

# European perspective

## Introduction

In this report Eurada has investigated the existence and practices of RDA's from non-USHER European regions and RDA's working at a European level in order to incorporate their reality, their current line of action with regard to E-business and their future plans. The report will also enrich B.As with the best practices to be found outside the Usher region. A questionnaire was circulated through 150 European Regional Development Agencies and the results of 20 of those are outline below. This is followed by an example of best RDA practice in Scotland.

## Definitions

### Business advisor

Although this seems to be more an anglo-saxon terminology, and in principle we could think that Business advisors are more developed in those countries where entrepreneurship culture is more developed, we can confirm that all European countries have introduced the term Business advisor in one way or other, always referring to the person in charge of the work around SMEs.

### Regional development agency

Eurada definition for an RDA is:

“Any organisation having:

A mission of economic development encompassing the global economic interest of a geographical zone;

Significant ties with a local authority as much from the point of view of its financing or from its objectives;

A sufficiently important and relevant programme geographical working area”

No geographical area is defined, but Regional means bigger than a city and smaller than a country.

### E-business supporting activitis

Most respondents gave a positive answer or are setting up an e-business strategy. In fact only three RDAs: Nord Pas de Calais (France), a big RDA of 150 staff, Stortrom in Denmark and Centreco in France, admitted not to have any strategy at all, although Denmark is involved in an e-business campaign through workshops. In the case of Nord Pas de Calais, being such a big RDA, it is simply because they don't work in this area of business in their region.

Nevertheless the others have a strategy on e-business that can be summarised on the following activities:

- Training e-business for SME
- Advising e-business for SME
- Offering information through brochures, booklets.....
- Making a status study on e-business in the region
- Support activities for SME's.
- Internet services for the Region
- Stuttgart, will establish in 2002 the leading marketplace for the Region in the Internet.

## **Resources**

### **Human resources**

Most of the RDAs studied have no expert people within the organisation on e-commerce, so they are using external sources, Others do have experts within the association and are also using external sources.

### **Financial resources**

Most of the RDAs have a big percentage of public support and most of them are dealing with sponsorship.

- Centro Sviluppo (I) is 100% supported by public money in those projects concerning e-business campaign and on the other side 100% from sponsorships in those projects concerning training SMEs.
- South West RDA (UK) is 50% public supported and 50% sponsorship.
- Strorstrom (DK) to what concerned the e-business campaign project, 100% is funded by EU funds.
- AGIT (D) is 50% public funded.
- Entre Douro e Vouga (P) 100% public funded and has made partnership with University and some other Innovation Society institutions.
- IMPIVA (E) is being funded by public funds (do not mentioned te percentage).
- Conseil General de la Creuse (Fr) 60% public money.
- MARR in Poland is 90% supported by public money and has made partnership with the private sector.
- In Belgium, SPI is 90% of public money and received private sector support.
- Centreco (F), 70% public support and private sector partnership.

### **Services on-line**

50% of the RDAs are using services on-line: Centro Sviluppo (I), South West England RDA (UK), IMPIVA (E), SPI (B) and MARR (Pl), Stuttgart (D), Shannon (IRL).

## **E-business training for the advisors**

Only two RDAs Centro Sviluppo (I) and Storstrom (DK) are providing formalised training on e-business for the advisors within their organisations. This seems to be a weak subject within the RDAs.

## **List of other services offered by RDA to SMEs**

- Small Business Service – to deliver precise and appropriate business advice and support to SMEs
- Various consulting programmes relating to broad initiatives similar to this e-commerce initiative.
- Consulting for young companies and founders, technology transfer and innovation support, regional marketing, retrieval of financing resources.
- Promoting services to SMEs and investors that will be financed by EQUAL Initiative
- Industrial information: patents and marks
- European Programmes
- Financial Support
- Training
- International Cooperation
- Competence Centres in the Region to support e-business activities.
- Web site dedicated to export, provide as well some data on market studies.

## **The Scottish example**

This is a summary of the work done by Scottish Enterprise (the RDA in Scotland) on e-business. This report aims to give a guideline of how to implement a framework for developing a region as an e-economy, choosing the right priorities and plans for the future economy and to understand what technologies can do for them and to help with implementation.

The Scottish policy environment has consistently identified e-business as a key factor in Scotland's future competitiveness. Over 80% of Scottish based firms are connected, and almost all Scottish Businesses realise on-line technologies offer some level of business benefits.

Definition of e-business: "The thrust of embedding new technologies into the life of an organisation"

The reality in the region is that it saw clearly the role of electronic technologies and processes in driving organisational competitiveness and productivity, this is why Scottish Enterprise proposes the following framework:

- Creating the right Environment
- Accelerating Uptake
- Accelerating supplier Development
- Skills & Knowledge for the future

### **Creating the right environment**

A competitive infrastructure is vital for success and so an ambitious telecoms project has been developed to enable Scottish enterprises to compete with the world.

### **Accelerating uptake**

The first step to help companies to better understand how e-business can be applied in their business is through the organisation of several workshops where the companies can learn about how to extract maximum benefit from e-business (that means from the introduction of e-mail to the full integration of e-business processes).

These are the subjects of the workshops held by Scottish Enterprise:

Digital advantage: This one-day e-business strategy workshop aims at helping business leaders assess their company's current market position in relation to the potential gains to be made from e-business.

Ecomm2001: this is a one-to-one support for companies moving to implementation delivered by e-business advisers.

UK online for business: This is a UK Government initiative which brings together a range of programmes and expertise to support businesses in making the right e-business and ICT decisions.

Business adviser skills: it highlights the importance of advisers having an appropriate level of e-business expertise.

Cluster action plans: these workshops are focused in facilitating and accelerating adoption of e-business processes in trade communities.

Supply Chain and Procurement: a framework of support is being developed to improve the competitiveness of supply chains by increasing productivity.

Channel Partner Programme: relationships with key partners in the public and private sector have been developed.

### **Accelerating supplier development**

The role of the e-business supply sector is critical to the growth of e-business as it provides the products and services required by companies to engage in e-business. Scottish Enterprise is delivering the following programmes to help companies trade internationally:

Observatory: the aim is an exercise that defines the nature of an e-business community and compares Scotland with five other geographies.

On-line Supplier Directory: this tool enables SMEs to find appropriate e-business suppliers in Scotland.

Incubation and Acceleration of Start-ups: these centres provide supportive environments for new and growing companies and a fast-track start for software inward investors.

Supplier Development & Community Building: seeks particularly to address the issues faced by small software and e-business supply companies.

Promote Scotland's e-business supply industries internationally: to ensure that Scottish software and e-business supply companies have access to global markets.

Encouraging Academic Collaboration: the aim is to raise awareness through seminars, demonstrator project, case studies, newsletter and a website.

## **Skills and knowledge for the future**

Different surveys outline the importance of high quality ICT and software in the new economy. A number of initiatives have been introduced to ensure that:

- Software and e-business skills are well developed and appropriate.
- Business advisers have an appropriate level of expertise.
- E-Business suppliers, to develop competence of suppliers and the market place
- Softer skills such as marketing, business development and languages
- The Digital Divide relates to the IT literacy of the population as a whole as well as the availability of appropriate graduate skills.
- E-Learning offers the potential to improve access to quality training.