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CREATING AN E-ENTERPRISE WITH THE GNET PROJECT

Case
Study

Keywords

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Culture

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Abstract

The paper is a study of the Get conNEcTed to the Job Market project, funded by the European Union under the Erasmus +programme. The project promotes the entrepreneurial spirit of adult learners in a digital environment and aims at ensuring increased opportunities for adults' participation on a modern, flexible and inclusive labour market. The article highlights the project's main aims, target groups, activities and outputs and gives insights into the project's training modules, which enable participants to acquire the necessary skills to exploit the full potential of ICT and social media in order to create new e-enterprises. The article also focuses on the cultural elements, which each e-company should consider nowadays due to their acknowledged contribution to the success of an e-enterprise.

INTRODUCTION

Considering the economic and social problems that Europe is facing nowadays, the Europe 2020 strategy “emphasises smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” in order to raise "Europe's employment rate – more and better jobs, especially for women, young people and older workers (European Commission, 2012)." The GNET project supports and follows the Europe 2020 strategy with a view to improving Europe's competitiveness and productivity. The project addresses young and older adults exposed to situations of vulnerability (such as social exclusion, poverty or discrimination) due to their social and educational backgrounds (poverty, disability, low education, ethnic minority or migrant backgrounds). The publishing language is English, French or Romanian.

The project partners have identified the target groups' main needs in the above described context:

- Adult teachers and trainers need to acquire the skills to train their adult students on how to use social media in order to find job opportunities and develop their entrepreneurial spirit.
- Adult students need to develop their entrepreneurial spirit and improve their ICT competences in order to create their own e-enterprises.

The project's aim is to promote adult learners' entrepreneurial spirit by using social media and ICT, which enable them to participate in a modern, flexible and inclusive labour market. In addition, the project also promotes equality between women and men, combating discrimination, promoting tolerance, combating long-term unemployment and fighting against poverty and social exclusion. Within this context the partners of the GNET project have explored these issues and have identified solutions to help young and older people to be inserted in the labor market by establishing effective links between adult schools and the world of work and entrepreneurship.

METHODS

To this end the main method of the GNET training courses is the use of videos. When developing the content of the videos the following issues have been taken into account.

The topics have been chosen carefully. The needs of the target groups as well as the length of the subjects have been considered when selecting topics. Thus, subjects that can be presented through short presentations have prevailed over subjects that require long explanations. The main focus is on training: the GNET videos are focused on training participants to create an e-enterprise.

The video is also used because it enables its participants to network. When presenters give their contact details, participants are invited to use them and come up with questions or ideas. Thus, they can expand their networks.

RESULTS

The main output of the project is its training package. The training package consists of four videos and four videos with real case scenarios.

The GNET Videos

The GNET videos teach adults to create an e-enterprise by using social media and ICT. They provide interested people with information on tools they need in order to create a website, how to monitor an e-enterprise, how to make an e-customer analysis, and how to create the content of e-enterprises. The project's training videos go along the following strands:

- How to create the digital identity of an e-enterprise (using social media and ICT):

What is an e-enterprise (visibility of name, logo).

What the website should look like;

Different tools to create a website (Wix, Wordpress);

Social media: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google Plus Instagram, Flickr, Pinterest, Youtube, Foros;
Geo-localisation/Google Maps

- How to monitor an e-enterprise: E-Customer analysis:

Profile of potential customers for the enterprise;

Tools to analyse e-customers;

E-customers relation (ethics code);

- Creation of content for e-enterprises:

Hootsuite;

How to create an attractive content;

Timetable;

Google Adwords.

Thus, the learning objectives of the e-customer analysis video are:

- How to create an e-customer's profile;
- In what ways one can analyse this profile and how this data can help a business succeed;
- How an entrepreneur can ethically manage the relationship with their e-customers and why being ethical matters.

The video gives the definition of the e-customer's profile. Defining the e-customer's profile is essential in the planning and research phase of the business; future success requires a familiarity with the buying habits of the target market, which helps one to find products and services that are better suited for customers and as a result, market these products and services to e-customers more effectively; the SWOT analysis is necessary because it highlights the strengths, weaknesses,

opportunities, and threats facing the business and enables one to create a realistic business plan. The video also goes through the categories that e-customers can be identified by so that they can be grouped for marketing and advertising purposes. It also reviews the necessary steps enterprisers take when creating an e-customer's profile (Devault, 2018).

- Demographic: details related to age, city or region of residence, gender and race and ethnicity;
- Generation: a specific identifiable generation cohort group;
- Geography: the geographical area in which e-customers live and work;
- Geo-demographics: a combination of geography and demographics defining groups;
- Socioeconomic: household income, educational attainment, occupation, neighborhood, and organization memberships;
- Psychographics: lifestyles, life stages, personality, attitudes, opinions, and even voting behavior;
- Brand affinity/ Product usage: product engagement on the basis of their behavior;
- Benefits: the benefits that e-customers look for when they shop for products and services.

When defining e-customers entrepreneurs are advised to take the following steps: defining the demographics of the target e-customer (age, race, gender, income, marital status, educational background and job); then adding details about the e-customers' residence, family, household size and psychographics (personality, interests, lifestyle and values). The profile is rounded off with the target e-customer's behavior, and attitudes particularly in terms of choosing products and services. In creating their e-customers' profiles entrepreneurs have to consider several questions about how their customers will perceive their product or service:

- What's most important to my e-customers in terms of the product? Is it the size, colour etc.?
- What is the best way to reach this e-customer? What are their preferred channels? Are they into TV or radio ads, newspaper, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, emails, promotions, or SMS marketing?
- What types of promotions do these e-customers favour? Discounts, giveaways, new products, or events?

The video also focuses on the tools that we can use in order to analyse e-customers:

1. Google Analytics - <https://www.google.com/analytics/>
2. Google Webmasters - <https://www.google.com/webmasters>
3. YouTube Analytics - <https://www.youtube.com/analytics>
4. Facebook Audience Insights <https://www.facebook.com/business/learn/facebook-audience-insights>
5. SimilarWeb - <https://www.similarweb.com>

6. Google Trends -

<https://trends.google.com/trends>

7. SocialRank - <https://socialrank.co>

A section of this video draws attention to the role that the e-customer's analysis has in the success of an enterprise. The analysis considers the data collected about customers from several sources: opinion polls, subscription forms and social media accounts. This material helps entrepreneurs to identify e-customers' needs and characteristics with a view to serving them better and making key business decisions. The analysis leads to significant benefits:

- Identifying new sales opportunities as well as risks;
- Prioritising business projects;
- Identifying e-customer's life values;
- Connecting with more e-customers.

The video also concentrates on CRM (Electronic customer relationship management), which integrates integrating new electronic channels (web, wireless and voice technologies) into the traditional CRM techniques and combines it with e-business applications.

The video also gives insights into business ethics, which considers the way firms take responsibilities in their endeavor to make profits that affects involved people among stockholders, or stakeholders and the whole society.

The video highlights various reasons why ethics matters in business:

- Being ethical would improve the company's reputation;
 - Being ethical would prevent the company from financial risks;
 - By implementing ethics in business the company promotes employees' motivation and performance at work;
 - Customer trust and satisfaction are also increased;
 - The relationship between suppliers and organizations is consolidated;
 - Investors will show their interest if the company has a good practice of responsible ethics.
- The video also stresses important ethical issues that entrepreneurs may face:
- The greatest threats to customers' privacy are identity theft, fake websites, spying and hacking.
 - Security in e-commerce is linked with integrity, confidentiality, availability, authentication and repudiation.
 - IP (intellectual property) consists in protecting three main types: copyright, patent and trademark.
 - A study shows that three factors are included in e-trust (e-commerce trust): internet trust (trust in the internet's performance), vendor trust (trust in the producer or the organization who sells the product) and other parties trust (trust in the intermediary).
 - Companies have to consider environmental

issues such as reducing the energy usages of IT equipment and supporting and developing green IT initiatives.

Online commercial transactions usually occur in a global environment, which means that they involve cultural differences. According to Hofstede's and Hall's studies different cultures shape different attitudes about work, family, social and political situations. Hall assumes that culture and communication can influence each other (Hall, 1976). The term 'context' is used by Hall to define the cultural background accompanying an event. There are two types of cultures according to linguistic communication: High Context and Low Context. In High Context cultures the meaning of the message lies in the context of communication; communication is not direct and it is expressed through context and words. In Low Context cultures communication is more explicit and direct and meaning is rendered through words.

According to Hofstede cultures vary along five dimensions (Hofstede, 1980):

- Power distance illustrates the distribution of power in society. High Power Distance values hierarchies (e.g. relationships between superiors and subordinates are very strict) and accepts social inequalities whereas Low Power Distance appreciates social equality, autonomy, and collaborative leadership.
- Collectivistic vs individualistic societies: high collectivistic countries value social group achievement and offer protection in exchange for group loyalty. Individualistic societies value personal achievement and self-care.
- Masculine vs feminine societies: a high masculine society makes clear cut distinctions between gender roles. Masculine cultures focus on challenges and social achievement, social recognition, career and wealth while in the feminine ones the most important values are the quality of life, environment, security and attention to others.
- Long-Term Orientation vs Short Term Orientation: cultures with a high Long-Term Orientation are centred on future rewards and are characterized by perseverance and economy. Short-Term Orientation cultures value the past and present and are based on respect for tradition and social obligations.
- Uncertainty Avoidance Index measures the degree to which people avoid uncertain or ambiguous situations. Countries with a high Uncertainty Avoidance Index try to reduce risks and uncertainty by using technology or rules. On the contrary, those with low Uncertainty Avoidance Index are more tolerant of different opinions and tend to assume risks and changes. Needless to say that these cultural findings should be taken into consideration in web design, as they play a significant role in the usability of web sites.

Users focusing on e-commerce from different cultural contexts have different preferences of web sites in terms of their layout, colours, interaction and navigation. Nowadays, studies have shown that the characteristics of a web site are directly influenced by different cultures (Marcus and Gould, 2000); thus adapting the characteristics of a web site according to different cultures has become an effective form of communication, which may define the success of the company.

Marcus and Gould proposed the following characteristics of a website impacted by culture (Marcus and Gould, 2000):

- Promotion of the values, visible in web images, sounds and videos.
- Appearance: images, colors and graphics of a web site.
- Structure: the way the data, menus and layout of a website are organised.
- Navigation: users' easy or complex navigation through a website.
- Interaction: users' involvement in interacting with a website.

Short term oriented and Low Context cultures favour simple interactions with the websites, clear and explicit messages and few animations. In Low Power Distance societies websites promote images of common people engaged in daily activities while websites from High Power Distance communities show images of leaders or famous people (Callahan, 2005). Masculinity is illustrated by images of impressive buildings from high masculine societies, while pictures of people represent relationships associated with femininity. Countries with High PD hold authority in high esteem, so images of memorable buildings are significantly more common on those websites (Calabrese et al, 2012).

The videos with real case scenarios

The videos lasting for about six minutes are based on real cases whose lessons, relying on what actually happened to some entrepreneurs when starting their business, are illustrated by the main actors, the entrepreneurs themselves selected from the participant countries.

The videos introduce successful adults and /or enterprises, who share their entrepreneurial e-experience by answering a common set of questions. Generally speaking, the interviewees present how they started their business and how they strategically used social media for promoting and marketing purposes when they set up their own e-business. The viewer also gets valuable information on the strategy these enterprisers used to maintain and monitor the reputation of their business on the market. The videos are accompanied by specific tasks to be carried out by students and will be used in a later stage of the project during the training. The videos aim at

creating a concrete and inspirational inventory of best practice which will encourage adult students to reflect on the successful experiences of their peers and on the strategic use of social media for self-employment and job searching.

CONCLUSIONS

Technology has revolutionized the way businesses are created, monitored or organised. As also highlighted by the project, technology has impacted e-businesses on several strands:

Costs: Technology can reduce business costs.

Communication: Business technology tools such as emails, texting, websites and apps have facilitated communication processes.

Increased Productivity: there have been substantial improvement in employees' productivity thanks to modern technology.

Broaden Customer Bases: Small e-businesses are able to reach new markets and customers by using internet advertising.

The project's output impacts:

-adult teachers and trainers, who acquire the skills to exploit the full potential of ICT and social media in order to create new e-enterprises, which ensure increased participation in a modern, flexible and inclusive labour market.

-adult students, who are trained to create new e-enterprises by using social media and ICT.

-enterprises, which collaborate on how to exploit social media and ICT when creating new e-enterprises in Europe.

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