

In Focus

Mapping the way forward

Partners gather in Warsaw to chart a future course for the Enterprise Europe Network



Business Support on Your Doorstep


MORE THAN 800 Network partners from 47 countries attended the Annual Conference from 26 to 28 September to brainstorm about how to improve the Network's performance in the years ahead.

"Considering it is just over three years old, the Network has achieved

Partners returned home with a fresh sense of purpose following three full days of exchanging ideas and best practices on 'Connecting Business with Europe', the theme of the conference. There was also plenty of time for networking, from Network Bingo to the Gala Dinner at the Palace of Culture and Science.

Network success star Andrzej Miciuła. Attendees felt at home in workshop rooms named for European capitals from Berlin to Brussels.

Addressing a standing-room-only crowd, Mona Lewis of BSK-CIC in Kent (UK) offered tips on professional networking. "Networking can seem very intimidating to many," she says, "but the more you do it, the easier it gets."

Christakis Theocharous of the Business Support Centre of Cyprus, who attended his first Annual Conference, says it will be a challenge organising next year's edition despite the lure of the country's mild climate. "The standard is very high, but we will do our best." 



The many faces of the Annual Conference

unexpected goals, laying the foundations for continued growth," said Joanna Drake, Director responsible for promoting SMEs' competitiveness, DG Enterprise & Industry.

In her closing remarks, she also urged partners to act as ambassadors' promoting the Network and the EU "at all possible levels". EACI Director Patrick Lambert pledged the Agency's support for the Network's next programming period.

"In organising the largest event during the Polish EU presidency, we worked very hard to get it right," said Anna Wróbel of the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development, which hosted the event.

The packed schedule included workshops on a wide range of topics including SME innovation support, success stories and Sector Groups, as well as a lively bongo-beating jam session led by Polish percussionist and

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News in Brief

A galaxy of Network Stars

SMEs and researchers honoured for making the most of the Network's services

FOR THE SECOND year running, the Network celebrated the achievements of clients it has helped expand internationally or branch out in new directions.

In a ceremony at the Annual Conference, two SMEs and two researchers were named Network Stars 2011.

The 'New Horizons' award, gathering inspiring stories on how the Network has helped companies go international of fuel new ideas, went to Danish wind firm Apro and its new UK partner Cosalt. Their joint venture, Cosalt Wind Energy Ltd., provides offshore installation, offshore service, safety and inspection services.

"Apro and Cosalt turned opportunities provided by the Network into real business," says Thomas Andersen of

Business Development Centre Herning & Ikast-Brandø. Targeting Innovation's Tim Barraclough adds that Cosalt Wind Energy has created over 30 local jobs and is "extremely busy."

In the second award category, researchers Dr Frédérique Magdinier of LBMC Institute, France, and the University of Sussex' Dr Mark Maconochie, received a 'Doing good business' award for their search into a potential cure for deafness.

"This prize is highly motivating to our client as well as our team," says Salvatrice Bufalino of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Rhône-Alpes. ☺

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The Network Stars Awards winners at the Annual Conference

Drawing inspiration from young entrepreneurs

OFTEN THE BEST business ideas come from young minds that bring a new set of innovations. This is why the EACI has introduced a special mention by its Director Patrick Lambert that honours young, original entrepreneurs. The Rising Star award was given during the Annual Conference in Warsaw, Poland on September 26, 2011.

"All the finalists turned their ideas into profitable businesses with the help of the Network experts. These young entrepreneurs' kind of blue sky thinking is inspiring for all of us," said Lambert.

The award went to Antonios Kondis

and Jason Georgaris, Greek sailing champions who now run their own sports management, marketing and media SME. Through Icarus Sailing Media, they broadcast top sailing races worldwide using a combination of 3D animations, GPS tracking technology, special onboard cameras and aerial footage.

Advised by the Athens Chamber of Small and Medium-Sized Industries (ACMSI), they were able to legally protect their intellectual property and make their investments pay off.

Katerina Leousi of ACSMI, who

accompanied her clients at the ceremony, notes that the award has taken on new meaning amid the current economic turmoil. "Icarus represents the other Greece," she says, "one we can be proud of, and to which we must give our full support."

Also inspiring were the other finalists, Irish financial consultant Susan Hayes and Andrzej Miciuła, a Polish percussionist who has turned his passion for music into a successful instruments distribution business. ☺



Find all the pictures from the Warsaw Annual Conference on the intranet





Networking





Plenary session





**Gala dinner
at the Palace of Culture**





News in Brief

Best practices on centre stage

Always a high point of the Annual Conference, the Best Practice Awards recognise the crème de la crème of creative tools and methods developed by Network partners to best serve SMEs

THIS YEAR'S CEREMONY was expertly emceed by Simona Barsan of Romania's CENTI Technological Transfer Centre and Bartosz Sokol of Poland's Podlaska Regional Development Foundation.

More competitive than ever, the 2011 edition featured three categories, including a brand-new one for Sector Groups. Representing the Agrofood Sector Group, chair Julio Carreras accepted an award for the ProProProgram matchmaking tool developed by the Dutch member Jan Willem Bot for use at meetings. According to Jan, "the beauty of ProProProgram lies in its simplicity".

Top honours in the Access to Finance category went to Finland's Technopolis Ventures Oy for its bi-annual 'MoneyTalks' business brokerage event linking entrepreneurs with financiers. As Karita Huotari of Technopolis notes, "It's all about efficiency." Last but not least, the Innovation Support Services award was bestowed upon German partner ZENIT for a tool that helps SMEs check their innovation potential in just 20 minutes. Like his fellow winners, Bernard Iking is proud of his award, saying, "There is no greater appreciation of one's work than the recognition from your peers." ☺

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The Best Practice winners

A blueprint for change

Action plan to boost ties between Network partners and FP7 NCPs

HELPING SMES TAP into EU research funding is one of the Network's core services, hence the need to work closely with the National Contact Points (NCPs), which are advising experts for the EU Research Programme FP7.

Detailed suggestions on how to do that are spelled out in an Action plan building on the recommendations of a 2009 Working Group on the cooperation between Network partners and NCPs. The plan seeks to refresh the interest of Network partners providing FP7 support services and to take stock of existing good practices in information exchange, awareness raising, training, sharing of profiles and other areas. There are a number of examples where Network partners already cooperate with NCPs and practically all Network countries

have developed such a practice in one way or another. Even in smaller Network countries, for example Serbia, Latvia, Cyprus and Armenia to name only a few, there is a far reaching cooperation with NCPs. This is also true for some of the Sector Groups such as the SG ICT and the SG Intelligent Energy. Both have, separately, signed an extensive cooperation agreement with their respective peer NCP.

In order to increase the transparency and efficiency of existing structures and to encourage new action, each consortium and Sector Group has also been asked to nominate a contact point on the cooperation between the Network and NCPs. By early December half of the consortia and Sector Groups had already done so.

By the end of 2012, EACI plans to issue a report on the Action plan – outlining successes and areas where further progress is needed.

"As we near the end of FP7, we must ensure that collaboration between the two networks takes us into the future programme (Horizon 2020) in the best possible way," emphasises Anastasia Constantinou from the Greek Network partner Praxi/Help-Forward, who chaired the FP7 WG and was part of the Focus Group that drafted the Action plan. ☺

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The Network in Poland

Reaching for the sky

Poland's economic boom is fuelling greater demand for the Enterprise Europe Network's services



Palace of Culture, Warsaw

WITH 4% PROJECTED GDP growth this year or more than double the EU average, Poland is fertile ground for innovative companies with international ambitions.

From fish-processing firms in the north to the aerospace industry in the southeastern Aviation Valley, Polish SMEs are increasingly turning to the Network, represented by 30 partner organisations grouped into four regional consortia.

This is especially true in the field of technology, as illustrated by over 150 technology partnerships signed between Polish and European SMEs in the Network's first three years of operation.

"There is growing awareness among

Polish SMEs about the need to invest in innovation and technology to be ahead of the competition," says Agnieszka Turynska-Gmur, the coordinator of the B2Europe West Poland consortium based at the Wroclaw Centre for Technology Transfer at Wroclaw University of Technology.

Among Polish companies the Network has linked up with new international technology partners are leading fish-processing firm Nord Capital with Farsk Food of the Netherlands, and ski equipment maker Phu Nobles with T.F.A. alfa, active in the same sector in the Czech Republic.

As in other countries, events offer a key opportunity to bring SMEs face to face with new contacts. Among

the most successful organised by Polish partners are seminars on doing business in Germany and company missions tied to the most important air shows in Europe.

"Rather than waiting for SMEs to come to us," says Agnieszka, "we prefer to approach them."

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News in Brief

SME Week a smashing success

Every year, SME Week gets better and better, thanks to growing support from Network partners across Europe. For the most recent event, Network partners organised a total of 568 events – including conferences, workshops, seminars, entrepreneur days and trade fairs. That represents a 105% increase over the previous year. In Portugal alone, Network partners working with innovation management organisation COTEC Portugal organised 15 events for SME Week throughout the country attracting 750 participants. Thanks to all partners for their initiative and enthusiasm in making the 2011 SME Week the best ever.



Tip of the Month

Networking through social media

Did you know that the Network is now on Twitter? Taking a cue from many of our partners, the Network is using social media as an additional communication tool.

Many of you may already be familiar with our YouTube channel, which shows the Network 'in action' through interviews and event reports. The Network also has its own LinkedIn group, co-managed by EACI and our UK partner, the Centre for Process Innovation.

To set up your own social media presence, visit the Branding Toolbox for some helpful hints.

Intranet>Network
Operations>Communication>Social media

Follow us on Twitter: @The_Network_EU

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