotion of the site and secondary the network. There's media that are more inclined towards promoting the network itself (interviews, articles in magazines, best practices and case studies) and there's media that are more apt to promote the online version of the Network.

The latter are the media that we will focus on at the first stages after the launch, because they attract traffic to the website. Traffic is our first objective. Once we have traffic, it is up to the quality of the site and the response o f the partners to make it all work. Traffic is merely a precondition. Everything else has to be in order already.

The second objective is to support the partners in the promotion of the services that they will put online; after all, it is the content that will make the difference. We will develop actions to implement service promotion over time, as it will become clearer which services are going to be inserted on to the Eubizz.net.

Furthermore, we will select those media that will support the partners best. We have chosen a model in which our project partners i.c. the service providers are our main promoters; they have the most to gain from the promotion and so we want to use them at best. This is also why we have asked them – again, in our questionnaire,- how they would promote the Eubizz.net if they had a chance. Their answers provide plenty of input for long lists of media to be developed in their support and we are happy to encounter such enthusiasm.

Some of the media mentioned here below exist already, and some just need a revision:

actionplan|
*	graphic identity	√
*	Webbanners	
*	Video	√
*	Brochure (update)	√
*	Powerpoints	
*	Template for press release	
*	Business cards	
*	Touchtable	
*	Presentation material *on demand* for trade fairs, seminars, meetings and workshops	
*	Copy for free publicity, newsgathering etc.	

6. **Media Mix**

actionplan| Each partner region should draw up a list of relevant media per target group. It concerns **websites** that they might go to that are successful and have a relevant reach, **magazines**, **newspapers** and **sectoral /branchemedia**. Also, **events** that are popular to use for seminars and presentations should be listed. Of course, we will start by using the partner websites and their newsletters.

7. **Campaign: execution of marketing-communications plan**

The campaign is the final result of when to plant which promotional activity or item, advertisement, event, promotional activity, Road Show or banner on a timeline.

The execution of the marketing campaign will in great part take place locally, in our regions, by the partners. They will talk about it when they have meetings or other activities, they will include the topic in their seminar and they will advertise it on their websites and within their networks. We will need to use their media, their voice.

This is why all the media that we will develop will be geared towards their agendas and their activities. This will be marketing-on-demand; only just able to guarantee an unambigious image and reputation, and to align messages.

*actionplan|*The campaign therefore will be designed in conjunction with the partners, many have indicated their promotional opportunities and we will specify them in the actionplan.

8

But we will start with a very general part, indicating the existence of the site by placing banners and links on as many sites as we can to generate traffic, and minimally on all the sites of our projectpartners.

Also, we will write a concept press release and a newsarticle that partners can use to distribute via their own newsletters and websites, and through their own networks.

Some of the greater events are already planned, and will be taken advantage of within the marketing campaign for the Eubizz.net. E.g., we have the Edinburgh Sustainable Conference Event that will serve as the launch of the ESBN website, and we will write a publicityplan for that.

Then, there's a few more events hat we can already plug into our campaign.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation

action plan| We suggest that the website should be tested before going live, as to make sure that all functionality is working correctline, in line with the requirements for quality.

After a period of three months, we suggest there should be an evaluation of the site on functionality and on marketing. How many vistors come to the site, how much exposure have we generated, how content are partners with the site, how many contacts have we established, do the services offered on the site in fact meet a demand? This evaluation should serve to make necessary changes to the site to improve it if need be.

Attachment 1:

Recommendations on Properties for Quality

Eubizz.net

Recommendations

For the marketingcommunications strategy to succees, the first necessary requirement is that the website meets a set of minimal requirements, that users will identify as `quality'. If end users (which represent our target groups; the people, businesses that we are aiming at to come to the site and use the services) were to value the site as useless or not functional, they won't want to revisit or spend any time browsing it. We want users to value the Eubizz.net. In order for them to do so, we recommend that the technical and functional design take into account these following set of requirements:

1. **Credibility**
   For a website to be credible, it needs to be clear from the start who the (end)user is dealing with. Generally, credibility is attributed to a product (like a website) by identifying its 'owner. Users will normally want to know who put this product out there, and `what are my beliefs about this producer? 'What has he got to gain from this product and what does he want from me?"

   In the case of the Eubizz.net, it would be recommendable to identify this network as a government-supported network and reveal some of the background of the partners and how they came together, and explain the development of it against the background of European policy.

   Also, in order to be credible it would be advisable to make use of the reputation and identity of the various partners regionally, so that regional users recognize a local party by its' logo and link it to the services offered.

   This requirement leads to the following condition for the website:

   - Partners need to be identifiable at the website by their logo and link to the partners organizational website.
   - The website should contain a part dedicated to the background, the projects, and European Policy. This could easily be realized by including an `about the network' menu-option, an `about the partners' menu-option, and include a links-page with links to relevant sites that contain the suggested information. This information does not need to be very prominent, but it should be easily found.

2. **User friendliness**
   The requirement of user friendliness usually guarantees that the site will be used at all. So it is a minimal requirement. It means that it needs to be obvious straight away, at first glance, when people come to the site, what they will find there and how they can use it:
   - Services sought after need to be one or at the most two clicks away from homepage; best would be to list all services immediately on the homepage (compare to websites of any telecom provider), as to segment the target group on the homepage and guide them to the relevant information as directly as possible.
   - All functionality provided at the site should work!
   - Partners need to define protocol as to how and when to react to contact requests, - with a minimum time period to confirm receipt of the request.

- Contact information should be easily available
- Services offered should be clearly defined

3. **Clarity on its purpose**

   when the website defines clearly how to use it and what to use it for, and who it is meant for, it will be a promotion for itself. The set-up, lay- out and presentation of the information should leave no doubts for any visitor and should also be clear on what visitors can and cannot expect. This goes for the functionality of the website, but also for the way in which services will be offered by the participating partners.

   Requirements are:

   - Presentation of information should guide expectations of visitors
   - Information needs to answer the questions that visitors have (what can I find on this website? why is that relevant for me? How can I make use of these services? How much does it cost?)

4. **Quality**

   The requirement of **quality** entails that the services and information on the website reinforce the reputation that we want to establish in the market. The network aims for a strong reputation, because it is a prerequisite to the success of the network. That means that partners need to dedicate themselves to the services they offer on the website, and follow up on website leads it generates. This is a definite and conditional requirement, and without it, the site will lose all credibility. The advantage of this approach is that when partners do invest their dedication, in return it will reinforce the reputation of the partner organization as well. So it works both ways!

   Requirements for quality are:

   - Dedication of partners
   - Offer services only that partners can guarantee their involvement/participation to.

5. **Functionality**

   If services can be offered online (like a database search) and no physical involvement of a partner is necessary to get the service, that process should technically work correctly and be as simple as possible. This is also valid for very simple procedures, like submission of an information request, and sending an email, downloading documents or registration for different purposes. If clients/visitors find the online processes complicated or confusing, they will not come back and it will damage the reputation of the network and its partners:
   - All technical functionality offered on the website should be state of the art, simple and understandable.
   - Users of technical functionality need to get a confirmation of the services rendered.

6. **Relevance**

   Like many of the conditions here that we define here, relevance is also closely related to prerequisites like quality, user friendliness and functionality. Relevance basically means, that the network/website offers the services that are relevant to the needs of the target audience; no more and no less. As a consequence the site needs to be clear on its target groups and its needs to be aware of their

problems. The network also needs to make clear how the network addresses these problems with solutions.

As a consequence, in the presentation of the website it might be an idea to present `best cases', examples of situations in which a real or fictitious company was helped along with some of the services offered by the network. This usually works well to give a concrete case to which companies can identify. This property means that the website should:

• Demonstrate the knowledge that partners have of the target groups' needs and problems
• Illustrate their competence to solve these problems by `best practice' examples made available on the site.