



EVITA Project E-Learning Platform for SMEs Launched

EVITA is a European-funded Interreg IVC project designed to strengthen and support ICT products and services amongst Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). It aims to increase the SMEs' competitiveness by improving their accessibility to the global digital economy, particularly focusing on Web 2.0 business opportunities. To achieve this, the project promotes the exchange, valorization and transfer of regional best policy measures for SME support on IT and e-business adoption.

EVITA has now launched a flexible training tool to help SMEs improve their knowledge and skills in a highly competitive and ever more globalised digital economy. Having created specialized and effective e-business training content over the past few months, the project has developed a multilingual e-learning platform containing the multimedia content intended to accelerate e-business strategy implementation. The targeted EU regions which lag behind in ICT and e-business practices will therefore have the opportunity to learn from the experiences of the regions which have successfully adopted such practices. Moreover, they will have at their disposal a practical tool to implement the identified e-business strategies to train their SMEs. Staff teams from each region have been trained to facilitate the participation of SMEs, acting as catalysts and multipliers for the implementation of these training policy measures.

The e-learning platform was introduced to the first 25 certified tutors who attended an e-Tutor Seminar held by the Fondazzjoni Temi Zammit (FTZ) at the University of Malta, between the 15th and the 17th March 2010. E-learning modules designed specifically for SMEs tackle e-Business Practices, Digital Marketing, Search Engine Optimisation and similar subjects. Through the course, one can learn how to attract visitors to a website, and how to convert those visitors to clients.

The certified tutors will soon be offering localized training to SMEs in their respective regions, acting as catalysts and multipliers of the good practices identified. In Malta, FTZ is collaborating with the Malta Communications Authority to ensure that more SMEs can benefit from the training.

EVITA is a three-year project which started in September 2008. It brings together partners from Greece, Malta, Spain, Sweden, France, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Latvia, combining successful 'donor' to 'beneficiary' regions, complemented by organizations having the expertise needed in the provision of e-learning, ICT training, SME competitiveness and regional development. The 'donor' regions are those which have successfully adopted ICT and e-business initiatives, while the beneficiaries still have to catch up in their e-business penetration strategies.

The Greek Research and Technology Network (GRNET) is leading the project, which addresses both policy-makers of the participating regions, as well as their SMEs. EVITA will not only raise awareness among the policy-makers of the need for SMEs to have access to knowledge in the information society, but also accelerate the use of ICT and e-business practice among the SMEs themselves. This will result in more effective regional policies targeting SMEs and a higher level of innovation, competitiveness and economic growth in the participating regions. The increased adoption of e-business practices will bring about an improvement of business performance. Moreover, the project will show how e-learning can be exploited as a sustainable training practice.

E-Learning can in fact contribute to the achievement of the pronounced needs for flexibility in SMEs. Some years ago, the introduction and use of e-learning in SMEs was seen as unproblematic and identified as the ideal solution to satisfy the training needs in SMEs. Nevertheless, reality proved to be different. According to various studies, e-learning is used predominantly in big companies. SMEs use the Internet and e-learning mainly for product advertising (particularly through websites) and only 7% view it as a tool to train their human resources. The low use of e-learning in European SMEs is mainly due to the training culture within the SMEs themselves, which is often dependent on the trainer and on the conventional training methods, while appropriate software and content for SMEs are not readily available.

The Maltese partner in the project, Fondazzjoni Temi Zammit (FTZ), has been responsible for the development of the e-learning platform, for delivering an e-Tutor Seminar to certify teams of tutors from each beneficiary region, as well as for the Communications component.

Anyone who wishes to follow the EVITA online training modules can log on to <http://vle.ftz.org.mt>. The project website (www.evita-interreg4c.eu) serves as a repository for relevant documents.

EVITA has a total budget of €1.7M, of which €1.4M are funded by the Interreg IVC Programme of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

