AEQUUS – Pilot training course on Marketing

1. Aim of the training course

Aim of the training was to share with SMEs marketing methods and technologies. Due to the fact that this issue was big we preferred to focus training on web marketing, communication and selling techniques.

The importance to be more or less effective in enterprise could be a gender issue and that's the reason why we decided to involve experts and stackeholders that could discuss on that.

The topics treated were related to communication plan in enterprises, selling methodologies and web marketing. A great percentage of female enterprises are micro or small, and there is no possibility to plan a complex marketing plan. An entrepreneurs could make the difference with some simple and good tips on web marketing and communication.

2. Attendants' list:

See annex – in attendant's list speaker and partner's staff are not included but they participated at the training course

3. Main topics treated

SME or Small to Medium Enterprises marketing simply means marketing strategies that benefit small businesses. In this time of global recession, small companies are exceptionally proactive in keeping sales up. Mainly for this reason it was decided to address this specific class to communication, selling techniques and web marketing. Expert involved persons and female entrepreneurs in a very useful debate on topics treated.

For the part concerning Communication it was underlined the importance of combining or amalgamating. Different messages confuse your customers and damage brands.

A good suggestion given by expert was to create a video. Countless buying emotions and memorable brand moments are possible with video. Until recently, spreading message with video was limited to the television screen. Now online video is interactive, memorable, widely accessible, cheap to create and highly shareable. There's also a lot of investment happening around video, which is sure to create even more low-cost opportunities for small businesses to participate in video promotions. Video presents a great opportunity for small-business marketing, but don't think of video as a replacement for text. As powerful as video can be, it can be more cumbersome than text because you can't scan a video as quickly as you can scan a page of headlines, links and text to find quickly the exact information you need.

It is difficult to disentangle or even to distinguish, the practice of relationship marketing from entrepreneurial action. This leads one to suggest that it may be useful to reconsider relationship marketing as a facet of entrepreneurship.

About selling techniques it was decided to address intervention on Personal Selling because it often occurs in Micro enterprises or SMEs (statistically women leads this type of enterprises) where an individual salesperson sells a product, service or solution to a client. Salespeople match the benefits of their offering to the specific needs of a client. Today, personal selling involves the development of longstanding client relationships. Expert referred to 5 different stages of a selling process: prospecting, making first contact, sales call, objection handling and closing the sale.

- Prospecting: it is all about finding prospects, or potential new customers. To do it one needs to:
    o Plan a sales approach focused upon the needs of the customer.
    o Determine which products or services best meet their needs.
    o In order to save time, rank the prospects and leave out those that are least likely to buy.
- Making first contact: it is the preparation that a salesperson goes through before they meet with the client, for example via e-mail, telephone or letter. Preparation will make a call more focused. Several tips were considered to be more effective. Some exercises were done in order to be more practical, this was very appreciated by the audience.
- The sales call: it is important to be enthusiastic about the product or service one is proposing and to focus on the real benefits of the product or service to the specific needs of client, rather than listing endless lists of features. Another thing suggested was to listen to client's needs and to ask plenty of questions, using open questions
- Objection handling: it is the way in which salespeople tackle obstacles put in their way by clients. Some approaches to overcome objections were suggested: anticipate the objection, ask why, and remember that sales person could also tactfully and respectfully contradict the client
- Closing the sale: often salespeople/entrepreneurs will leave without ever successfully closing a deal. Therefore it is vital to learn the skills of closing, for example it's very important to use the "summary close" to summarise everything that the client needs, based upon the discussions during the call.

As told by the experts web marketing isn't just about buying ads anymore.
The online marketing arena has experienced significant growth over the past few years, while traditional marketing has deteriorated mainly due to its higher costs. With this kind of marketing, entrepreneurs are able to control and discover key revenue streams and make the right decisions with advanced reporting technology. It has been noted that advertisers are more aggressive now in terms of performance marketing with more than half of them planning to maintain or even increase investments in email and search engine marketing channels.
Nowadays it is requested to learn how social networking and blogging can bring the world to your doorstep. More than ever before, social networking sites are important resources for entrepreneurs seeking to market their businesses on the Web. Along with weblogs, social bookmarking sites, and wikis, social networking sites are a part of "Web 2.0" a term that refers to the recent surge in reader participation and collaboration in

the creation of Internet material. Spending even minimal amounts of time marketing in these ways could be massively beneficial for company, resulting in a higher search ranking for business and potentially much more income.

In training course Web Marketing was also treated considering the use of Social Networking, Blogging and E-Mail Newsletters. According to experts and entrepreneurs E-mail marketing will remain highly predictable in future and may even become more powerful as e-mail service providers improve social media integration, search engine access to archived e-mails, auto-responders and new integrated applications.

It was suggested that a good test of social network marketing potential is to survey current customers to see how many of them consider social networking to be a primary form of communication. You should probably experiment with a Facebook fan page and a Twitter page if you find that a meaningful percentage of current customers indicate an interest in following business.

Converting prospects into customers depends on driving visitors to content that maximizes conversions, and that means conversion rate is only as good as the content on the landing page.

5. Main conclusions reached

During the training course was noticed a great interest in topics related to marketing. Once again it was clear that women entrepreneurs pay a great attention to tips and suggestion to increase their business.

Communication skills were seen as fundamental in developing marketing strategies and plans. Small Businesses that strengthen relationships with new and existing customers will differentiate themselves and dominate as the economy recovers. It was noticed by audience that people don't care about products, but that's what most advertising or promotion is about – product message or company message, not skills or relationship.

In role as a business person, providing goods and services, there should be only three reasons for clients to do business with an enterprise:

1. To help identify or clarify their emotional needs for your product or service (so they'll buy)
2. To become more knowledgeable about offering (so they'll be clients who return again)
3. To feel inspired by understanding, relationship and services(so they'll refer others to that enterprise)

In the debate emerged some interesting points useful for entrepreneurs:

o **Change perspective**. Although as a service or product supplier the tools of a trade may be very important to entrepreneur, from a client's perspective they are more interested in themselves and the results that product will get for them.
o **Find out what they really want**. So what do a target market and prospective clients really want? If an entrepreneur doesn't yet have a clear and compelling benefits-based answer to this then the best thing to do is to ask them. When

entrepreneurs are researching a target market, you need to first of all understand their problems, their pain and how they are feeling now, and secondly it's important to understand what they want instead.

- o **Changing expectations.** Before the explosion of tools such as Word Press onto the market, the pain that many small business owners experienced was that once their beautifully designed website was up and running, it was virtually impossible for them to make any changes without going back to their developer and paying, often substantial fees, for every change. Now days, business owners don't just want a website, they want and need a flexible, dynamic marketing tool that they can update on demand. So if a web developer has become 'purist' about their tools and only wants to work with raw code then they could find their market diminishing or that they perhaps needs to focus on a different one

- o **Fresh perspectives.** Surveys to database and target market can be very revealing and cost very little to implement so if a marketing is not producing the results you would like, it may be time to find out what clients really want.

- o **Learn customer's names.** Customers love to be called by name. If staff has trouble remembering the names of your regulars, offer employees some sort of incentive, they want to be recognized by company as well.

- o **Remember their Favourite Products.** Regular customers often purchase the same products over and over. Once you know which products or services a particular customer likes, notify them of sales or promotions on those items. Put a few aside so they are always in stock when customer comes in. Customer love to feel they are getting the royal treatment when they walk through your door.

- o **Follow Through after the Sale.** Once a sale is complete, follow up with customer to ensure the product and service the customer received were both satisfactory.

- o **Ask them for Feedback.** Once can hand out feedback cards, offer an online survey or simply ask customers how they're doing. Ask if the products and service they received meets their expectations. Find out what one could do to make the experience with the company more convenient and enjoyable.

About gender mainstreaming in marketing it was argued and explored the "glasshouse effect" that women marketing managers may experience as they carry out their marketing roles. There is an invisible organizational environments which constrict and stifle values which are traditionally perceived as "feminine" in the workplace. Research with women in marketing management indicates that these barriers are not only vertical, as implied by the phrase "the glass ceiling", but also horizontal, and are consequently more appropriately encapsulated in the image of a "glasshouse", a colloquial term for a prison.

It was put another question: the question of whether men and women in sales differ in their ethical attitudes and decision making. It was concluded that there are significant ethical differences between the sexes in situations that involve relational issues, but not

in non-relational situations, and that gender-based ethical differences change with age and years of experience.

Female vs. Male Decision-Making Styles

As revealed from a study[1] women are much more likely to be described as "sensitive and caring" and they like to "build consensus before making a decision". Marketers also indicate that they believe women are much more likely to seek advice from colleagues "before making major decisions".

Women are likely to be perceived as "cautious" and concerned with "long term" effects, but the difference versus men is not that great.

In contrast, marketers attribute an autocratic decision-making style to men. Respondents report men were much more likely to make decisions without input from others and to prefer a hierarchical structure. Men more than women tend to make the important decisions, but delegate implementation to others and to make decisions quickly. Intuition continues to play a large role in decision making.

Experts concluded that women have achieved great success in marketing and that their success has been in large part due to the decision-making styles and characteristics such as a collaborative style, team-orientation, facility with consensus building, thoughtfulness, and listening skills that are increasingly ascribed to female business decision-makers. Clearly these characteristics are considered an asset within marketing and have been rewarded in the form of increased advancement opportunities.

As women continue to increase their numbers and management influence in the field, they have the opportunity to take marketing decision-making in a new direction. Traditionally, marketing has resisted conforming to the analytic, fact-based approach to decision-making that is *de rigueur* in virtually every other critical strategic business function—from finance to information technology to operations. Both female and male are equally likely to rely more heavily on intuition and judgment than facts and research to make decisions about their brands and many marketers still view data and research as more of an encumbrance than an aid. As CEO expectations for marketing accountability mount, women would greatly enhance their future career prospects if they lead the charge away from gut-based to fact-based decision-making.

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[1] Copernicus, marketing consulting and research

1. Aim of the training course

The training course is tailored to provide a better knowledge on how making lobbying and to offer a methodical understanding of lobbyists. After an introduction it will be studied which skills and strategies women must adopt to increase their influence policy-making process. The course was opened to all the questions and clarification women might have.

2. Attendants' list:

See annex – in attendant's list speaker and partner's staff are not included but they participated at the training course

3. Main topics treated

In order to introduce the training course the expert decided to report shortly about a research done by the Middlesex University in which it is stated that in most countries, regions and sectors, the majority of business owner/managers are male (from 65% to 75%). However, there is increasing evidence that more and more women are becoming interested in small business ownership and/or actually starting up in business. In addition, rates of self employment among women are increasing in several EU countries. There is a good deal of evidence to suggest a significant increase in female entrepreneurship. One consequence of this is that women are a relatively new group of entrepreneurs compared with men, which means that they are more likely to run younger businesses. This in turn has some implications for the problems they face and their ability to deal with them. A key issue, therefore, is whether women entrepreneurs face specific problems in setting up in business that are different from those faced by male-owned businesses. Like young entrepreneurs, women may have particular problems with raising finance and may have had less chance than most men to accumulate the confidence, skills and contacts necessary to start and run a successful business. In addition, gender discrimination by finance and support providers, customers or employees may be an issue. Some previous research has suggested that it is more difficult for women to raise start-up and recurrent business finance than men and that women are more likely to encounter credibility problems when dealing with bankers. For these and others reasons it is very important to share ideas and problems in a lobby, association or network.

Business representative organizations may serve and may be used as a to do network and lobby.

Organisations that stated that their primary purpose was to support and/or represent women entrepreneurs are growing and are taken as representatives from governments and parties. Usually the range of services are:

- Some services catering for women entrepreneurs.
- General business support or membership organisations in EU countries.

General support or membership organisations that have a policy specifically concerning women entrepreneurs is not very high, the same occurs with membership organisations that have a specific department, group or individual dealing with women entrepreneurs.

Some organisations, while delivering general support services to a cross-section of businesses, provided some services that are specifically tailored for, or aimed at, women entrepreneurs. Some organisations give their support in:

- Training, advice, counselling or other types of support activity targeted solely or primarily towards women owner/managers who are already in business.

- Programmes designed to assist women to start up in business, by providing training, business planning advice and other forms of support. In some cases the focus could be upon helping women to return to the labour market after having a family. In others, there is an emphasis on addressing issues of unemployment among women.

- Initiatives concerned with developing or supporting networks of women entrepreneurs. In some cases this means providing financial and administrative support for groups related to the respondent organisation. There are groups that run a network for women active in local development initiatives, and others doing "women in business" or similar network initiatives, on a local, regional or national basis.

- Specific financial support for women entrepreneurs.

- A range of other initiatives were mentioned by the expert, including a childcare programme in Ireland, a programme to develop international links between women entrepreneurs in Sweden and an awards scheme run by a local Chamber in the UK.

From the research done by the expert it is underlined the need to raise awareness of the potential of women entrepreneurs, both among women themselves and throughout wider society. Some examples were mentioned during the training course. Several organisations based their general promotion efforts on networks of women entrepreneurs.

Some organizations prefer to revolve around treating women entrepreneurs as a special group, and targeting initiatives towards them. In some cases, this involves the development of special programmes for women members or clients; in others, the focus is upon making a special effort to involve women entrepreneurs in 'mainstream' programmes.

- Few organisations have their equal opportunities policies in relation to ensuring that all groups have equal access to the available services.

For women entrepreneurs and for leaders of organization is important to have special support that can be summarised as follows:

- Hosting, supporting or developing networks of women entrepreneurs organisations

- Training, advice or counselling services for women entrepreneurs

- Information or research services for women entrepreneurs

- Representation and/or lobbying on behalf of women entrepreneurs
- Policy design or development
- Finance for women entrepreneurs
- Export advice, training or support for women entrepreneurs

The encouragement of networks of women entrepreneurs and/or networks of mentors supporting women entrepreneurs, is seen as a key policy priority by participants and expert. Most of the participants felt that the encouragement of women entrepreneur networks is a high priority, networking is significantly more important for women entrepreneurs than for small businesses in general. Some participants saw a specific need for mentors working with women entrepreneurs to have access to networks.

The possibility of making contacts with other entrepreneurs was favoured by the women entrepreneurs that participated during the training course, and meetings organised either by organisations or individuals were viewed as a way of achieving this.

Encouraging collaboration, both between entrepreneurs and between entrepreneurs and external organisations, is currently seen by many academics and policy makers as one of the ways of reducing the disadvantages associated with small size, and the feeling of isolation that is experienced by some entrepreneurs. At the same time, the practical difficulties involved in intervening to stimulate network activity of this type should not be underestimated.

5. Main conclusions reached

Participants were asked to suggest what they felt were the main success factors in the provision of effective support for women entrepreneurs and networking, based on their own experiences and examples of good practice. A wide variety of responses were received, of which the following examples represent a cross section:

- A business women emphasised the need to use experienced entrepreneurs for the provision of advisory services. Training in new technology, foreign languages and in business skills is also seen as important. The benefits of using experienced women entrepreneurs to provide support for start up and developing businesses were also emphasised by another women. Experienced entrepreneurs commit to be 'godmother' for at least one year to a start up woman entrepreneur.

- The provision of effective financial support was noted as an important success factor by two local enterprise, specialising in the provision of support for women entrepreneurs. In one case, a local loan guarantee fund was operating successfully. In another, a micro credit scheme was in operation, linked to support for business planning and local business networking initiatives.

- Some others mentioned the need to ensure informality in the provision of services and the development of networks. One respondent said that the main success factor was 'face the adversity of discrimination against women'.

- A woman emphasised the need for women entrepreneurs to meet internationally, and the financial restrictions that prevent such activities taking place on a regular enough basis.

- Some business women operating within a regional business association felt that effective networking within the organisation itself is important, in combination with the presentation of plans to sponsors and financial institutions.

- It was clear that it is required some specific advice such as:

  o Training and consultancy targeted solely or mainly at women entrepreneurs;

  o start up programmes for women, particularly those returning to the labour market;

  o development of or support for networks of women entrepreneurs;

  o special financial support programmes;

  o special targeting of women in general campaigns to boost levels of entrepreneurship;

  o equal opportunities policies aiming for equal access for women to services

The provision of training, advice or counselling services are important activities, with financial support being mentioned by all persons involved in the training course.

Support organisations needs to indentify a wide range of issues faced by women entrepreneurs that are greater then those faced by small businesses in general, with the most important being:

- difficulties with access to start up and, to a lesser extent, development finance;

- perceived discrimination on the part of finance providers; limited management skills e.g. in marketing and/or the use of technology;

- limited awareness of and/or access to appropriate business support.

There are some key areas within which associations might introduce initiatives to remote and support the development of entrepreneurship among countries. These areas are:

- General information and education programmes

- Support for networking activities involving women entrepreneurs

- Support for appropriate financial assistance to women entrepreneurs

- Encouraging and assisting relevant business support initiatives

The majority emphasised the benefits to be achieved through business networking. In some cases, networks of women entrepreneurs can provide an informal, non-threatening environment in which entrepreneurs can exchange views, advice and experiences. In other cases, the main need is to ensure that women entrepreneurs have equal access to, and influence over, local and sectoral business networks.

Support for Europe-wide information and lobbying bodies should continue. Entrepreneurs are busy people, and often women entrepreneurs are busier than most, due to family and other commitments. Any programme to promote international networking among women entrepreneurs should operate initially on a pilot basis.