e-Business Support Network for SMEs (eBSN) 2003-2009

How public policies help SMEs to thrive by fostering ICT-enabled innovation

European
Commission

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Foreword

eBSN: How public policies help SMEs to thrive by fostering ICT-enabled innovation

European SMEs are a major source of entrepreneurial skills and creativity and contribute to economic and social cohesion. They hold the key to innovation and are also emerging as global players, by participating in worldwide production and supply chains. It is obvious that in the challenging race for competitiveness and excellence, where new technologies and innovation play a central role, European SMEs cannot afford to lag behind.

That is why SMEs have been placed high on the Lisbon reform agenda. The goal is to unlock the growth and jobs potential of SMEs by making full use of their innovative capacity. In this context, the European Commission and Member States drew up, in December 2008, a "Small Business Act" for Europe, to help SMEs succeed in our increasingly globalised world, as well as through the improved integration and innovative use of ICT.

In today's global economy, information and communication technologies (ICT) are a major driver for improving both quality of life and economic growth. ICT integration is the most important driver of innovation and competitiveness, both at firm and macro-economic level. However, the potential of ICT-enabled innovation and new business models is still under exploited by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Europe.

Around the world, governments have increasingly sought to promote ICT and eBusiness models as a way of enhancing the competitiveness of their SMEs. The European Commission's Enterprise and Industry Directorate-General is also aiming to reinforce the coordination among EU Member States through the establishment of the e-Business Support Network for SMEs (eBSN). Its goal is to improve the effectiveness of public e-Business policies for SME by fostering exchange of best practices and policy coordination.

Since its establishment in 2003, eBSN has grown into a sound, broadly recognized policy network in the area of e-Business, counting over 200 decision makers and e-Business experts from over 30 countries. eBSN is an active "policy intelligence" initiative, which observes policy developments and identifies new trends. I'm pleased to see three major trends, observed through the eBSN:

- SMEs are gaining increasing economic importance and are recognised as key players in implementing the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs. In addition, their potential to act as global players in the emerging global economy is continually growing;

- ICT and new eBusiness processes are unanimously recognised as major enablers for innovation, productivity and competitiveness growth;

- all European governments are strongly committed to stimulating the innovative use of ICT, eBusiness models and modern management practices by their enterprises, in particular SMEs.
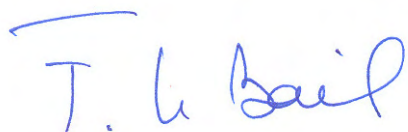
The contribution of eBSN in boosting ICT policies was substantial. eBSN provided a platform for innovative cooperation between government, the business community and academia; a "one-stop-shop" for information about regional, national and European initiatives; it contributed to a shift in the focus of public policies from more generic actions such as raising general ICT awareness, to specific actions aimed at helping business to successfully integrate ICTs as part of their overall business strategy. Finally, it also supported and re-enforced policy coordination to shape pan-European policy trends.

This eBSN report "How public policies help SMEs to thrive by fostering ICT-enabled innovation" is meant to:

- offer a thoughtful analysis of the evolution of national and regional ICT and e-Business policies for SMEs over the period 2003-2009; this analysis helps identify common policy trends and re-enforce them at pan-European level, for achieving sustainable impact;

- describe a set of good national policy cases, that can act as a source of inspiration for others; as well as a valuable information base of the different tools and instruments which can be used to deliver successful policies;

- derive valuable lessons to be learnt from the eBSN operation.

The report does not offer a recipe for shaping the perfect e-Business policies addressed to SMEs. There is no such thing, the optimal solution lies in a balanced policy mix that should take into account the diversity of the local SMEs community, the particular characteristics of SMEs, as well as the changing nature of e-Business. Based on evidence obtained through the eBSN, shaping a holistic policy approach and seeking to exploit multilateral synergies has the potential to achieve a greater and more sustainable impact.

I trust that this report offers excellent material for inspiration and reflection on how to improve the design of our future ICT policies, and I'm sure you will enjoy reading it.

Françoise Le Bail
European Commission SME Envoy
Deputy Director-General for Enterprise and Industry

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Executive summary

Information and communication technology (ICT) and eBusiness models are major drivers of innovation and competitiveness today. European SMEs, however, are lagging behind in up-taking and exploiting the potential of ICTs in innovating their business models.

Therefore, a major challenge for policy makers over the past years is how to improve the integration and innovative use of ICT by European SMEs. This is why the European Commission established the eBSN (eBusiness Support Network for SMEs, http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/e-bsn/index_en.html), to exchange ideas and best practices on how to help SMEs fully exploit ICT in their daily business.

eBSN encounters over 200 decision makers and ICT experts from over 30 countries, who exchange information and ideas on how to improve national and regional ICT-related SME policies.

This report has three main goals. The first is to provide an analysis of the evolution of national and regional ICT and e-Business policies for SMEs over the period 2003-2009. The second is to provide a set of good government policies that can act as a source of inspiration for others. The third is to highlight any issues that emerged during that period and all valuable lessons to be learned.

SMEs and ICT. The prosperity of European Economy depends heavily on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). They account for 99.8% of the total European enterprises providing employment to more than 80 million people, i.e. 66% of jobs. The implementation of ICT can benefit SMEs in several ways i.e. by boosting the quality of their products and services, fostering innovation, creating new jobs. Unfortunately, the e-Business Index indicates that SMEs are lacking by 33% to 60% (depending on the size) in relation to the large enterprises.

The evolution of e-Business Policies for SMEs. National e-Business policies have evolved through three major phases. In the first stage (2002-2004), policy initiatives aimed at general ICT awareness raising as well as at sponsoring, and co-financing basic ICT investments and Internet connectivity. In the second stage (2004 – 2006), the policy instruments put forward, aimed at stimulating SMEs to explore the innovative potential of ICT and e-Business in their business. Finally, in the last stage (from 2006 onwards), many national policies focused on sector-specific e-Business policies for SMEs, recognising the potential synergies that these policies could have. These policies aim at accelerating the pace of digital innovation of entire industry or services sectors. Eventually they wish to help SMEs participate in global digital supply chains.

Good government practices. The report includes several e-Business initiatives from member countries, at national, sectoral and regional level. Best practices of one country's policies can act as a source of inspiration for others. Through this process, countries are learning form each other and

create a "domino effect" that can lead to an overall increase of innovative use of ICT in European countries. That is a significant contribution of eBSN.

European initiatives. What countries e-business initiatives have clearly showed is the need for efficient policy coordination. In this line, EU has launched several complementary initiatives, from eEurope and eBSN to CIP. Furthermore the new SME policy "Small Business Act" for Europe, with the moto "Think Small First" aims at promoting entrepreneurship and skills, improving market access for SMEs, simplifying legislation and improving SMEs' participation in the EU's 7th Framework Programme for Research (FP7).

Workshops. During the active period of eBSN (2003-2009), nineteen eBSN thematic workshops were organised to facilitate the diffusion of good examples and best practices of e-Business policies and to encourage cross-border co-operation among eBSN members. The results of these workshops are reported in the Annexes of the report.

Lessons learnt. There is no magic-bullet for shaping the perfect e-Business policies addressed to SMEs. The optimal solution would be a balanced policy mix that should take into account the diversity of the local SMEs community, the particular characteristics of SMEs, as well as the changing nature of e-Business.

Moreover, to be able to assess the impact of ICT implementation on business performance, appropriate monitoring and registration of results is needed, which is not yet the case in the majority of SMEs.

Based on evidence through the eBSN, shaping a holistic policy approach, seeking to exploit multilateral synergies, has the potential to achieve a greater impact. Thus, future policies should focus more on regional cross-border and pan-European cooperation.

Last but not least, the merits of creating SME support networks that embrace government, business and institutions are uncontestable, but, in practice, such networks are still at an early stage and need to set more ambitious targets for policy coordination, should they wish to achieve sustainable results.

1   SMEs and ICT

## 1.1   The central role of SMEs in the European economy

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a central role in all the economic activity of the European Union. They are a key source of jobs, a breeding ground for business ideas and a main driver for innovation, employment, social and local integration[1]. To illustrate, there are 20 million SMEs in the European Union, **accounting for 99.8% of the total European enterprises.** They are a major source of innovative and entrepreneurial activity thus contributing to economic growth. **Moreover, they provide employment to more than 80 million people, i.e. 66% of jobs** (See Table 1.1, Figure 1.1). The proportion of jobs to be found in small business is significantly greater in the EU than in either the US or in Japan, both of which find a much higher share of jobs in large companies.

Table 1.1: Main indicators of non-primary private enterprise (Europe-19)

	Number of Enterprises (in thousands)	Employment (in thousands)
Micro (0-9)	19,040	41,750
Small (10-49)	1,200	23,080
Medium-Sized (50-249)	170	15,960
Total of SMEs	**20,415**	**80,790**
LSE (250+)	40	40,960
Total	**20,455**	**121,750**
SMEs/Total	**99.8%**	**66.36%**

Source: Observatory for European SMEs 2002, No.2

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[1] "Report on the implementation of the European charter for small enterprises", COM(2002)68, 6 February 2002

Figure 1.1: Main indicators of non-primary private enterprise (Europe-19)
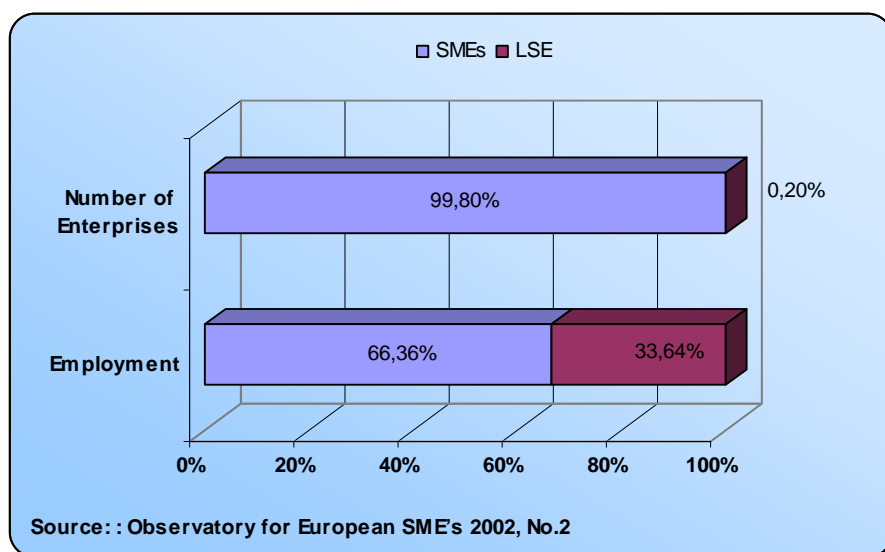
SMEs play also **a key role for local, regional and social cohesion**[2]. There are SMEs in each region of European Union –including rural and peripheral, urban and industrial redeployment areas– contributing to employment and wealth. Therefore, they play a crucial role in the development of regions not considered attractive by multinational firms. As Figure 1.2 indicates, the smaller the firm, the more likely it is to hire local labour.

Figure 1.2: Geographic Origins of Workforce: Same Region (% EU 27)
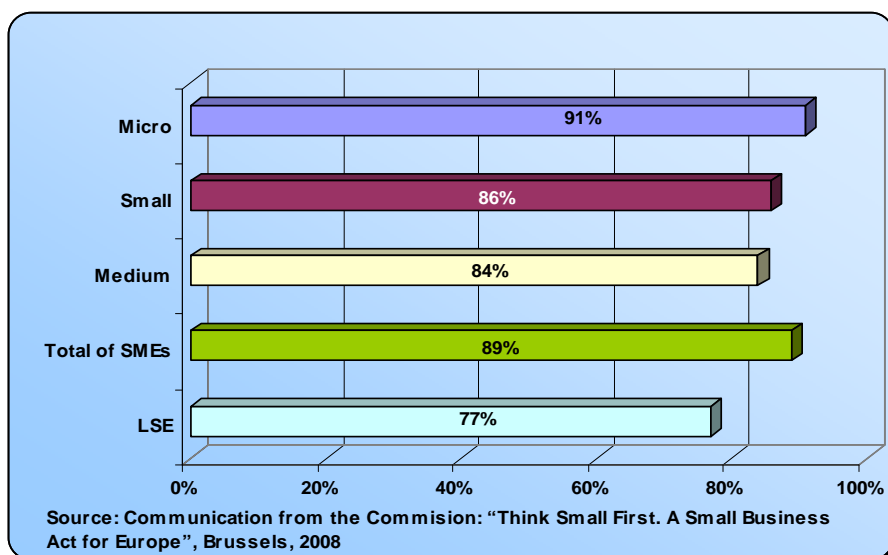
European SMEs deserve to be better assisted to fully unlock their potential of long term sustainable growth and of more job creation. Towards this goal, the European Council has endorsed on

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[2] Communication from the Commission: "Think Small First. A Small Business Act for Europe", Brussels, 2008

December 2008 the **Small Business Act for Europe (SBA).** SBA is driven by the "Think Small First principle" and brings the full support of EU and its Member States behind small companies. Within the SBA, the European Commission proposes a genuine political partnership between the EU and the Member States to put in place a comprehensive policy framework for SMEs. SBA is based on **ten guiding principles** and proposes policy actions to be undertaken by both the Commission and Member States: In addition to the standing commitment to cut administrative burden by 25% by 2012, the time needed to start a new company should be no more than one week, the maximum time to obtain business licenses and permits should not surpass one month and one-stop-shops should assist to facilitate start-ups and recruitment procedures.

The SBA includes an ambitious set of measures to allow SMEs to fully benefit from the Single Market, expand into international markets and, most important, to promote all forms of innovation among SMEs, including ICT-enabled innovation.

1.2   ICT impact on Economic Growth and Business

In today's global economy, ICT is a major driver for improving both quality of life and economic growth. The integration of ICT into virtually all aspects of the economy and society is creating a digitally-enabled economy that is responsible for generating the lion's share of economic growth and prosperity[3]. More than 50 studies on the relationship between ICT and productivity at both the firm and country level demonstrate that **greater investment in ICT is associated with greater productivity growth[4].**

Productivity growth is not the only positive impact of the adoption and implementation of ICT. There are **several other benefits** including the following[5]:

- It boosts economic output by **increasing employment**. The ICT industry creates jobs, on average paying 84% more than average jobs. Moreover, IT appears to be playing a key role in reducing the severity of the business cycle, allowing the economy to run at full capacity more of the time.

- ICT is helping organizations **boost the quality** of their products and services. ICT enables more information about quality to be collected and makes it easier for organizations to design more customized products and services, which by definition are of higher quality as they fit closely to consumers' preferences.

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[3] Atkinson, R. D. 2007a. "Digital Prosperity: Understanding the Economic Benefits of the Information Technology Revolution," Report, March. The Information Technology and Innovation Foundation

[4] Jason Dedrick, ViJay Gurbaxani and Kenneth L. Kraemer, "Information Technology and Economic Performance: A Critical Review of the Empirical Evidence," ACM Computing Surveys 35.1 (Mar. 2003): 1

[5] Atkinson, R. D. 2007a. "Digital Prosperity: Understanding the Economic Benefits of the Information Technology Revolution," Report, March. The Information Technology and Innovation Foundation

➕ ICT is making it easier to **create new products and services** as it gives researchers powerful new tools. Moreover it **boosts innovation** by giving users more of a role in shaping innovation, in part by making research more collaborative.

The views of European business executives are consistent with the above statements. A survey[6] of European executives shows that most of them think ICT to have a beneficial impact, not just on productivity, but also on work organization, product quality and customer service (see Figure 1.3)

Figure 1.3: Perceived ICT impact on European Business

Source: E-Business W@tch Report, 2006
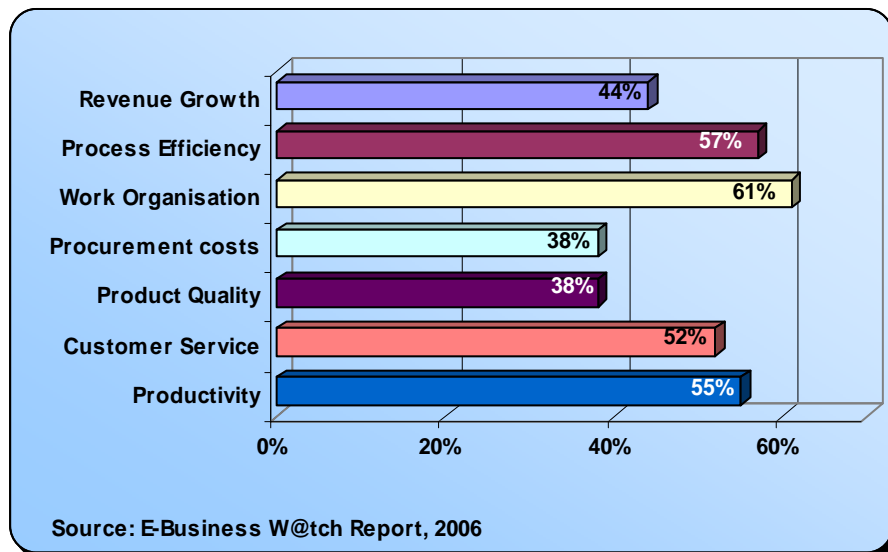
In the same study, executives expressed their personal judgment **about ICT impact on the near future**, in several business activities. The results show that many companies expect that ICT will have a "high impact" in the future for various business functions; in particular for management and accounting, and for marketing and customer service (See Figure 1.4)

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[6] E-Business W@tch report 2006

Figure 1.4: Where ICT will have an impact in the future

Source: E-Business W@tch Report, 2006
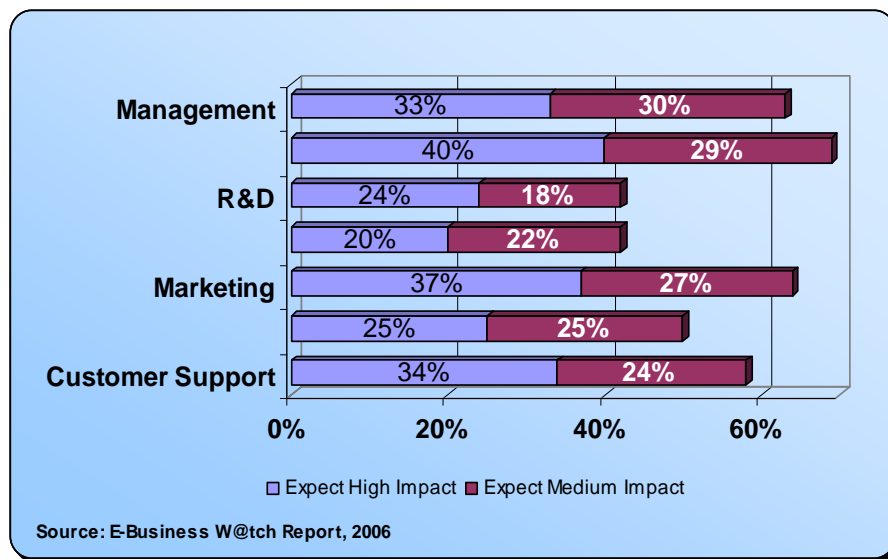
Concerning ICT impact on SMEs, studies have showed that SMEs **have a lot to benefit from ICT investments**. A major incentive for companies to invest in e-Business solutions is to help them increase the efficiency of their business processes and as a result their overall competitiveness.

The e-Business Watch report of 2006 has identified the following **e-Business opportunities for small business**[7]:

- **ICT usage facilitates cooperation**: SMEs can cooperate by building networks. ICT usage facilitates cooperation in many ways e.g. through project management tools, or online collaboration tools for design.

- **ICT offers opportunities for new technologies**: Current technological developments hold some promise for small companies, for example Voice-over-IP telephony and mobile e-Business solutions. Moreover, ICT companies are increasingly addressing the SME market by developing affordable, smaller-sized solutions (e.g. ERP and CRM suits).

- **Metcalfe's Law**: The value of any communication technology is proportional to the square of the number of users of the system. Large companies have recognized that they need to get their small business partners "on board" in order to reap the full benefits of e-Business.

- **Going international**: Many SMEs are forced to expand their market area. E-Commerce can be an opportunity (if not the only way) for them to achieve this goal.

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[7] E-Business W@tch report 2006

Another study[8] examined the **effects of ICT implementation on firm's performance.** The results showed that ICT can be beneficial for firms in many crucial areas and therefore improving their competitive stance. The basic findings can be summarized as follows:

- The implementation of new ICT and complementary investments can lead to **innovations**, and innovations are positively associated with **turnover growth**. In other words, innovative firms are more likely to grow.

- The intense usage of ICT, when combined with innovative activity, is positively related to **productivity growth** at the level firm.

- There seems to be a positive relationship between ICT-enabled innovations and **employment growth**. Furthermore, more advanced users of ICT are significantly more likely to increase employment than less advanced ICT users.

1.3   SMEs and ICT deficit

SMEs are a major source of entrepreneurial skills, innovation, and creativity, and they contribute to economic and social cohesion. More recently, SMEs have been emerging as global players by participating in global production and supply chains.

The importance of ICT on business activities highlights the need for SMEs to adopt and implement ICT as much as possible. Nonetheless, SMEs are the firms that suffer the most from their limited possibilities to fully exploit the ICT potential. Recent surveys indicate that their uptake of ICT remains low. SMEs often lack the managerial understanding, the knowledge, and the skills required to fully grasp the potential of ICT as a major enabler of organizational innovation and structural reforms.

In relation with large enterprises, **SMEs are still struggling with the requirements of getting digitally connected with their suppliers and customers.** The e-Business Index of 2006 indicates that even the medium-sized enterprises are lacking by 33% in relation to the large enterprises.

Table 1.2: The e-Business Index 2006 by firm size

	A	B	C	D
Micro	41	23	34	40
Small	60	39	43	54
Medium	84	56	56	67
Large	100	100	100	100

A = Sub-Index "ICT networks"
B = Sub-Index "e-Integration of internal processes"
C = Sub-Index "e-Procurement and supply chain integration"
D = Sub-Index "e-Marketing and sales"

Source: e-Business W@tch (2006)

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[8] E-Business W@tch report 2006

Figure 1.5: The e-Business Index 2006 by firm size

Source: e-Business W@atch 2006
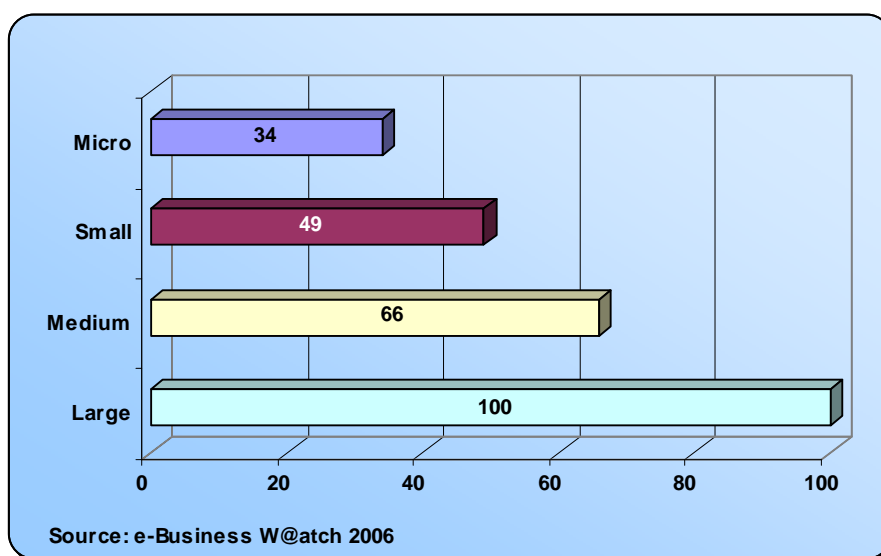
Lack of resources (and therefore limited budget for ICT investments) and limited understanding of the ICT role are the prime reasons of the difficulties that SMEs are facing. For example, about 21% of SMEs report that accessing finance is a problem[9], and in many Member States the percentage is much higher for micro-enterprises. Furthermore, fixed costs for technology implementation and maintenance tend to be relatively high for small companies. This is worsened by structural difficulties such as the lack of management and technical skills, and rigidities in labour markets at national level. If SMEs cannot cope with requirements of the digital economy, they risk being eliminated from the value systems that tend to be orchestrated by large firms[10].

The supply of e-Business solutions for SMEs

ICT adoption by SMEs follows different patterns and different drivers than it does for large enterprises. While the main drivers for e-Business adoption for SMEs is competitive advantage and market share, large firms are more focused on understanding supplier expectations and competitors' behavior, as well as customers' expectations. This implies that SMEs need specific e-Business solutions and services, which respond to their particular needs. The question faced by SMEs for quite some years has been whether there are readily available, affordable, and user-friendly e-Business solutions and services in the market, specifically addressing their needs. The evidence seems to be encouraging.

Analysis of current market trends shows that the **SME segment is increasingly gaining importance for e-Business solution providers**. The SME segment is vast and has high growth potential, currently growing faster than the enterprise one. At first, some ICT vendors tried a one-size-fits-all solution,

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[9] 2007 Observatory of EU SMEs. http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/enterprise_policy/analysis/ observatory_en.htm
[10] E-Business W@tch report 2006

instead of looking at SMEs' real requirements. The analysis shows that ICT suppliers quickly realized the complexity of the SME segment. They recognized that meeting SMEs' demand does not simply require a re-scaling and functionality reduction of applications and packages, but much more: it requires a new comprehensive approach, providing adequate and cost-effective solutions, developing specific technological support, and adjusting marketing and networking strategies. Specializations of products and solutions, integrations of functionalities and channels, and reorganization of strategies and internal structures are being adapted to the particular characteristics of SMEs.

In recent years, the whole IT sector, and in particular the SME segment **is moving toward a "software as a service"** (SAAS) approach—that is, providing and managing software solutions as services over the Web. SAAS vendors are increasingly focusing on how their solutions help customers streamline business processes, providing best practice guidelines for business process improvement, pre-built integration solutions, and comprehensive business ecosystems to facilitate community relationships.

The competition for the SME segment takes place at different levels. It involves the incumbent multinationals and their resellers and partners, but also the local small suppliers. This competition has positive impact on the market by ensuring the effective matching between the supply and the enterprises' needs; making the ICT solutions affordable for the smallest firms.

2   National e-Business Policies

One of the greatest economic challenges for European Union over the next decades will be to raise productivity growth rates. One way to achieve this goal is by taking advantage in greater degree the opportunities stem from the intense use of ICT. It is not a surprise that many studies conclude that it was ICT that led to the U.S. productivity rebound during the last decade. This finding appears to be also one of the two key factors that explain why Europe has benefited from the ICT revolution less than other nations, including Unites States and Japan. As Figure 1.6 illustrate, European firms have invested less in ICT than their counterparts in U.S. and Japan.

Figure 1.6: Information Technology Expenditure (% of GDP)

Source: Eurostat, "Information Society Statistics", 2008
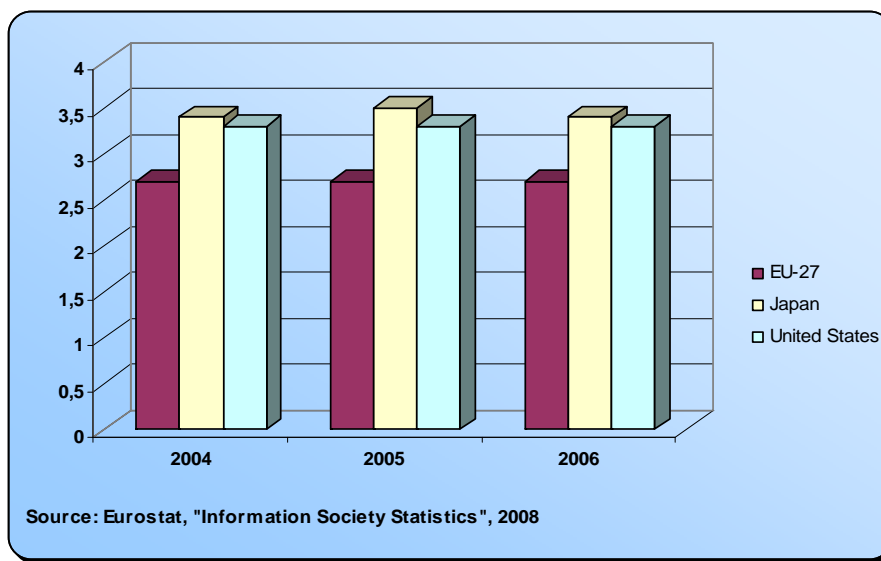
The second reason is that European countries have been slower in making the appropriate process and organizational changes that would allow them to achieve the full benefits of ICT. As OECD argues, ICT "seems to offer the greatest benefit when ICT investment is combined with other organizational assets."[11] To take advantage of ICT opportunities, European policy-makers will have to make digitally enabled transformation a key economic policy priority.

In this challenging race of competitiveness and excellence, where new technologies and innovation play a central role, European SMEs cannot afford to be left behind. For this reason, more and more governments around the world have been seeking opportunities to promote ICT and e-Business models as a way of enhancing the competitiveness of their SMEs[12].

Substantial progress in e-Business is being made. This concerns the availability and quality of e-Business solutions and the effective use of e-Business by firms across a range of sectors and countries. Policy makers have recognized the challenge to reinforce ICT and e-Business uptake by SMEs and have devised various policy mixes to stimulate innovative e-Business uptake. The range of policy topics and policy instruments co-evolves with progress in e-Business.

The evolution of e-Business Policies for SME's

According to eBSN observations, e-Business policies for SMEs have evolved through three major phases[13]:

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[11] Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "A New Economy: The Changing Role of Innovation and Information Technology in Growth," (Paris: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2000): 13.

[12] "The Global Information Technology Report 2007-2008 (World Economic Forum)".: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/e-bsn/publicationsandstudies/documents/pdf/2.3_small_and_medium-sized_enterprises_european_commission.pdf

[13] The Global Technology Report 2007-2008, World Economic Forum

The first phase of e-Business policy initiatives was mostly aimed at general **ICT awareness** raising as well as at **sponsoring, and co-financing basic ICT investments and Internet connectivity**. These policy initiatives were often devised in response to market speculations on the "new economy" hype, and were often on a rather ad-hoc basis. Many of these e-Business measures were characterized by a lack of founded rationale or of documented analysis of the particular needs of local SMEs, as well as of concrete and measurable targets.

Examples of first phase e-Business Initiatives: awareness raising and basic ICT infrastructure

- The **Greek "*Go Online*"** Programme (2000 – 2005) funded the purchase of infrastructure and the provision of Internet services to Greek SMEs.

- The **Hungarian** "*Electronic commerce as a means for developing SMEs*" aimed at informing SMEs of the possibilities offered by e-business; and developing the necessary skills for using the internet and e-commerce.

- The **French Programme "*AchatVille*"** offered assistance to Small Enterprises, especially retailers, and aware them on the importance of the use of Internet today in their activity.

- The "*ECAustria*", an interactive information service and organisational platform aimed at improving the flow of information between SMEs. To this end, it provided a network of existing initiatives and direct access to advice and support.

- The *National ICT Strategy framework* in Malta promotes an ICT culture in SMEs, allowing them to derive the benefits of introducing ICT in their operations.

Once the hype subsided, and in the aftermath of the "e-economy bubble" burst, many governments started reconsidering and reviewing their measures in order to achieve broader impact, and make a difference for SMEs. In this context, it became apparent that any public policy action should be based on a sound assessment of the real needs of local SMEs and designed to respond to those specific needs.

Indeed, the e-Business W@tch confirmed that basic ICT infrastructure and access to the Internet were no longer considered major barriers to e-Business uptake in Europe. The Internet has significantly decreased the ICT gap between SMEs and large companies.

> **Examples of second phase e-Business Initiatives: exploiting ICT to stimulate innovation**
>
> o **The Finish *"eAskel"*** programme offered "expert services" to businesses in the form of individual consultancy. For each particpating SME, consultants identified the possibilities created by IT and networks for improving thier business processes. Each firm received a practical "roadmap" for developing its use of IT.
>
> o **The Irish "*eBusiness Management Initiative (eBMI)*"** has been designed to improve the eBusiness/ICT management capability of SMEs through action-based learning. Trainers/consultants worked one-on-one with companies as they go through the process of an ICT and eBusiness planning and implementation.
>
> o **The Danish *"e-Business to SMEs",*** assisted SMEs in getting the necessary overview of the IT potential and the market for IT solutions**.**
>
> o **The Portuguese ICT policies** aim at fostering and developing a more favourable environment for business competitiveness and innovation, to support the design, diffusion and assessment of policies for manufacturing, trade, tourism and services
>
> o **At EU level, the Commission sponsored the *"Train-the-trainers"* programme with a view to promote first-class training of independent eBusiness advisors to SMEs.**

This first phase process led to the **second phase** of e-Business policies, namely **policy instruments stimulating SMEs to explore the innovation potential of ICT and e-Business**. Although measures promoting online access and general awareness about the potential of ICT continue to be valid, in particular at local and regional levels, more and more e-Business policies were addressing the specific needs of SMEs by providing them with hands-on assistance by specialized e-Business experts. The main policy concept was to have independent e-Business consultants take a close look at the business processes of an enterprise in order to figure out what sort of organizational innovations could be introduced to eliminate inefficiencies and improve productivity through ICT systems. The majority of European countries have endorsed this trend, and lots of initiatives of this type have been launched at national, regional, and local levels.

These second-wave e-Business initiatives have provided very concrete and practical assistance to individual firms and initiated the digital transformation of many enterprises. According to an impact assessment analysis of a number of e-Business policies of that period, the major achievements of these measures were:

- Increase in e-Business awareness and ICT literacy

- Entrepreneurial e-Business understanding

- Competitive advantage from improved relations with business partners

The assessment of these second-phase e-Business policy initiatives, in combination with the changing environment, raised further reflection on how to enhance their scope and impact on the European economy, at both micro and macroeconomic levels. Some Member States have then realized that the potential impact of their policy actions on the SME market would be much bigger if policies shift their target from individual firms to entire industrial or services sectors.

This, in turn, resulted in the **third phase**, namely the **sector-specific e-Business policies for SMEs**. These policies focus on encouraging market forces to hasten the pace of ICT-enabled change in specific industry and services sectors. The aim of such policy initiatives was to support the participation of SMEs in global digital supply chains.

Examples of Sectoral e-Business Initiatives

- The *"TIC-PME 2010 Action Plan"*, **in France**, aims to stimulate implementation of electronic data exchanges in 20 different sectors, by supporting the development of best practices, standards and common tools in entreprises of the same sector, and their implementation by SMEs.

- The "***PROZEUS***" **programme in Germany** stimulates the implementation of data exchange standards by SMEs in different sectors.

- The "***Netherlands connected digitally***" **programme,** aims to stimulate SMEs use ICT for transactions and collaboration with suppliers, clients and partners**.**

- The **Finish "***VERSO***" (Vertical Software Solutions)** seeks to enhance the digitization of business processes and to promote expertise relating to business activities and internationalization within businesses, selected customer sectors and sector specific cluster models. The Verso technology program is generating new, innovative software products, collaboration and services that are both customer and market-oriented. In providing ICT services for cooperation and trade, Verso aims at enhancing the establishment and development of sector specific cluster models.

- The mission of **Portugal ICT policies** is to foster ICT uptake and the adoption of new technologies by industry, trade, tourism and services, to encourage the development of systemic insight into the business environment, concerning technological innovation and to monitor the results of programmes and initiatives under sectoral policies.

- To valorise national results at EU level**, DG Enterprise and Industry launches a series of pan-european sector-specific pilot actions, as part of the SBA (Small Business Act for Europe).** These actions seek to streamline entire sectors by digitising the whole supply

In fact, there is enormous value locked up in the value chain of firms and entire sectors. This is mostly the result of an apparent lack of quality and timely, structured information, as well as inefficiencies resulting from disjointed and manual paper-based processes. Large companies are increasingly streamlining and integrating their business processes. Smaller firms in lower tiers of the supply chain -often of more than one industry or services segment- risk elimination if they cannot comply with their customers' technical requirements. In order to maintain their business partners, smaller firms have to conform to different data processing architectures, ICT solutions, and standards for each of their major customers, resulting in complex ICT systems that are costly, time consuming, user-unfriendly, and inefficient. The direct result is a competitiveness deficit, which is, in turn, transferable to the whole value network, with negative effects for regional or national economies.

A wide range of e-Business policies at European, national, and regional levels are increasingly deployed with the aim of counteracting this digital divide by creating a win-win situation for all players and positive overall effects. In recent years, several EU Member States -including France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain- have launched initiatives to promote e-Business exchanges within and between sectors.

Several of these initiatives aim at harmonizing data exchanges between players in different segments of a sector's supply chain. If more companies can exchange data electronically based on agreed standards and processes, buyers and sellers will both benefit. Significant challenges, requiring time and adequate resources, need to be addressed in this context: initiatives typically have a larger scale than earlier awareness-raising policies. Excellent project management involving stakeholders that are broadly accepted by the target groups is a critical success factor.

Developing an effective e-Business policy initiative requires an in-depth understanding of the business culture and commitment that only the particular business sectors can provide. A sectoral focus helps to create critical mass: single firms are very limited in their ability to innovate without the cooperation and alignment of the entire industry or service sector.

Many sector-specific initiatives involve extended cross-border pilot projects, where business models and applications are tested in real life conditions to demonstrate the real benefits of e-Business. Certain sectoral policies also highlighted the combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches, with central management controlling regional or local deployment. Central coordination increases the efficiency of the action, avoids duplication of efforts, facilitates collaboration with international stakeholders (e.g., in standardization), and increases the possibility of replicating the initiative. At the same time, bottom-up regional implementation ensures close links with target beneficiaries and the provision of services tailored to customers' needs.

Another good practice element is to assess or even measure the return-on-investment, with documentation of project results, which can then be used as showcases. Several initiatives reported that showcasing effects are even more pronounced if delivered in a peer-to-peer context.

A study contacted in 2007 to scan the existing sectoral e-Business policies that support SMEs pointed out that[14]:

- The possibility to gain from networking is a quite common condition for many of the analysed policies. The sectoral focus is a facilitator in this respect, as it "naturally" drives to the involvement of stakeholders and experts with sectoral background and reputation. It also makes it easier to involve industry associations and chambers of commerce in the dissemination phase.

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[14] "Sectoral e-Business Policies in Support of SMEs" (2007), European Commission

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🞣 Initiatives that monitored and assessed the outcome of their projects have convincing evidence of mostly positive effects. Reasonable investments in ICT provide more often than not attractive returns for SMEs, either by supporting their growth or by helping them to cut costs.

🞣 Policy initiatives appear to make a strategic shift from addressing weaknesses to reinforcing strengths. While many of the earlier initiatives addressed "starters" with little or no ICT experience, more recent policies exhibit a trend towards focusing on more advanced and motivated SMEs which "know what they want", i.e. have clear business objectives.

The same study has identified some interesting **best practice elements in designing and deploying sector-specific policies**:

🞣 Effective and dedicated management is critical. The involvement of numerous stakeholders causes organizational problems and imposes the need for consistent highlighting of the win-win outcome for the participants over and above any individual and conflicting interests. Effective marketing of the policy is a key in order to become known and accepted by the relevant business sector.

🞣 Partnership with strong sectoral industry associations is a key for industry outreach. Sectoral associations have a key role to play in setting priorities, establishing communications channels, endorsing the findings, and further promoting the initiative.

🞣 Live pilot projects are an excellent way to show real benefits of e-Business for a particular business sector. This is often more convincing than research results.

🞣 Support of ICT industry is crucial. The creation of broad partnerships between business sectors and ICT providers ensures that the technology developed is the most suitable for the particular sectors' needs.

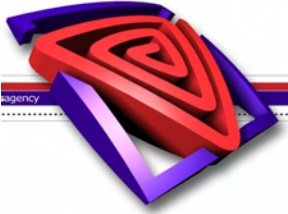# 3 Good examples of national and regional e-Business policy initiatives

3.1 Austria

Title	Austrian e-Commerce Trust Mark
Type	National
Description	The Austrian e-Commerce Trust Mark is granted to companies that show **customer friendliness above the legal minimum standard** and a sound conduct of business. The trust mark, which is part of the EU-wide Euro-Label system for safe online shopping, is officially recognized by organizations for consumer protection, the public sector and the economic sector. It provides the owners of online shops with information and advice on how to build a legally unobjectionable website.
Objectives	The objectives of the Austrian e-Commerce Trust Mark are to: ⬦ immediately indicate the seriousness of a website at first sight ⬦ increase consumers trust, increase turnover for certified shops and thereby safeguard jobs ⬦ increase the marketing for the certified companies by press articles, TV spots, speeches etc
Results	In total, 178 companies are certified, 40 are currently in the process of being certified, and 40 more have applied for the Trustmark in Austria. About 76% of these companies are SMEs. The trust mark system of the Austrian e-commerce trust mark (Euro-Label Austria) outperforms the other trust mark systems by a factor of three in certified companies.
Contact	Austrian Economic Chamber Dr. Gerhard Laga, Wiedner Hauptstraße 63,1045 Vienna, gerhard.laga@wko.at WebSite: http://wko.at/ebusiness, http://www.guetezeichen.at

Title	ECAustria
Type	National
Description	ECAustria is an interactive information service and organisational platform for **improving the flow of information between SMEs**. To this end, it provides a network of existing initiatives and direct access to advice and support.
Opportunities	The potential for e-Business is enormous: both in coordinating business processes with customers and suppliers and in connection with Internet marketplaces. Large companies increasingly do business over the Internet and small and medium-sized enterprises often act as suppliers. Thus, entering e-Business becomes a key factor for their success in the market. To further increase e-Business awareness in Austria, the ECAustria Commerce initiative is intended to enhance the Austrian economy's general knowledge and offer direct support and solutions for specific concerns of the individual industries.
Content	The main focus as regards the content is: ⬥ to provide industry-specific case studies of e-Business projects that have already been implemented ⬥ to offer a direct inter-active possibility to contact the persons who implemented the projects, both on the part of the companies and that of the providers
Objectives	The objective is to create a platform where newcomers, advanced users and experts will find all relevant information and services regarding e-Business in a clear and easily comprehensible form.
Contact	EC Austria Christian Czaak, Gonzagagasse 12/12, Vienna, office@ecaustria.at Wedsite: http://ecaustria.at

3.2   Belgium

Title	e-Business Policy for Textile and Clothing SMEs
Type	Sectoral
Description	The purpose of the e-Business Policy for Textile and Clothing SMEs is to **share experience and information material on current e-Business initiatives and policy impacts** at local, European, sectoral and cross-sectoral level, in order **to identify gaps and strengths in the field of e-Business** which might help both industry stakeholders and policy-makers in defining their future strategies.
Current situation	EURATEX, the European Textile and Clothing Organization strongly support the adoption of e-Business from European SMEs in its industry that is still lacking behind full adoption of these technologies if compared to other manufacturing sectors in Europe. The cause of such delay is due to the polymorphic structure of the industry which translates in the existence of regional clusters rather using traditional ways of communications such as fax, telephone and ordinary mail than internal business processes automation, procurement and supply chain integration, connectivity of enterprise and electronic means of conducting marketing campaigns and sales.
Objectives	The objectives of the e-Business policy initiative for T/C SMEs are to: 🔸 strengthen T/C SMEs awareness on potentials of e-Business in the EU25 and acceding countries 🔸 promote best practices and the results of e-Business projects undertaken by the T/C Industry at local, regional and national level while reinforcing their links 🔸 monitor the development, inform members and support e-Business policies that might help T/C SMEs develop 🔸 foster the creation of cross-sectoral synergies in e-Business
Contact	EURATEX - European Apparel and Textile Organization Deborah Roosen, 24 Rue Montoyer, Bruxelles, deborah.santus@ euratex.org Website: http://www.euratex.org/content/projects.html

3.3 Bulgaria

Title	e-Business For SMEs
Type	Regional
Description	The purpose of this initiative was the implementation of two weeks **trainings on e-Business** by Business Dynamix. As a result of the discussions, a report on the needs of training on e-Business for SMEs was made as well as the need of business internet portal and the concept of creating a Virtual Business Accelerator – a business internet portal for the SMEs in Varna and the region.
Objectives	The basic objectives of the project are to: 🞣 improve the skills of the beneficiaries to implement trainings on e-Business for small and medium enterprises 🞣 improve the quality of the services offered to SMEs in the sphere of the vocational training of e-Business 🞣 increase the capacity of the organizations and enrich their experience in managing international projects
Outcomes	The trainings carried out resulted in improvement of the skills of the beneficiaries to put into practice trainings on e-Business for SMEs as they furthered the acquaintance of the beneficiaries with the methodology of the trainings. As a result of the raised qualification of the participants in the exchange, the programs for training developed and the project for business internet portal, as well as the report made for the need of SMEs of e-Business, the entrepreneurship and the realization of new ideas through e-Business will be stimulated, which hopefully will lead to the development of Varna and the region.
Contact	Varna Business Agency Silvia Stumpf, 9000 Varna, Bulgaria, 4-6 Slaveikov Sq, vba@vba.bg Website: http://www.vba.bg

3.4   Cyprus

Title	e-Learning Management System
Type	National
Description	The system is expected to provide additional **support to the traditional training programs** and to enable the Cyprus Productivity Center (CPC) to design and operate e-learning training programs which will be designed in order to meet specific needs of the business community in Cyprus. At the initial stage of its operation, the system will provide the opportunity to all interested employees from ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΠΑΡΑΓΩΓΙΚΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΚΥΠΡΟΥ SMEs, free of charge, to participate in an e-learning course. This specific course will provide training support to SMEs in order to encourage e-Business initiatives.
Topics	Some of the topics to be offered by this specific course will be: 🔸 Internet awareness 🔸 Internet Applications and Technologies 🔸 E-Commerce Applications 🔸 Web site Design and Development 🔸 Customer Related Business Processes 🔸 Intranet Design
Contact	Cyprus Productivity Center Nikos Philippou, nphilippou@kepa.mlsi.gov.cy Website: www.kepa.gov.cy

3.5 Denmark

Title	e-Business to SMEs
Type	National
Description	The initiative support projects that can **improve SMEs'** (in particular small and micro-undertakings) **use of IT and e-Business**. To this end, a grant of DKK 9.7 million (approx. EUR 1.3 million) was made available over a two-year period. The purpose of the grant is to overcome existing barriers regarding the use of IT and investment in IT infrastructure. Industry organisations, business councils and business service centers have applied for the grant. The grants were awarded on the basis of the following criteria: 🞣 The quality of the activities and services 🞣 Integrated solutions for services 🞣 Strategy for attracting the SMEs 🞣 Plan for permanent (own) financing of the services 🞣 The degree of specialist competence of the applicant
Objectives	The objectives of the project is to: 🞣 give SMEs assistance in getting the necessary overview of the IT potential and the market for IT solutions 🞣 induce regions, local authorities and trade associations to give a higher priority to efforts promoting IT use in enterprises 🞣 anchor the effort at a point as close as possible to SMEs 🞣 ensure collection of experience data and dissemination of knowledge with regard to the experience gathered by individual enterprises
Contact	Danish Ministry of Science, Technology Ms Helle Dam Sørensen, , Bredgade, Copehnagen, hds@vtu.dk Website: http://www.vtu.dk/

Title	**The promotion of measures to introduce business-to-business (B2B) e-commerce for SMEs**
Type	Regional
Description	The aim of the business-to-business (B2B) Programme is to **introduce the economy of Schleswig-Holstein to e-commerce with a B2B focus**. SMEs are offered incentives for tapping the potential of electronic business operations in a clear-sighted and consistent manner. The risk linked to the introduction of these modern technologies is reduced by the incentive programme, which provides financial resources, in particular for the successful design and implementation of solutions. The programme consists of consultancy, concept development and the implementation of B2B solutions in various fields such as external and internal communication processes, supplier and customer networking, in-house workflow and structural management, logistics, marketing and customer relationship management, the necessary adjustment of standard software, staff training, evaluation and performance monitoring, and investments.
Impact	The initiative is expected to increase turnover and profits, secure existing jobs, generate new jobs, improve customer's loyalty, and create better purchase conditions.
Results	During the first phase of the programme, 10 SMEs received an allocation under this measure. Some of these B2B projects have already been completed and the introduction of e-commerce has been a success.
Contact	WTSH (Business Develop. and Technology Transfer Corpor. of Schleswig-Holstein) Ms Rita Wanke, Lorentzendamm 24 D-24103 Kiel, r.wanke@wtsh.de Website: www.wtsh.de

Title	**Promoting innovative IT take up in SME's**
Type	Regional
Description	**The Funen region** of Denmark has 30,000 people employed in SMEs within traditional manufacturing industries. Due to competition these enterprises are under heavy pressure to make continuous improvements in productivity and efficiency in all traditional business processes. This e-Business policy initiative will apply the ideas of collaborative learning in a more intuitive way of becoming aware and getting interested in IT take up in the integrated way described above. Networks of management representatives from SMEs will together go through a bench learning process around different core industry applications (e-Business in general, major administrative applications, etc.). Learning islands on the net will compensate for the problem of bring busy people together in space and time to do the networking. Experts will facilitate the discussions and the exchange of experience and good practice.
Objectives	♣ To draw the attention of SMEs to the potential of e-Business and application of digital tools and methods in improving competitiveness and developing core business in an innovative way. ♣ To underline and make it understood that the positive business effects from IT take up within the various business process areas could only reach the full potential if the implementation of new IT possibilities goes hand in hand with business process reengineering and development of necessary skills and competences in an integrated overall business strategy process.
Contact	Funen Business Support and Development Centre Erling Sörensen, Blangstedgaardsvej 1, Odense SO, eso@fec.dk

Title	**Promoting innovative IT take up in SME's**

3.6   Estonia

Title	Estonian Information Policy
Type	National
Description	Estonian ICT proceeds from the Principles of Estonian Information Policy, which serves as a basis for making public policy decisions **to support the rise of information society**. The policy document serves as a basis for an action plan for establishing information society. The Information Policy Action Plan is the basis for all government agencies to make specific proposals to the Government - proposals with schedules, sources of finances, and responsibilities for the implementation of information policy programs every year.
Objectives	The information policy priorities-objectives are as follows:

- development of services for citizens, business sector and public administration, especially the elaboration of ID-card applications

- improvement of skills and access of social groups in unequal position for using electronically provided services

- elaboration and introduction of systems for digital document management and archival processing

- development of the system and infrastructure of state registers

- better provision of schools with computers to achieve the ultimate goal – one computer per 20 students

- launching of Tiger University programme to support the development of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and academic ICT staff, and the infrastructure for post-graduate training

Contact	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications Elo Tuppits, Harju 11 Tallinn, 15072, elo.tuppits@mkm.ee Website: http://www.mkm.ee

3.7 Finland

Title	eAskel — Expert Service
Type	National
Description	The eAskel programme is one of the "branded expert services" offered to businesses via the Finnish Employment and Economic Development Centres (T&E centres). Under the programme, the possibilities created by information technology and networks for **improving the efficiency of business activities and processes** are individually identified. In the development programme, the IT solutions concerning the business activity of the firm in question and its development needs as regards information technology and networks are examined. As the end product, the firm receives a practical "roadmap" for developing its use of information technology. The eAskel service is provided in the form of individual confidential consultancy for firms in cooperation between experts on SMEs and entrepreneurs.
Objectives	The aim of the eAskel programme is the long term, business oriented development of the use of information technology by SMEs. The main objectives are to: ♣ make the use of information technology and networks part of a firm's planning and development of its business activities ♣ develop the working methods and processes of businesses ♣ develop long term planning of investment in IT ♣ find solutions (involving information technology and networks) that give a competitive advantage and benefit business activity
Contact	Ministry of Trade and Industry Ms Jaana Lappi, jaana.lappi@ktm.fi Website: www.te-keskus.fi, www.yrityssuomi.fi

Title	e-Business project for SMEs in Seinäjoki region
Type	Regional
Description	e-Business project aims **at developing the competitive advantage of local SMEs by applying new ICT solutions in their business processes**. The idea is to support and train SME personnel for better use of applications, research SME needs and business processes and enables the development of new applications.
	Technology Centre Kareltek Inc. has been running e-Business project in South-Karelian region since September 2001 aiming to strengthen the Seinäjoki region as an operating environment that attracts businesses and professionals, and to support new and existing technology companies. The Center offers facilities and associated services to companies as well as research and educational organizations at the Frami Technology and Innovation Centre.
Objectives	The main goal is to improve the level of know how in local SMEs by supporting the use of knowledge intensive business services (KIBS) related to each new ICT solution.
	The main objectives are to:
	♣ improve the competitive advantage of local SMEs by applying e-Business methods
	♣ help the local service providers in seeking new business opportunities
	♣ improve the efficiency of the e-Business investments by providing help and financial support for the SMEs
Contact	Seinajoki Technology Centre Ltd Tommi Ranta, Kampusranta 9C, tommi.ranta@stoy.fi http://www.stoy.fi/

Title	**KITARA - The Application of Information Technology in Mechanical, Civil and Automation Engineering**
Type	Sectoral
Description	**The mechanical engineering and construction cluster** makes a major contribution to the Finnish national economy. The cluster provides jobs to 650,000 people. A sufficient volume of high-level basic research in these fields is regarded to be essential for **staying competitive**. In Finland, ICT are heavily concentrated in data communications applications, where Finland has world-leading know-how in ICT. If this excellence could be transferred to manufacturing processes, the result could give products a strong competitive edge in the global marketplace.
Objectives	It is expected that this will further strengthen the international competitiveness of this cluster. The programme seeks to create innovative and internationally competitive basic research across disciplinary boundaries, to support the development of new multidisciplinary research groups and of national and international networks of cooperation. Further aims of the research programme are: ✦ to create and establish a culture of basic research ✦ to support postgraduate training in these fields and ✦ to liven up their rather traditionalist image and give them greater appeal.
Contact	Academy of Finland Saila Karvinen, Vilhonvuorenkatu 6, PO Box 99, Helsinki, 00 501

3.8   France

Enhancing competitiveness through ICT

The role of the General Directorate for Competitivity, Industry and Services is to prepare and implement French policy to enhance business competitiveness, stimulate innovation, and develop the information society within a European and international framework.

ICT and e-business solutions are considered as key factors for the competitive position of companies, but the adoption of ICT by the French economy was assessed to be lagging behind that of other European countries and the USA.

The Directorate is implementing sector-focused policies in cooperation with professional organisations such as the "TIC&PME 2010" action plan, as well as technology-oriented actions which focus for example on RFID, ICTs in the health sector and mobile services. The primary targets of these policies are the SMEs, because they suffer most from limited understanding of ICT, limited budgets for ICT investments and difficulty in recruiting ICT professionals.

The most well-known action is the **TIC&PME 2010 initiative** (http://www.ticpme2010.fr). It aims to support co-operative initiatives by actors at distinct levels in the value chain who have the potential to improve performance and competitiveness and to focus on processes and exchanges that take place within the value chain or sector.

Another current initiative is the **"Entrepreneurs, Faites le choix de l'Economie numérique"** (Businessmen, choose the digital economy) action plan, which has been designed to:

- carry out a communication campaign on radio and in newspapers to promote the advantages of the digital economy for SMEs and very small enterprises

- introduce and explain the new uses of information technologies to managers of small enterprises, through thematic modules

- promote the emergence of offers adapted to the needs and expectations of small enterprises in terms of equipment, counselling and funding.

The objective is to introduce new ways of using ICTs in micro and small enterprises. Due to its large implementation, the ministry decided in February 2009 to pursue this programme for the next two years. The thematic modules will be renewed for a better matching with enterprises' expectations.

Other activities include dedicated calls for projects to support research, development and innovation focused on key technologies like NFC or RFID (http://www.telecom.gouv.fr/).

3.8   France

All sectors can benefit from using ICT, whether as a tool for supply-chain optimisation, for planning and management, in production, or to support trade. We believe that the key success factor is the willingness of company managers to accept change in the way they do business.

In the TIC&PME 2010 action plan, projects have been launched in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, confections, footwear, watch making, furniture, automotive, aeronautics and aerospace, electric and electronic components, wood and paper, packaging, transport services and logistics, finance, toys, perfumes and cosmetics, optical and medical instruments, biotechnologies, construction and public works.

Title	TIC&PME 2010 Action Plan
Type	Sectoral
Description	The TIC&PME 2010 Action Plan is an umbrella programme which aims at **improving the implementation of ICT by small and medium-sized enterprises for supply chain management, e-design, traceability, product life management etc.** Launched in October 2005, the Action Plan supports projects in selected sectors of the French economy.
Objectives	The policy initiative has three main objectives: - to support the implementation and the use of common ICT tools in companies belonging to the same sector ; projects can either concern creation of digital supply chains, e-design, traceability, product life management etc. - to improve interoperability between developed tools across different sectors - to locally develop actions for technical assistance within companies to support organizational changes and help them integrate ICT in their internal processes and data exchange with suppliers, customers, or other partners
Results	Two calls for project proposals were launched in 2005 and 2006. In the end, in July 2007, 20 projects have been selected corresponding to specific sectors (agriculture, forestry, footwear, watch-making, furniture, electronics, automotive, aeronautics, transport services and logistics, finance, toys, biotechnologies, etc.). In 2009, about half projects are over at national level and local actions to support SMEs in the implementation of ICT develop.
Contact	Ministère de l'Economie, de l'Industrie et de l'Emploi (MINEIE), Mme. Anne Laurent, anne.laurent@finances.gouv.fr Website: www.telecom.gouv.fr/tic-pme2010/, www.ticpme2010.fr

Title	**A.L.F.A. – Improvement of Business Relations in the Automotive Industry**
Type	Sectoral
Description	The A.L.F.A. initiative was launched to **support CEOs and managers of SMEs in understanding, managing and implementing ICT tools and ICT-based business processes** in their company. The project has been implemented in nine regions of France. Projects have been funded by the DRIRE (Regional Governmental Office belonging to the French Ministry of Finance and Industry), the Regional Council and the participating companies themselves. The main characteristics about the A.L.F.A. initiative are: ‌ It is an industry lead initiative ‌ It is a cooperative initiative, implemented in partnership of national and regional administrations, professional groups and players in the automotive industry ‌ It is a long term initiative (running for more than five years until the end of 2010) ‌ It promotes the adoption of existing ICT tools and processes that are commonly used by manufacturers and suppliers, rather then developing new ones
Results	By mid 2007, i.e. after more than two years, 135 companies have participated in various projects that were initiated by A.L.F.A. Thus, A.L.F.A. has over-achieved its own target. As some projects, for example the implementation of an ERP solution, can take more than a year to be completed, not all of these projects have yet been completed.
Contact	GALIA (Groupe pour l'Amélioration des Liaisons dans l'industrie automobile) Mr. Alexandre Loire, loire@galia.com Website: http://www.galia.com

Title	Achatville
Type	Regional
Description	AchatVille is a programme to **offer assistance to Small Enterprises, especially retailers, and aware them on the importance of the use of Internet today in their activity**. This objective is achieved through an internet platform, information on AchatVille websites possibilities and training seminars on the internet. On the internet platform the SME can choose to have a shop window presenting its activity with 10 products. The SME, if ready for that, can sell on line thanks to secure on line protected payment facilities. The originality of this programme is that it covers 3 concepts: ♣ Access for all: all the SMEs of the region concerned are able to be on the database of the internet platform ♣ Local internet: Even if Internet is known as a worldwide communication tool, AchatVille helps the local SME to better sell to the consumer of its region ♣ The use of public-private partnerships with their defined role: for the public (Chamber of Commerce) the role of informing and training; for the private, the charge of investing in the internet platform to maintain it with the last technical tools. This programme has started in Grenoble in 1999 after a survey on small retailers and companies that showed these SMEs were having troubles accessing ICTs and using e-commerce.
Contact	CCI de Grenoble Christine Petit, christine.petit@grenoble.cci.fr http://www.achatville.com/

3.9   Germany

Title	PROZEUS Processes and Standards
Type	Sectoral
Description	e-Business studies confirm that inter-firm processes are increasingly being digitized. A pre-condition for exchanging data with other companies electronically is the use of e-standards. However, SMEs often experience difficulties in selecting the right standards and implementing them. Against this background, the German PROZEUS initiative promotes the **adoption of e-Business among SMEs based on proven, recognized standards**. PROZEUS focuses on companies with up to 500 employees from manufacturing, the consumer goods industry, retail and services. PROZEUS is funding projects in which SMEs implement e-Business standards. About 60 SME projects have been commissioned as a result of two calls for proposals.
Objectives	The main objectives of the PROZEUS initiative are: 🞧 to promote transparency in e-Business and e-Business standards in particular by developing know-how and sharing this information with others 🞧 to increase security in planning and investment decisions for SMEs by providing recommendations for e-Business standards and applications 🞧 to increase the practical knowledge and managerial understanding of e-Business by disseminating best practices 🞧 to empower SMEs by enabling them to implement e-Business solutions on their own
Contact	Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Kln Consult GmbH Mr. Ralf Wiegand, Gustav-Heinemann-Ufer 84-88, Cologne, wiegand@iwkoeln.de Website: http://www.prozeus.de

Title	**TASK – Programme for Establishing Software Supply Chains**
Type	Regional
Description	The TASK project (2005/06) aimed at **enhancing the value creation within emerging software supply chains in Baden-Wuerttemberg**, the third-largest of the 16 German federal states (with 10.7 million inhabitants) and one of the leading high-tech regions in Germany. The project focused on cross-company cooperation, integration and implementation of software components. About 60 companies, including software producers and user companies, cooperated in the development of innovative and marketable solutions, such as a groupware tool, a tool for providing online customer service and a solution for e-billing.
Objectives	The main goal was to pilot three cooperative engineering processes (software supply chains) in the industry. It was anticipated that these pilots would trigger processes that contribute to the following wider objectives: - Strengthening the competitiveness of SMEs in the software industry by improving work processes and exploiting economies of scope - Enhancing the provision of high-quality software solutions and services to SMEs from various sectors in the region
Contact	Mr. Manfred W. Petz Vordere Karlstrae 12, 73033 Gppingen, Germany, petz@task.de.com Website: http://www.doit-task, http://www.task.de.com

Title	**B 2 B - The promotion of measures to introduce business-to-business (B2B) e-commerce for SMEs**
Type	Regional
Description	The aim of the business-to-business (B2B) programme is to **introduce the economy of Schleswig-Holstein**, which is predominantly characterized by small and medium-sized enterprises, **to e-commerce with a B2B focus**. SMEs will be offered incentives for tapping the potential of electronic business operations in a clear-sighted and consistent manner. The risk linked to the introduction of these modern technologies shall be lessened by the incentive programme, which provides financial resources, in particular for the successful design and implementation of solutions. The programme should therefore help to overcome any hesitations on the part of SMEs to use modern information and communication technologies. This support benefits SMEs in the EU Objective 2 area, thereby making a targeted contribution to equal opportunities in this disadvantaged region.
Content	The programme consists of consultancy, concept development and the implementation of B2B solutions in various fields such as external and internal communication processes, supplier and customer networking, in-house workflow and structural management, logistics, marketing and customer relationship management, the necessary adjustment of standard software, staff training, evaluation and performance monitoring, and investments.
Contact	WTSH (Business Development and Technology Transfer Corporation of Schleswig-Holstein) Rita Wanke, Lorentzendamm 24 24103 Kiel, r.wanke@wtsh.de Website: http://www.wtsh.de

3.10 Greece

Title	The Digital Future Initiative
Type	Sectoral
Description	SMEs are increasingly aware of the opportunities offered by advanced ICT solutions and thus develop more sophisticated ICT requirements. However, they are still in need of technical and financial assistance in their way up in the e-Business ladder, typically because of the high costs of such an endeavour. Against this background, and considering that Greek SMEs, in general, still need to boost their ICT modernisation efforts, the Greek Ministry of Development launched the Psifiako Mellon (Digital Furture) Programme in October 2006, in continuation of the successful Epihirite Electronica (Operate Digitally) programme. The programme **supports ICT-related investments of companies** and is co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund.
Objectives	Digital Future aims to strengthen Greek SMEs' participation in the Information Society through: ♣ subsidising the development of information technology solutions to serve their activities ♣ increasing the level of IT professionalism within enterprises ♣ developing new digital products and services and ♣ increasing the number of jobs in technology-related sectors
Contact	Ministry of Development, General Secretariat for Industry Ms Anagnostou , Director of Informatics, Informatics Department, 119 Mesogeion Ave, 10192 Athens, Greece Website: http://www.psifiakomellon.gr

Title	E-Business Forum
Type	National
Description	The e-Business Forum is a standing mechanism for **consultation between the Greek State, the academic and the business world on various subjects related to electronic business**. The forum is an initiative of the General Secretariat for Industry (Ministry of Development) to create a favourable digital environment for Greek SMEs. The purpose of this forum is to present opinions, exchange ideas and expertise and encourage e-Business knowledge accumulation. The working groups and their members detect the problems concerning technology penetration in the electronic economy in Greece. They also suggest to the State measures and actions, which will lead to the success of e-Business in Greece. The work of the E-Business Forum has already won the trust of the business community of Greece as a flexible mechanism for contact between State and the private sector.
Objectives	The objectives of e-Business Forum are to: ➕ promote and extent the dialogue about the world wide electronic economy ➕ watch and report the progress of the electronic entrepreneurship in Greece ➕ increase the documentation to the citizens-consumers
Contact	The Greek Research & Technology Network GRNET S.A Ilias Hatzakis, 56 Mesogion Ave., Athens, hatzakis@grnet.gr hatzakis@grnet.gr Website: http://www.ebusinessforum.gr

3.11 Hungary

Title	**Electronic commerce as a means for developing SMEs**
Type	National
Description	The programme was built from the following elements: 1) National PR events that popularised the importance of including SMEs in e-Business; in the course of this drive several million people in the target group were reached 2) One-, two- and three-day training courses whose purpose was partly to prepare future instructors and partly to prepare SMEs; more than 800 SMEs were able to take advantage of these courses 3) Advisory services dealing with e-Business and, within it, e-Commerce; 4) The development and operation of the kkv portal. The project, whose implementation was cofinanced by Phare and the Hungarian Government, came to an end on 31 August 2005; since then, further utilisation of the results has been financed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Transport.
Objectives	The project, which was implemented by the European Commission and the Hungarian Government, served the purpose of: ♣ promoting more extensive use of the various tools for communication of information by SMEs in Hungary ♣ informing them of the possibilities offered by e-Commerce and e-Business ♣ providing help for developing the necessary skills ♣ obtaining the necessary basic theoretical and practical knowledge for using the Internet, e- Commerce and ICT tools
Contact	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Transport Ildik Kecsks Lesk, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Transport, Honvd u. 13-15. 1055, kecskes.ildiko@gkm.gov.hu Website: http://www.kkvportal.hu

3.12 Ireland

Mainstreaming e-business among SMEs

Enterprise Ireland's eBusiness Unit is deeply committed to **mainstreaming ICT adoption and e-business within its client base of indigenous companies**. To that end, Enterprise Ireland undertakes a wide range of activities, including the following:

- Embedding ICT management skills in SMEs

- Knowledge events

- Building awareness of the impact of new technologies on businesses

- Promoting the use of ICT as marketing and sales channel

- Conducting ICT reviews with client companies

- Improving access for SMEs to top-class ICT business consultants

As part of its existing funding offer to clients, Enterprise Ireland introduced the **eBusiness Management Initiative** (eBMI) in 2006. This builds on the success of previous e-business support initiatives funded by the Information Society Action Fund and supported by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The objective of the programme is to improve the productivity and competitiveness of SMEs through the absorption of appropriate Information and Communication Technologies and the development of ICT management skills. As of the end of 2008, more than 100 clients have received support under the eBMI, resulting in a commitment of over €1,000,000.

Enterprise Ireland raises **awareness and disseminates knowledge** about the impact of ICT developments at a business level, through its dedicated eBusiness website (www.openup.ie) and electronic newsletter (eBusiness Live). As part of an ongoing campaign, Enterprise Ireland highlights security and business continuity as core issues for senior managers, given the potential impact on core operations and customer service if there are weaknesses in these areas. The website currently has an average of 1,200 visitors a week and there are over 4,000 subscribers to the eBusiness live electronic newsletter.

Title	CITAX The Construction IT Alliance eXchange
Type	Sectoral
Description	Construction industry is an important part of the Irish economy. However, the industry has essentially remained unchanged over the last few decades. Furthermore, the electronic documents exchange or any electronic cooperation between companies in the industry is very fragmented and in most instances not interoperable. To address those issues, in July 2006, a sectoral organisation Construction Technology Alliance (CITA) obtained funding for their project known as the Construction IT Alliance eXchange (CITAX).
Objectives	The overall aim of the CITAX project is to **facilitate efficient working between companies in the construction industry and to actively encourage the Irish construction sector to take full advantage of current and emerging ICT**.
	The main objectives of the initiative include:
	To inform the Irish construction sector of relevant IT developments
	To establish and disseminate best practice in the use of IT in the construction sector
	To encourage IT related research and training collaboration between the Irish academic sector and the leading firms in the Irish construction sector
	To establish and maintain links with relevant national and international organisations
Contact	CITA Construction Information Technology Alliance Mr. Alan V. Hore and Mr. Connor Ryan, ahore@cita.ie ahore@cita.ie Website: http://www.cita.ie/member_benefits/citax.htm

Title	**National e-Business strategy**
Type	National
Description	The strategy contains a series of recommendations to **help overcome obstacles to more effective usage of ICTs by SMEs and to stimulate optimum ICT usage**. A working group has been established to oversee implementation of the recommendations of the strategy with various subgroups working on individual recommendations.
Objectives	The objectives of the initiative are:

- To reinforce the use of e-procurement and e-invoicing among SMEs. The strategy recommended that dialogue be progressed with the Department of Finance and major public sector buyers to leverage the opportunities and mitigate the threats posed by public sector eProcurement for SMEs.

- To improve the availability of e-Business solutions for SMEs and micro enterprises. The national e-Business strategy recommended that an ICT consultant accreditation scheme be established. The Department requested that the government agency Enterprise Ireland establish an assurance scheme for ICT consultants.

- To support a sectoral policy approach to promote the uptake of ICT by SMEs. The e-Business Strategy recommended that the state development agencies should promote ICT and e-Business development supports as part of an overall approach to enterprise development, rather than addressing e-Business as a more remote and distinct activity.

| **Contact** | Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Sinad Gilligan, 23 Kildare Street Dublin, sinead_gilligan@entemp.ie
Website: http://www.entemp.ie |

Title	**Information & Communication Technologies e-Cluster Programme**
Type	National
Description	The e-Cluster programme brings together a cross-sectoral group of up to 15 manufacturing SMEs for a series of 8 **workshops on ICT-related issues**. Participating companies pay an entry fee and a portion of internal and external training and consultancy costs are grant-supported. This combination of Training, Networking and Consultancy provides an effective vehicle for making a real impact on the use of ICT by participating companies. The e-Cluster programme targets Owners and Senior Managers and actively encourages their participation at all stages. This ensures that there is buy-in from senior management for all proposed ICT activities. Each participating company creates a detailed ICT Improvement Plan. This plan is tied-in to the overall business plan of the company and includes a budget for the planned ICT activities. Where relevant, companies also create an Internet Marketing Plan and/or a detailed ICT Training Plan.
Objectives	The e-Cluster programme assists companies in creating and implementing an ICT improvement plan which meets the needs of customers and suppliers and improves the bottom line. Targeted at the SME client base in the Shannon Region of Ireland, the objectives of the e-Cluster programme include: 🞉 Accelerating the use of e-Business as a competitive advantage 🞉 Developing a Skill Base in IT & e-Business functions 🞉 Creating appreciation among senior management for potential impact of ICT on the-Business 🞉 Integrating e-Business strategy into company Business plans
Contact	Shannon Free Airport Development Company Brendan McCormack, Michael Str, Limerickmccormackb@shannondev.ie Website: http://www.shannondev.ie

3.13 Italy

Title	DDTA **Digital Districts in the Textile and Clothing Sector**
Type	Sectoral
Description	The main objective of DDTA is **to increase competitiveness of the Italian Textile and Clothing (T/C) districts through the adoption and usage of standard low-risk open solutions**, requiring limited investments, in value chain operations. DDTA aims at defining and implementing a model for the digital integration of SMEs operating in T/C districts supply chains and this model is expected to be replicated in other T/C districts across the country. The overall budget of the policy is 28 million. The project combines central management with local/regional implementation. At the central level, activities are carried out in the area of standardisation, definition and validation of ICT solutions for the T/C sectors, as well as communication and promotion to potential beneficiaries. Central co-ordination ensures savings and economies of scale; it also makes it easier to link with other national and international initiatives and institutions.
Objectives	The DDTA initiative has the following objectives: ✚ to facilitate SMEs' access to systems of digital integration ✚ to create a network among districts of southern Italy with a view to supporting the diffusion of managerial and technological best practices in the usage of ICT ✚ to implement existing service centres in the district areas or to create new structures to supply companies with supporting services in the areas of process and product innovation, market intelligence, ICT usage.
Contact	Department of Innovation and Technologies Dr. Paolo Donzelli, p.donzelli@governo.it Website: http://www.ddta.it, http://www.innovazionepa.gov.it

Title	**Multimedia and e-Business tutorship for SMEs**
Type	Regional
Description	The initiative provides services that **support the set-up, development and internationalization of the enterprises of the Florentine territory**. The main activities of e-Business tutorship are: ➕ Assistance to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises ➕ Organisation of conferences on e-Business issues and workshops between operators ➕ Realisation of projects to support SMEs in order to enter into on line-Business ➕ Assistance to sustain SMEs in order to communicate in an efficient way, both in the case of a start up enterprise and of a consolidated one that intends to expand abroad. These activities are thought out and established in order to help the Small and Medium Enterprises in using all the new opportunities offered by e-Business and multimedia communication. Its aim is to increase the enterprises' competitive ability and innovative strategies. This initiative helps SMEs to do the predisposition of a multimedia project, to develop its business plan and on line communication.
Objectives	Multimedia and e-Business tutorship helps small and medium-sized Florentine enterprises exploit the opportunities offered by the Internet in order to increase exchanges, take part in international Trade Fairs, be on view among their clients and generate some profits with regard to costs and benefits.
Contact	PROMOFIRENZE - Special Agency of the Chamber of Commerce of Florence, Carmen Russo, Via Por Santa Maria, Palazzo Borsa Merci, Florence c.russo@promofirenze.com Website: http://www.promofirenze.com

3.14 Lithuania

The Lithuanian e-Business Promoting Program is a **National Action Plan for SME** e-business support for 2009-2012 period in the Republic of Lithuania. The aim of the Plan - **to encourage and assist small and medium size enterprises (SMEs), to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)** in a way that will maximize their competitive advantage. Effective use of ICT across all sectors of the economy can act as a driver to increase competitiveness. As is the case with all technologies, SMEs are slower than large firms to adopt new ICT. Potential SME benefits and sector-specific strategies drive the adoption and use of ICT. Furthermore, sectors are increasingly global and dominated by large firms and the structure of their values chains and operations shape opportunities for SMEs.

The key areas of the National Programme are:

- improvement of the business environment
- skills upgrading
- trust infrastructure
- digital products and information services
- intangible investments and assets
- information
- government on-line

Principal reasons for non-adoption are lack of applicability and little incentive to change business models when returns are unclear. SMEs also face generic barriers to adoption including trust and transaction security and intellectual property rights concerns, and challenges in areas of management skills, technological capabilities, productivity and competitiveness. The issues for the Government are to foster appropriate business environments for e-business and ICT uptake, and target programs to overcome market failures to the extent that they are needed in particular areas (e.g. skill formation, specialized information).

Based on these considerations, the **key elements** of the Action Plan are mapped and addressed around key dimensions of e-business (functional, sectoral, and regional/spatial) on three distinct levels (micro - the level of the firm, meso - the level of the region, and macro - national/international level).

Title	E-service competence centre
Type	National
Description	The aim of the project is to **create the public infrastructure which will promote development of e-services in SMEs as well as in the public sector**. The main target of the Project is to create an e-services providing/receiving system, a competence centre. Public infrastructure will be offered to existing and new providers of e-services. The competence centre is planned to store and disseminate information at a practical level (good examples) of e-services as well as economic, financial, legal and technological aspects of providing e-services. In future, the centre will also start assisting enterprises and institutions in providing e-services. Recommendations on issues related to the standardised e-services providing/receiving system and its technological implementation aspects will be prepared for SMEs which will be willing to develop e-Business. The system was tested during a pilot project at Kaunas Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts where a smart card-based identification and payment system was implemented.
Objectives	The objectives are: 🔸 to create the conditions for small and medium-sized enterprises, especially for start-ups to engage in e-Business and provide innovative services based on information technologies 🔸 to promote e-services between SMEs
Contact	Public institution Technopolis Justinas Taruska, Laisves al. 96, 44010, Kaunas, info@technopolis.lt Website: http://www.technopolis.lt

Title	Kaunas e-region
Type	Regional
Description	The purpose of this project is to **facilitate the development of Information Society in Kaunas and Tampere regions** within the framework of eEurope initiatives. In this process, Tampere will transfer its know-how to Kaunas regarding Information Society development in the region. Planning and programming skills of the Finnish partners will be transferred to Kaunas partners via training seminars and study visits.
Objectives	The objectives of the project are:

The objectives of the project are:

- To facilitate the development of the Information Society in both regions: Kaunas and Tampere

- To promote and facilitate direct contacts and joint Information Society related project activities between local enterprises, academic institutions and other relevant organizations

- To create a permanent forum for exchange of information and experience in Information Society related issues in administration, research and business

- To use eTampere as a benchmark in the development of the Kaunas eRegion programme

- To facilitate partnership development between ICT sector companies from Tampere and Kaunas

- To enhance acceleration of potential innovative business ideas from Kaunas, with infrastructure, know-how and services from Tampere side

Contact	Kaunas County administration Dr. Valdas Pukas, valdas.pukas@kaunas.aps.lt Website: http://www.kaunaseregion.lt

3.15   Luxembourg

Title	Business Plan Toolbox
Type	National
Description	The online platform called Business Plan Toolbox has been developed in order to **help future business creators through all administrative steps, from developing a business plan to complying with the essential administrative formalities**.
	The project will help businesses to develop their business plan from the general description to the financial planning of their project. If businesses have any question the virtual guide contains a lot of useful information with concrete examples. The Online Coaching is another unit helping them to develop a business plan.
	The Business Plan Toolbox is a project lead by the IUIL in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and the University of Luxembourg.
Objectives	The objectives of the Business Plan Toolbox are:
	✦ Concretizes initial business idea
	✦ Reducing entrepreneurial risk in the start up phase
	✦ Structuring the main steps of creating an enterprise
	✦ Professional basis for the following procedure
Contact	Institut Universitaire International Luxembourg 31 rue du parc L-5374 Munsbach, ddurinck@iuil.lu Website: http://www.businessplan.lu

3.16 Malta

Using e-commerce as a business enabler

The mission of Malta Enterprise is to **support industrial development and the establishment of new business in Malta**. Our aim is to sustain Malta's overall competitiveness by supporting the development of successful enterprises.

Malta Enterprise provides a range of services that include various support measures to promote innovation activity, international competitiveness and other horizontal business aspects such as environmental sustainability, networking and e-business.

Currently Malta Enterprise has **three support measures** that directly address the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as a business enabler:

- **e-Commerce Tax Credits.** The aim of this incentive is to increase the number of enterprises providing online services and using the internet as a sales channel. Over 400 enterprises applied for this incentive and are expected to implement their projects during 2009 and 2010.

- **ERDF e-Business Development Grant Scheme.** This competitive scheme supports SMEs who invest in ICT projects that integrate business functions, streamline workflows and enhance interactions with clients and suppliers.

- **Business Advisory Service.** Through this incentive independent advisors can provide diagnostic services in relation to e-business development and hand-hold enterprises in selecting the most effective approach for their activities.

Malta Enterprise strongly believes that ICT and e-business are tools that can be utilised by enterprises to develop their innovative capacity and eventually improve their competitiveness and their position in the market.

In most interventions, Malta Enterprise focuses on supporting growth in manufacturing, related services and other high-value-added activities such as research & development, ICT, and biotechnology. Nevertheless since ICT and e-business are horizontal in nature, a wider sectoral perspective is adopted.

Although the individual incentives are addressed to specific sectors the overall mix of the above mentioned incentives in support of e-business development are open to most business sectors.

Title	National ICT Strategy (Kick-Start)
Type	National
Description	The objective of the National ICT Strategy framework is to **promote an ICT culture in SMEs**, allowing them to derive the benefits of introducing ICT in their operations. Through the Kick-start programme, the Government aims at supporting and assisting local businesses to venture into the larger global market. The framework programme includes a broad range of activity areas, such as the establishment of national and sector based emarketplaces, an eTrustmark Scheme, the development of e-Business assistance packages and a programme to promote electronic activity and efficient interoperability
Objectives	The scope of Kick-Start is to translate strategy and policy into practice through tangible programmes and initiatives with clear deliverables. The development of this Action Plan the Kick-Start Programme is a timely concerted effort by all stakeholders with a view of kick-starting the effective and efficient conduct of e-Business operations in Malta and Gozo. The objective is to raise awareness about the potential of using technology as a business tool to increase the competitive advantage of firms. The set out actions seek to encourage existing and new businesses to explore how technology could be integrated in their operations and help them to Kick-Start their e-Business activity with a view of generating wealth for their shareholders.
Contact	Ministry for Investment, Industry and Information Technology Bernard Agius, 168 Strait Street Valletta, bernard.agius@gov.mt Website: http://www.miti.gov.mt

Title	Euro-Label Trustmark Scheme
Type	National
Description	With an effort to **further enhance a general trust in eCommerce**, the Ministry for Investment, Industry and Information Technology in collaboration with the Malta Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise, is coordinating the availability of the Trustmark Scheme. The availability of the Euro-Label is of benefit to both the business sector and the customers with the former having a tangible evidence of their sound business practices, and the latter being reassured by a systematic regulatory set up which will give them the necessary freedom and peace of mind to conduct safe online purchasing. The Trustmark secure that: ✛ The company selling the product is reliable ✛ The selling conditions are clear and available on the website ✛ The trader respects laws on data protection ✛ The products will be delivered as specified when the consumer placed the order A dispute resolution procedure is in place if anything does go wrong during the transaction
Objectives	The Trustmarks (Euro-Label) central objective is to foster the growth of national and cross-border e-transactions, by ensuring that there is a common basis for on-line trading that is trustworthy and fair. This common environment needs to provide both consumers and traders with the confidence to commit to e-commerce.
Contact	Ministry for Investment, Industry and Information Technology Marcelle Attard, 54/2 Transcontinental House, Zachary Street, Valletta marcelle.attard@gov.mt Website: http://www.eurolabel.gov.mt

3.17 The Netherlands

The Ministry of Economic Affairs promotes SME innovation with ICT through its action plan entitled "**Netherlands Digital in Connection 2007-2010"**. The action plan aims to raise awareness about digital value chains by conducting and up-scaling pilot-projects in different sectors. Complementary to this initiative is another action plan, "**e-Invoicing B2G"** with a focus on e-invoicing to the government in public procurement procedures.

The goal is that 10% of invoices to the government (i.e. approximately 1 million invoices per year) should be received and processed electronically by 2010. The overall objective with these action plans is for The Netherlands to keep its position among the leading adopters of e-business in Europe. The European e-Business Readiness Index of 2008, for example, ranks The Netherlands second in "ICT-use" and sixth in "ICT-adoption". The underlying rationale for the policy is the market failure in the usage of ICT by SMEs, due to a lack of transparency of ICTmarkets and awareness about ICT-developments and opportunities.

In the coming years the greatest e-business-related challenge for SMEs, but also the greatest opportunity, will be to get connected in the emerging digital value chains. This overall challenge can be broken down into three main areas:

- in terms of business processes, where the key issues in the next few years will be e-procurement (including public e-procurement) and e-invoicing;

- in terms of framework conditions, it will be important to promote open standards and interoperable ICT-systems without a vendor lock-in, and to take measures to ensure trust and safety in a digital environment

- In terms of technology development with two main emerging trends: first, the use of RFID for advanced tracking and tracing options; second, the se of open-source software for open innovation solutions.

Title	**NDiV - Netherlands Digital in Connection 2007-2010**
Type	national
Description	Netherlands Digital in Connection is an initiative of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs **to stimulate and improve the e-business activities between the trading partners in the supply chain**, in particular focusing on SMEs.
Objectives	The action plan **aims to raise awareness about digital value chains** by conducting and up-scaling pilot projects in different sectors. The program uses a mix of instruments, such as workshops, the dissemination of information material and the up-scaling of ongoing pilot projects. The main stakeholders involved are Syntens (an agency of regional innovation advisors catering to SMEs), SenterNovem (an agency of the Ministry of Economic Affairs promoting innovation), ECP.NL and Media Plaza (organising the workshops), TNO (applied research organisation), trade associations (prominent ipartner being the association for retailers, HBD), and of course the targeted beneficiaries – the SMEs. More than 100 showcases of smart digital cooperation (also including the application of RFID) have been started
Contact	Syntens Peter Koudstaal, Kelvinbaan 42, 3439 MT Nieuwegein, pko@syntens.nl Website: http://www.ndiv.nl/

Title	e-Invoicing B2G
Type	National
Description	The Ministry of Economic Affairs has started an actionplan in 2008 in which the government acts a s **launching customer for e-invoicing**. The goal is that 10% of invoices to the government (i.e. approximately 1 million invoices per year) should be received and processed electronically by 2010. In this way, B2B e-invoices stream will be boosted.
Objectives	The action plan on e-invoicing to the government has as its main stakeholders government purchasing and financial departments, suppliers (sending invoices to governments) and solution providors such as software vendors. The activities aim at reducing uncertainties (e.g. which standards to use, legal issues) by conducting pilot projects. UBL 2.0 (migrating to UN/CEFACT standard) has been selected as the preferential open standard for receiving e-invoices. Measures to make it mandatory for governments to receive e-invoices are under investigation.
Contact	Ministry of Finance Rex Arendsen, P.O. Box 20201, 2500 EE The Hague, r.arendsen@minfin.nl Website: http://www.ez.nl/Onderwerpen/Ruimte_voor_ondernemers

Title	e-Invoicing B2G

3.18 Norway

Title	BuildingSMART
Type	Sectoral
Description	BuildingSMART is a unified and international concept introduced and supported by the International Alliance for Interoperability (IAI) for **modernizing the construction sectors and arenas.** The main objective of BuildingSMART is to increase the interoperability and transparency in order to improve effectiveness, quality and security. Introducing open standards in business processes and product directories it also aims at lowering the barriers for innovative SME suppliers to enter the construction markets. BuildingSMART represents one of 7 business sectors that are co-funded by the public Norwegian e-Business development programme BIT (Business Intelligence Technology), organized by Innovation Norway. The BIT programme and BuildingSMART are strategic initiatives financially supported both by the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development.
Objectives	The objective of the BuildingSMART initiative is to improve work-flows and productivity in the building and construction industry by the smart use of new technologies in all phases of building projects. BuildingSMART aims at the dynamic and seamless exchange of accurate information on the built environment among all members of the building community, and throughout the lifecycle of a facility.
Contact	Norwegian Homebuilders Association Mr. Jns Sjgren, Postboks 7186 Majorstuen, jons.sjogren@boligprodusentene.no Website: http://www.buildingsmart.no, http://www.buildingsmart.com

3.19 Poland

Title	**German Polish Virtual Logistics Broker System**
Type	National
Description	The purpose of the system is to **generate logistics chains with the greatest possible consideration of transshipment and pooling aspects and integration of suitable logistics nodes**. The system integraties German and Polish logistics service-providers and partners from EU and non-EU countries on an equal footing in the master agreement relationship by exercising a broker function and responsible control, implementation, processing and tracking of intermodal transport chains in cross-border traffic.
Objectives	The project is realised within EUREKA and aims at: 🞢 ensuring effective interchange of information on the transportation (logistics) needs of distribution and production companies between these companies and transportation or logistic companies 🞢 providing distribution and production companies with information on transportation and logistic services offered in the market 🞢 developing of electronic standards for data interchange 🞢 providing customers with the most satisfactory transportation service, providing transportation companies with information relating to the demand for their services and the possibility to plan their work in a more efficient way 🞢 increasing IT knowledge development in small and medium-sized companies 🞢 increasing IT interest among employees of SMEs.
Contact	Institute of Logistics and Warehouse E.Estkowskiego 6 61-755 Poznan, office@ilim.poznan.pl Website: http://www.ilim.poznan.pl

3.20 Portugal

ICT Usage in Portugal

The objectives of Directorate General for Economic Activities and more particularly, of the Department for Innovation and Business Competitiveness, are:

- to foster ICT uptake and the adoption of new technologies by industry, trade, tourism and services

- to encourage the development of systemic insight into the business environment, concerning technological innovation, skills acquisition, business organisation and management, marketing of products and services, adoption of good practices, and creation of innovative enterprises

- to monitor the results of programmes and initiatives under sectoral policies, assessing their impact either on business or on the economic environment, and proposing the necessary adjustments for improved efficiency.

The **National Strategic Reference Framework** (NSRF) 2007-2013, an incentive scheme established for the qualification of SMEs, geared towards the creation and/or adjustment of SMEs' own support infrastructure is underway. This scheme aims at facilitating their integration into the digital economy and (if needed) the development of new business models, which enable SMEs to establish more effective business processes and improved relationship with clients and suppliers through ICT usage.

Within NSRF there is a support scheme for the Information Society Qualification and SME Internationalisation with 6 main axes, one of them devoted to products, services and processes development and engineering; organisation and management; ICT and e-Economy.

Four different typologies of projects can apply for this support scheme: Individual projects submitted by a single enterprise; Joint projects submitted by stakeholders concerned with the development of a SME intervention programme; Cooperation projects submitted by a SME or a consortium leaded by a SME for business cooperation; Simplified projects (Innovation Vouchers) submitted by a SME for the acquisition of consultancy services and support for innovation.

Title	PME Digital Initiative
Type	Sectoral
Description	The initiative promoted the **adoption of e-Business applications among SMEs**. It considers e-Business to be a key instrument to enhance the contact, cooperation and trade between buyers and sellers. This includes the potential to improve customer service, facilitate and increase sales, smooth order and payment processes, improve distribution and delivery processes, and to raise awareness for new business trends in general. PME Digital aimed at increasing the access and use of e-Business technologies by SMEs in order to enable them to innovate their internal working processes, organisation and their exchanges with business partners, and thus to seize new business opportunities.
Objectives	The mission statement of PME Digital was to enhance the participation of Portuguese SMEs in the digital economy. This covers the following objectives: - To reinforce the technical and technological capacity of SMEs and the modernisation of their structures - To promote a higher degree of digital integration between firms (from action to interaction) - To enhance access of SMEs to internal and external markets, e.g. using ICT to foster exports - To stimulate the adoption of innovative and cooperative business attitudes.
Contact	Ministry of Economy Affairs and Innovation Paulo Cunha, Estrada do Pao do Lumiar, 1649-038 Lisboa, pcunha@adi.pt Website: http://www.adi.pt

Title	**E-Business in the Region of Santarem**
Type	Regional
Description	The project aims at the **creation of an advanced infrastructure of e-commerce services of the Area of Santarem**, allowing the international availability of innovative models of managerial development for the use of electronic services provided by the existence of advanced infra-structures of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).
Objectives	Main objectives of the project are the: ✦ implementation and availability of Internal Services, with advanced Information and Communication Technologies ✦ implementation of an advanced ICT infrastructure within the region entrepreneurial network ✦ set up and Availability of Regional Internet Server, with wide scope information and services support, namely supporting internationalisation of regional companies and strengthening the European socio-economic development projects ✦ strengthening of the information society by the complementary projects, such as Training in Information and Communication Technologies and the effective use of digital content and supports ✦ availability of Regional Digital Infrastructure, supporting regional partners electronic communication, such as Municipalities, Educational sites, Tourism Associations, and other entities
Contact	NERSANT - Associacao Empresarial da Regiao de Santarem Antonio Campos, Varzea de Mesioes Apartado 177, geral@mail.nersant.pt Website: http://www.nersant.pt

3.21 Romania

Title	eROad
Type	Sectoral
Description	The eROad project, financed through The General Directory for Industry of European Commission aims at **initiating an effective partnership between a group of Romanian IT suppliers and the SMEs from the transporting sector of the Romanian economy.** Organized as a cluster, this partnership will be aimed at providing affordable and viable integrated e-Business approaches as a way of boosting efficiency and accelerating the adoption of the European standards in the transportation sector.
Objectives	The eROad project objectives are: ➕ increasing the capacity of IT providers to develop viable and affordable ITC solutions that address the specific needs of the SMEs from the transportation sector ➕ increasing awareness among the transportation SMEs of the advantages of adopting e-Business tools through a series of workshops ➕ establishing of the current status of ICT integration into the transporters business processes ➕ developing e-Business competencies at SMEs level through trainings of the 3 levels of management: top, middle and line management
Contact	NET BRINEL SA Ovidiu Teodorescu, B-dul N. Titulescu, Cluj-Napoca, Teodorescu@brinel.ro Website: http://www.e-road.ro/index_en.html

3.22 Slovakia

Title	**Digital and e-Commerce for small and medium enterprises in Slovakia**
Type	National
Description	The policy initiative seeks to **bring the latest ICTs to the attention of and be utilised by SMEs in the Slovak Republic**, New business opportunities of the enlarged internal market also offer enormous business opportunities for SMEs, but only where they are able to properly utilize all opportunities offered by the latest ICTs, e-Business, e-Commerce, etc. For example, proper utilisation of websites could help SMEs to become an active part of the current enlarged common market of the EU-25 with enormous opportunities in the area of practical utilisation of e-marketing, e-advertisement and e-shopping, that is to say e-Commerce in general. This active role in global and/or regional markets could also help SMEs to become a part of worldwide-Business and commercial chains, groups, etc. Also, an integral part of this initiative is to provide regular training and advisory services.
Objectives	The main objectives of the initiative are to + support and develop the process of information provision in the area of Slovakian SMEs especially as far as utilization of modern ICTs is concerned + help SMEs to efficiently promote their services, goods, etc. at a fraction of the cost that otherwise they have to invest in the necessary network of local shops, advertising, marketing policies, etc + attract the attention of potential foreign partners, investors for the future potential business cooperation, joint ventures, etc
Contact	Faculty of Management, Comenius University Dusan Soltes, Odbojarov 10, Bratislava, Dusan.soltes@fm.uniba.sk Website: http://www.fm.uniba.sk

3.23 Slovenia

Title	e-SLOG
Type	National
Description	The e-SLOG project aimed at **developing simpler standards for electronic business messages and at promoting e-Business among SMEs**. The resulting e-SLOG standards, a simplification of GS1 EANCOM, were developed in cooperation between the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, large companies, and representatives from the public administration. The project is unique in two aspects. The first is in the special approach of e-SLOG, where large companies were used as pioneers in using the standards, while market pressures than ensured that SMEs were quick to follow. The second aspect is that the initiative had almost no funding and all the participating companies covered their own costs.
Objectives	The main objectives of the initiative are the: ✦ preparation and implementation of basic standard electronic documents ✦ preparation and implementation of solutions for safe e-Business using electronic signatures ✦ implementation of open technological solutions for large, meddle-sized and small enterprises ✦ promotion of e-Business The end goal of the project was not only to enable SMEs to conduct business electronically with other companies, but with public administration and financial institutions as well.
Contact	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia Duan Zupani, Dimieva 13, 1000 Ljubljana, dusan.zupancic@gzs.si Website: http://www.gzs.si/e-poslovanje

3.24 Spain

The mission of the Deputy Directorate for Digital Economy is, among others, developing, managing and monitoring:

- Programs to promote the use of telecommunications services and the Information Society, particular in e-business, in SME's.

- Initiatives to support the creation and development of enterprises in the sectors of information technology, communications and digital content.

- Training programs for professionals and users of information and communications technology, and also of professional e-business, including the promotion of new online learning and digital content for training.

"Plan Avanza 2" is the key initiative to achieve this goal launched by the Spanish Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Trade. The objective of "Plan Avanza 2" is to contribute to the Spanish Economy recovery through the widespread and intensive use of ICT, with special attention on projects that balance sustainability and energy saving.

In 2008, **the "Avanza PYME"** was the initiative that the Ministry for Industry, Tourism and Commerce (MITyC), through the Secretariat of State for Telecommunications and Information Society (SETSI) funded the promotion of e-business programme for SMEs.

In 2008 **"Avanza Formación",** 154 projects were approved to support the development of e-skills and e-learning opportunities for about 246,000 employees in Spanish SMEs. These projects received grants of about €32 million.

To further support ICT adoption in SMEs, a loan programme, **"Préstamo TIC",** launched in 2006, will run until 2010. It addresses micro enterprises in particular. In total, loans of €1.30 billion for ICT adoption are available to enterprises. The interest-free loan, without endorsements, is awarded in a fast and simple process, avoiding bureaucratic burdens for enterprises.

Title	**2Bdigital: using e-marketplaces to internationalise SMEs**
Type	National
Description	The programme has been developed in accordance with the following basic criteria:

- Adaptation to the problems and the aims of the enterprise.
- A participative process involving the enterprises management team, combining the individual and the work group sessions that are established.
- The incorporation of expert advice on digital marketing and international trade strategies.
- Compatible with day-to-day activities.

The above general phases are established and can be adapted to the needs of the enterprise and in accordance with the size of the teams participating therein, the structure, organisation, activities and specific objectives to be achieved.

Objectives	The objective of the project is to foster the international promotion and commercialisation of Catalan companies via the Internet with the specific aim of:

- increasing the number of international trade contacts via the Internet
- boosting the international image of enterprises via their websites
- strengthening their internationalisation strategies in the target markets
- controlling the profitability of investment in the Internet

Contact	COPCA - Catalonian Trade Promotion Consortium Xavier Rivera, Passeig de Grcia 94, Barcelona, xrivera@gencat.net Website: http://2bdigital.copca.com

Title	**Technology Assessment to Enterprises**
Type	Regional
Description	The assessment procedure is as follows: ⚜ The SME is asked to fill out a questionnaire which enables the Chamber to make a diagnosis, which includes: a) Assessment of technological needs, b) Orientation on business strategy on the Internet, c) Suggestions on courses from the Chamber adapted to their real needs and d) Assessment on how to finance the investment ⚜ Once the SME sees the diagnosis, it selects the equipment it is interested in. ⚜ This generic demand arrives at the suppliers that have previously registered with the platform. ⚜ Suppliers offer their products indicating their characteristics, price, and improvements based on demand. ⚜ The SME receives all the offers, listed by price and selects the one it is interested in. ⚜ The supplier receives the confirmation and installs the product at the SME.
Objectives	The main objectives of the assessment are the following: ⚜ assessment of technological needs and orientation on business strategy on the Internet ⚜ product proposals adapted to needs previously detected, with its characteristics and price ⚜ assessment on how to finance the investment (adapted to the characteristics of the company)
Contact	Madrid Chamber of Commerce and Industry Eva Casado, Ribera del Loira 56-58, Madrid, inn1@camaramadrid.es Website: http://www.camaramadrid.es

3.25 Sweden

Title	Meeting point Wermland
Type	Regional
Description	The Meeting point Wermland project offers a range of services to **permit the cost-effective exchange of electronic messages**, including invoicing, ordering, certification and procurement. It is a joint e-commerce project for municipalities, purchasers and suppliers. It furnishes all participants with suitable tools, training and project support. The project: ♣ provides information on easy-to-use, functional and cost-effective e-commerce solutions ♣ gives support to both the sender and the receiver for implementing electronic invoicing ♣ facilitates contacts between the municipality/business and suppliers when implementing electronic invoicing
Objectives	The basic objectives of the project is to: ♣ increase IT skills among SMEs ♣ get e-Business strategies higher up on the SMEs agendas and open their eyes to applications within e-Business ♣ provide SMEs with knowledge about different forms of collaboration in the area of e-Business ♣ provide SMEs with information on easy-to-use, functional and cost-effective e-commerce solutions ♣ assist SMEs in implementing their transformation towards e-Business
Contact	The Wermland Chamber of Commerce Ulrika Obstfelder Peterson, Sdra Kyrkogatan, Karlstad, ulrika@wermland.cci.se Website: http://www.wermland.cci.se

Title	**SVEA e-Business for Swedish SMEs**
Type	National
Description	The project has established a network of 150 coaches all around Sweden. They, with some support from the main project, **arrange seminars and conferences for SMEs, as well as offer consultancy guidance** (which is charged for Give-aways are seldom appreciated up to a level). Staff with media background keeps track of interesting examples that are published in a structured manner. The project also measures two things: 1. the number of SME companies with company-run e-mail 2. an e-Business index, where the level of acceptance for e-Business is measured
Objectives	Project objective were to: 🞣 create a nationwide network of SME coaches and SME informers 🞣 establish a database of good examples 🞣 create an easy-to-use web-based school for SMEs 🞣 produce and distribute newsletters on a regional basis to more than 100.000 SMEs; all of this with the ultimate objective of having 80 % of SMEs realizing the potential of e-Business
Contact	GEA Swedish Alliance for electronic Business Mikael Von Otter, Stockholm, Mikael.vonotter@swedishenterprise.se Website: http://www.gea.nu

3.26   United Kingdom

Title	eBusiness Specialist Advisor
Type	Regional
Description	The aim of the catalyst project is to **get SMEs in the North East using Broadband and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to benefit their businesses**, make them more productive and able to compete more effectively in securing public sector business and private sector trade both nationally and in export markets. The project premise is not technology for technology's sake, but rather using technology as an enabler to enhance company productivity, sustainability and reaping the many business benefits that broadband, ICT and e-Commerce technologies can bring to regional companies.
Objectives	The main objectives of the project are to: 🞦 create wealth by raising the productivity of all businesses 🞦 encourage the local suppliers to trade electronically with local authorities and facilitate improved communication processes between authorities and suppliers 🞦 encourage the use of ICT to increase business growth and therefore increased employment opportunities 🞦 extend local company access to electronic methods of trading as well enabling access to new markets 🞦 act as a gateway for SMEs to access other business support facilities by working closely with partner agencies in the region and marketing their services through the project
Contact	One North East Stephen Carey, Stella House, Goldcrest Way stephen.carey@onenortheast.co.uk Website: http://www.onenortheast.co.uk

Title	Opportunity Wales
Type	Regional
Description	Opportunity Wales provides a personalised, staged series of **e-Commerce advisory services for SMEs** within a service area of Wales defined under European Union Objective One. The services are provided through a series of stages: An e-Commerce Review is carried out by an independent and trained adviser. Through discussions with managers they analyse the existing business and identify where e-Commerce applications can bring additional benefits. Client aid is offered to assist with purchases identified within the e-Commerce Review. The initiative is developed on a series of rigorous quality thresholds and guidelines. Adviser training, methodologies, and the internal process of segregating client skill levels is developed and delivered in partnership with the e-Commerce Innovation Centre in the University of Wales Cardiff.
Objectives	The objectives of the Opportunity Wales project are for: ♦ 35,000 SMEs to benefit from support by Web unique visitors, direct mailings, e-Commerce booklets, and magazines ♦ 120 advisers to be deployed within the project's service area ♦ 5,267 SMEs to benefit from adviser support ♦ 2,043 jobs created and 4,700 jobs retained
Contact	Opportunity Wales Christine Lloyd, Innovation House, Dr William Price Business Park christine.lloyd@opportunitywales.co.uk Website: http://opportunitywales.co.uk

Title	**Electronic Payments Tool & Trade Online Project**
Type	National
Description	Electronic Payments Tool (EPT) is a benchmark portal that **diagnoses specific SME online payment scenarios against the actual costs of the solutions available in the UK**. The portal was fully funded by the Department of Trade and Industry and Scottish Enterprise and its objective is to increase the adoption of e-payment solutions by SMEs. EPT is presented as a two tier web portal.
	The first tier is comprised of rich e-Learning material. The content is designed to move the SME up the e-Business adoption ladder.
	The second tier of the portal is a diagnostic tool. The tool is built from a database of solution 'datasheets' that accurately model the cost structures of the various e-payment solutions available in the UK. Each datasheet was developed in partnership with the solution provider and is updated under contract when modifications are made to the e-payment offering.
Objectives	Trade Online Project is a catalyst for small businesses to overcome their resistance to online trading by encouraging take-up of entry level e-Commerce solutions and payment gateways through learning, hands-on experience and expert advice. On completing the workshops the participant SME will specifically have in place:
	♦ a branded website with sales and marketing content
	♦ the ability and knowledge to update new products / services to their online trading solution
	♦ the ability to take payment and booking transactions over the Internet
Contact	RSTO Ltd, John-Paul Anderson, 13 Hamilton Place, Edinburgh, jp@readysteadyonline.net, Website:http://www.electronic-payments.co.uk

Title	e-learn2work
Type	National
Description	It is acknowledged that training providers find it difficult to recruit small and micro businesses (SMFs). The reasons for this are predominantly lack of time, resources and awareness on the part of the SMFs. The e-learn2work project is addressing this. **It highlights the benefits of e-learning to SMFs and brings them together with e-learning providers**. The e-learn2work Mission is to create an enabling framework for disadvantaged and deprived enterprise communities to access on-demand business-critical learning. Focusing on small and micro businesses, the project aims to: ↓ understand how employees currently acquire new skills ↓ find out what kind of e-learning material might interest businesses ↓ use this information to develop cost effective and suitable e-learning packages
Objectives	The main objectives of the project are the following: ↓ First, it aims to understand as clearly as possible the barriers to learning experienced by small and micro businesses (SMFs) ↓ Second, a quality framework is drawn up, containing detail relating to e-learning content and delivery methods for those preparing e-learning material ↓ Finally, from the interpretation of findings from primary and secondary research in the context of ICT delivery, models are designed and tested
Contact	Virtual College, info@virtual-college.co.uk Website: http://www.elearn2work.net

4   European Initiatives

The proliferation of national and regional e-Business policy initiatives necessitates efficient policy coordination in order to put those in a perspective and valorise them at the EU level.

This is why the Commission and the Member States have established the European e-Business Support Network (eBSN) for SMEs, with the goal of improving the effectiveness of public SME policies. The eBSN involves over 200 public policies or private-public partnerships from 30 European countries. It supports policy analysis and benchmarking, shapes policy trends, generates synergies between national policies, and inspires new e-Business policies by the exchange of good practices.

4.1   Need for collaboration: eBSN

SMEs need to renew their business models by integrating and fully exploiting ICT technologies in their business strategies. In today's competitive business framework, where all sorts of innovations, including technological and organizational innovation, play a determinant role, European SMEs should exploit every opportunity the use of ICT can offer.

For this reason, there has **been increasing and high-level political concern that Europe needs to do more to exploit the role of ICTs in boosting its competitiveness**. Member States have to collaborate and coordinate their efforts in the formation of relevant e-Business policies and reforms. This collaboration is crucial element for ICT policies to be successful[15].

Best practices of one country's policies can act as a source of inspiration for others. Through this process, countries are learning from each other and create a "domino effect" that can lead to an overall increase of innovative use of ICT in European countries.

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[15] The Global Information Technology report 2007-2008, World Economic Forum

Most important, coordinated implementation often results to larger-scale effects compared with these created by single-country initiatives. Empirical findings suggest that international reforms are responsible for the creation of valuable synergies that would be absent in any other case. For

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Example of Policy Synergies*

If Member States achieve the R&D intensity targets announced in their National Reform Programmes R&D expenditures in the EU will increase from 1.9% of GDP in 2004 to 2.7% in 2010. This could lead to an increase in output of 2.6% for the European Union as whole. Cross-border knowledge spillovers would account for roughly half of these gains. In the new Member States and the Scandinavian countries output gains from spillovers caused by increases in R&D intensity brought about by other Member States are even higher than the gains they would reap from their own increase in R&D spending. **These significant spillovers are obtained as direct consequence of the huge increases in R&D expenditures implicit in the national R&D spending targets.**

*Communication from the Commission: "Raising Productivity Growth: Key Messages from the European Competitiveness Report", October 2007

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example[16], cross-border knowledge spillovers can result to an increase of Member States' R&D intensity with and thus to an overall boost of their growth. As an example, increasing skills and R&D raises real wages, which in turn should increase participation rates by around one percentage point on average across the EU.

In this sense, the **eBSN was established as a network of policy makers and high-level e-Business experts** in Europe to share experience and good practice in support of e-Business for SMEs. **It was established in 2003** by the European Commission, in response to high-level political focus on the important role of ICTs in boosting the competitiveness of the overall EU economy. eBSN is an open policy coordination platform e-Business, a tool to make existing e-Business policies more consistent. Its ultimate **goal is to improve the effectiveness of public SME policies** in fostering competitiveness by promoting the innovative use of ICT.

The eBSN was founded to address this goal, by improving co-operation and using synergies within the European e-Business policy community. Activities of the eBSN focus on networking and the exchange of good policy practice. More specifically, the objectives are:

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[16] Communication from the Commission: "Raising Productivity Growth: Key Messages from the European Competitiveness Report", October 2007

- To bring together decision-makers in the field of e-Business, to share information, to discuss strategic policy orientation.

- To provide a platform for policy coordination among Member States.

- To provide a "one-stop-shop" for information about regional, national and European e-Business initiatives and funding possibilities for SMEs.

- To organise special meetings of governmental e-Business experts, to share practical experience and to identify future challenges.

The eBSN is open to all relevant policy initiatives in support of e-Business for SMEs in the Member States, the Candidate Countries and the EEA/EFTA States which are willing to share experience and information, as well as to e-Business experts and representatives of the business community.

The eBSN has grown to involve more than 200 public policies or private-public partnerships from 30 countries in Europe. It supports policy analysis and benchmarking, shapes policy trends, generates synergies between national policies and inspires new e-Business policies, by exchange of good practice. eBSN is an **"e-Business policy intelligence" initiative**, which observes and analyses policy developments and identifies new policy trends. The structure and members of the eBSN are described in Annex II.

The last eBSN report (2003-2005) summarises how European and national policy makers have created awareness, information and advice tools for firms. The report also mentions the increased focus on SMEs and on persistent problems such as standardisation and interoperability, legal issues related to the internal market and e-procurement by governments.

This report demonstrates the evolution of national e-Business policies towards sector-specific e-Business policies and the need for more policy coordination at pan-European level to leverage the European added value.

Other studies and reports seem to converge on this point: A 2004 OECD study – ICT, e-Business and SMEs – provides a similar message. The OECD stresses that large benefits can derive from e-Business in both internal processes and external transactions and collaboration. However, many policies 'only' stimulated firms to launch websites and to interact online with consumers. The OECD acknowledges that barriers for e-Business can be specific for sectors, for SMEs and even for SMEs that are well advanced or less advanced on the e-Business adoption ladder. For instance, even well advanced SMEs may be hindered by electronic market places that are controlled by and designed for large firms in a sector. For less advanced SMEs, security issues and skills remain the main issues. The OECD identifies a policy challenge. The complexity of e-Business and the differences between sectors and between firms calls for a customised or even personalised approach. Moreover, the 2006/2007

edition of the European e-Business Report advocates that supply chain integration is perceived an 'advanced element of e-Business' with high relevance for productivity.

eBSN support actions

The Directorate General for Enterprise and Industry together with the Member States (through the eBSN Steering Group), anticipated the need **to leverage the European added value of the aforementioned national sector-specific e-Business policies** and place them in a European perspective. This is why the European Commission announced **in the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA), a series of sector-specific e-Business actions of European scope**. **The ultimate beneficiaries will be not only SMEs but the entire European economy**:

So far, the European Commission has allocated over 8 M € to the eBSN support actions. One large-scale pan-European pilot action in the textile/clothing and footwear sectors (started in January 2008 and will be completed by the end of 2009. Mid-way to its completion, this action progresses very well and managed to attract strong Pan-European attention:

- 4 pilot projects involving electronic business transactions among over 30 enterprises in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria have already been completed successfully;

- 13 more cross-border pilots have just started involving up to 300 small and large enterprises covering all EU countries, and much more have expressed their interest to use the results.

Two more pilot actions will be launched in the first half of 2009:

- One action is planned to target the automotive industry, currently under extreme pressure resulting from the global financial downturn.

- The other will cover the transport and logistics sector in Europe, a crucial sector with enormous potential benefits (of economic, environmental and social dimensions) from an efficient digitalisation of business processes along its supply chain.

Apart from these pan-European sector-specific actions, it is obvious that more needs to be done, to integrate these on-going actions and guide the selection of future ones in **a broader policy framework** that would capitalise upon the experience gained, build synergies and maximize pan-European and cross-sectoral coordination and efficiency gains. This policy framework would **take into consideration the Commission's policy priorities, provide more coherence and better visibility and ensure greater industry commitment**.

In parallel, eBSN offers independent advice to all European SMEs, through its intelligent on-line self-assessment tool and case studies:

- The new on-line service "e-Business Guide for SMEs: e-Business software and services in the European market" (http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/e-bsn/ebusiness-solutions-guide/welcome.do) financed by DG Enterprise and Industry is available at the eBSN portal, since November 2008. This is an intelligent online tool that helps an SME to self-asses its e-Business needs and competences; based on these it proposes a range of appropriate e-Business solutions and local ICT service providers that can offer such solutions. The e-Business Guide for SMEs is available in English, French and German.

- A compendium of at least 200 case studies of best e-Business practices among European SMEs, covering SMEs of different sizes, sectors and geographic areas in the EU. Evidence shows that the best inducement to ICT investment among SMEs is the demonstration of concrete and plausible success stories from peers, other SMEs that took the initiative to innovate through ICTs. The case studies will be available in all EU languages by the end of 2009 (http://www.e-pme.eu/)

- Moreover, eBSN has launched a study to further explore global trends in e-Business policies, namely the **"Sectoral e-Business Policies in Support of SMEs: innovative approaches, good practices and lessons to be learned"**. This study presents case studies of 15 existing sector-specific e-Business policies. It analyses the case policies, compares and assesses different policy approaches in terms of their strengths and weaknesses and identifies key learning points. Its finding has been instrumental in shaping common policy orientation in the frame of the eBSN.

4.2   Other European initiatives

4.2.1 From eEurope to i2010 and CIP

The European Commission launched the eEurope initiative in 2000 with the aim of **accelerating Europe's transition towards a knowledge-based economy** and realise the potential benefits of higher growth, more jobs and better access for all citizens to the new services of the information age. The first phase of eEurope was the eEurope **2002 Action Plan** which focused on exploiting the advantages offered by the Internet and therefore on increasing connectivity.

As a follow-up to the eEurope 2002 initiative, the Seville European Council gave a broad political endorsement to the **eEurope 2005**[17] Action Plan which was then adopted by the Council in December 2002. eEurope 2005 was based on the recognition that **high speed connectivity** (broadband) stimulates the use of the Internet by making it possible to use more developed applications and services. eEurope 2005 set out to create more favourable conditions for the deployment of infrastructure - often called the "supply side" of the broadband equation - and to support the development of services - the "demand side" - within a more secure digital environment. It also attempted to make the benefits of the Information Society available to the socially excluded people with special needs.

Part of eEurope 2005, the **GoDigital**[18] initiative aimed to **help SMEs get involved in electronic commerce**. The initiatives allow SMEs to create an environment which is conducive to the development of electronic commerce and entrepreneurship, benefit from the results of the research and technological development programmes, and put them in the position to use these results and develop ICT skills.

The GoDigital initiative is organised around three action lines and a number of actions which fall within one of these action lines.

- Action line 1 on a favourable environment for electronic commerce and entrepreneurship
- Action line 2 concerning the take-up of electronic commerce
- Action line 3 on ICT skills

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[17] http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/2005/index_en.htm
[18]   Commission   Communication,   Helping   SMEs   Go   Digital,   COM(2001)136,   13   March   2001
http://europa.eu.int/eurlex/en/com/cnc/2001/com2001_0136en01.pdf

The eEurope initiative finished at the end of 2005 and was followed by the **i2010[19] initiative.** The i2010 strategy is the EU policy framework for **the information society and media**. It promotes the positive contribution that information and communication technologies (ICT) can make to the economy, society and personal quality of life. The European Commission presented it in June 2005 as the new initiative for the years up to 2010.

The i2010 strategy has three aims:

- to create a Single European Information Space, which promotes an open and competitive internal market for information society and media services

- to strengthen investment and innovation in ICT research

- to support inclusion, better public services and quality of life through the use of ICT

To achieve those aims various actions have been put forward such as regulation, funding for research and pilot projects, promotion activities and partnerships with stakeholders.

The strategy and actions, presented in the i2010 Communication of 2005, are reviewed and updated through i2010 Annual Reports. The annual report also analyses developments in the ICT sector and assesses the Member States' progress in implementing their ICT objectives.

Moreover, i2010 has undergone a mid-term review to make sure that it remains up to date with the rapidly changing ICT environment. The updated strategy was presented in April 2008. Given the importance of ICT for today's economy, i2010 is a key element of the Lisbon strategy for growth and employment.

4.2.2 CIP

The Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) aims to **encourage the competitiveness of European enterprises**. With small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as its main target, the programme will support innovation activities (including eco-innovation), provide better access to finance and deliver business support services in the regions. It will encourage a better take-up and

use of information and communications technologies (ICT) and help to develop the information society. It will also promote the increased use of renewable energies and energy efficiency.

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[19] http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/index_en.htm

The programme will run from 2007 to 2013. The CIP is divided into three operational programmes:

A. Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (EIP)

With this programme, the European **Commission seeks to support innovation and SMEs in the EU**.

The objectives of EIP are to:

- Facilitate access to finance for the start-up and growth of SMEs and encourage investment in innovation activities.

- Create an environment favourable to SME cooperation, particularly in the field of cross-border cooperation.

- Promote all forms of innovation in enterprises.

- Support eco-innovation.

- Promote an entrepreneurship and innovation culture.

- Promote enterprise and innovation-related economic and administrative reform.

With a budget of € 2.17 billion for the overall period of 2007-2013 the programme aims to achieve its objectives through the following actions:

1. Access to finance for SMEs through "EU financial instruments"

These EU instruments target companies in different phases of their lifecycle (seed, start up, expansion and business transfer) and support investments in technological development, innovation (including eco-innovation), technology transfer, and the cross border expansion of business activities. They are managed by the European Investment Fund (EIF) in cooperation with financial institutions.

2. "Enterprise Europe Network": a network of business and innovation service centres

Regional centres providing integrated business and innovation support services form part of a European network, drawing on the experience of the Euro Info Centres (EIC) and Innovation Relay Centres (IRC). They provide enterprises with a range of quality services to help them more competitive.

3. Support for initiatives to foster entrepreneurship and innovation

Support will be given to encourage the trans-national networking of innovative companies and all other actors in the innovation process, including benchmarking initiatives and the exchange of best practice.

4. Eco-innovation - making sustainable development become a business reality

Innovative products, processes and services aiming at reducing environmental impacts, preventing pollution or achieving a more efficient and responsible use of natural resources will be supported.

5. Support for policy-making

Under the EIP a number of conferences are organised to assemble and publicise sectoral knowledge, inform policy-makers, and make policy suggestions to increase the coherence and cooperation between EU Member States.

The programme will also be used to support policy-makers; the latest trends and developments in certain sectors - as well as European and global markets- will be analysed in studies and the results will be disseminated.

B. Information Communication Technologies Policy support Programme (ICT)

The objective of ICT research under the EU's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) is to **improve the competitiveness of European industry** as well as to **enable Europe to master and shape the future developments of ICT technologies** so that the demands of its society and economy are met[20].

ICT is at the very core of the knowledge-based society. Activities will strengthen Europe's scientific and technology base and ensure its global leadership in ICT help drive and stimulate product, service and process innovation and creativity through ICT use and ensure that ICT progress is rapidly transformed into benefits for Europe's citizens, businesses, industry and governments. These activities will also help reduce the digital divide and social exclusion[21].

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[20] http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ict/
[21] ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/ict/docs/ict-wp-2007-08_en.pdf

The ICT Work Programme is divided into **seven "Challenges"** of strategic interest to European society, plus research into "Future and emerging technologies" and support for horizontal actions, such as international cooperation[22]:

🔧 Challenge 1 - Pervasive and trusted network and service infrastructures

🔧 Challenge 2 - Cognitive systems, interaction and robotics

🔧 Challenge 3 - Components, systems and engineering

🔧 Challenge 4 - Digital libraries and content

🔧 Challenge 5 - Sustainable and personalised healthcare

🔧 Challenge 6 - Mobility, environmental sustainability and energy efficiency

🔧 Challenge 7 – Independent living and inclusion

The EU Member States have earmarked a total of € 9.05 billion for funding ICT over the duration of FP7, making it the largest research theme in the Cooperation programme, which is itself the largest specific programme of FP7. FP7 research activities will strengthen Europe's scientific and technology base and ensure its global leadership in ICT, help drive and stimulate product, service and process innovation and creativity through ICT use and ensure that ICT progress is rapidly transformed into benefits for Europe's citizens, businesses, industry and governments.

C. Intelligent Energy Europe (IEE)

There are many untapped opportunities to save energy and encourage the use of renewable energy sources in Europe, but market conditions do not always help.

The Intelligent Energy - Europe programme is the EU's tool for funding action to improve these conditions and **move us towards a more energy intelligent Europe**.

The Intelligent Energy – Europe programme is run by the Executive Agency for Competitiveness and Innovation (EACI) on behalf of the European Commission, and seeks to bridge the gap between EU policies and how they impact on the ground.

In mid-2008, the EACI managed more than 400 IEE projects and the establishment of 60 new local or regional energy agencies has been supported by the programme. IEE-funded initiatives also include the ManagEnergy Initiative and the Sustainable Energy Europe Campaign.

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[22] http://www.ideal-ist.net/ict-programme

4.2.3 The new SME policy and the Small Business Act for Europe

In November 2005, the Commission presented a new SME policy. Entitled "**Think Small First**", **it aimed to promote entrepreneurship and skills via education and training, improve market access for SMEs, simplify legislation and improve SMEs' participation in the EU's 7th Framework Programme for Research (FP7).**

The European Council endorsed the policy in March 2006, backing the establishment of one-stop shops for company registration and measures to reduce the length of time and expenditure required to start up a business. In December 2008 the European Council endorsed a **Small Business Act for Europe (SBA),** aiming to unite all the existing initiatives for SMEs under a single legislative document while also introducing a series of new measures to speed things up.

The following principles are at the heart of the SBA:

- Creating an environment in which entrepreneurship is rewarded

- Ensuring that honest entrepreneurs who have faced bankruptcy get a second chance

- Mainstreaming the "Think Small First" principle into all fields of legislation

- Making public administrations more responsive to the needs of SMEs

- Adapting public policy tools to SMEs' needs, notably by facilitating their participation in public procurement and making better use of state aid

- Facilitating SMEs' access to finance and developing a legal environment supporting timely payment in commercial transactions

- Helping SMEs benefit more from the opportunities offered by the single market

- Promoting skills upgrades and innovation in all its forms

- Enabling SMEs to turn environmental challenges into opportunities

- Allowing SMEs to benefit from the growth of markets

The SBA includes an ambitious set of measures to allow SMEs to fully benefit from the Single Market, expand into international markets and, most important, to promote all forms of innovation among SMEs, including ICT-enabled innovation.

5 Lessons learned and future perspectives

From general promotion of ICT to business transformation

The eBSN experience revealed that European Policies, following major national initiatives, should shift their focus from general promotion of the use of ICTs and Internet connectivity to tailor-made coaching of enterprises to achieve their e-Businesses transformation, in full collaboration with their business partners (i.e. along digital supply chains). In recent years, new policy priorities set by many EU Member States, regions, and business support organisations reflect the shift of attention from general ICT infrastructure and e-Business solutions to actually coaching businesses in fully integrating e-Business into their overall business strategies. This paradigm has to continue and to be further enhanced.

From Generic to Regional and Sectoral Initiatives

The first relults of several regional "Best Practices" indicate that focus should be made to regional transfer of good policy practices. The difference of e-Business diffusion between companies from different regions does clearly not constitute a barrier for transferring successful policies. There is a plethora of smart and innovative policy initiatives in support of e-Business in SMEs across European regions. Regional policy makers are invited to seek inspiration in designing their policy measures which should be adopted on the needs of local SMEs, but they can also utilize good examples from other regions. To this respect, it is vital to share experience that could be expanded to other regions.

Furthermore, there is clear need for SME and sector specific support actions. Sectors differ widely in their use of e-Business. For example, sectors producing technology themselves or providing related services have a higher propensity towards e-Business activities than low-tech sectors. To this respect, policies and support initiatives should be defined by understanding the sector-specific e-Business requirements of companies and the economic implications of e-Business on the whole value chain.

Flexibility of e-Business Policies for SMEs

There is no magic-bullet for shaping the perfect e-Business policies addressed to SMEs. The optimal solution would be a balanced policy mix, that should take into account their diversity (based on size, sector of activity, geographic location, etc.), the particular characteristics of SMEs (e.g. techno-phobia, lack of managerial understanding, lack of e-skills, etc.), as well as the changing nature of e-Business.

The need for adequate monitoring

To assess the impact of ICT implementation on business performance, appropriate monitoring of results and registration of data is needed. However, there is an enormous lack of statistics and metrics on the diffusion and use of ICT by enterprises, as well as the quality of available data. Sufficient and reliable data would offer great value to decision makers in formulating favourable policies for their enterprises. Future initiatives toward that goal should take into account the difficulty to measure the impact of ICT investments (including equipment, solutions, and structural changes) due to long-term impact, mainly based on empirical evidence.

The value of Cooperation and business networks

One of the most useful lessons learned from eBSN initiative was the importance of a holistic policy approach exploiting synergies between e-Business policies. For example E-invoice, a very practical and interesting e-Business application of a Finnish regional policy in South Karelia was successfully transferred to Slovenia proving that transferability of best practices in e-Business is feasible. Thus, future policies should focus more on regional and cross-border cooperation.

Furthermore, valuable work has been done in a bid to broaden networks, but actions are still insufficiently coordinated. The merits of creating SME support networks that embrace government, business and institutions are obvious, but, in practice, such networks are still at an early stage and need to set more ambitious targets for policy coordination, if they are to achieve sustainable impact.

Annex A: About eBSN

eBSN Structure

eBSN **is structured** around two main axes:

- A **Steering Group,** that consists of representatives of the European Commission, the participating countries, academics and the business community. It decides on the objectives and modus operandi of the network and the practical arrangements to foster cooperation, and specifies the overall policy priorities for action.

- The **virtual network**, namely the eBSN Portal linking all identified stakeholders and initiatives, and providing information, statistical data, best business practice, etc. This virtual network has been established and managed by the Commission services (DG Enterprise), with the technical assistance of a contractor. The eBSN web portal (http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/e-bsn/index_en.html) links all identified stakeholders and initiatives, and offers further information, statistical data and best practice examples.

As a supportive mechanism, the eBSN organises up to four thematic workshops per year. These bring together interested stakeholders to deepen the dialogue on specific e-business-related issues. Recently, workshops have focused on ICT solutions for SMEs, the deployment of e-standards, and sectoral policy approaches. Workshops provide an opportunity for sharing learning points from good policy practice. Workshops are hosted and organised by eBSN members, often taking place in the country that holds the EU Presidency. In total, 19 eBSN workshops have been held since the establishment of the eBSn (2003-2008).

Members

The eBSN is open to all relevant policy initiatives in support of e-business for SMEs in the Member States, the Acceding and Candidate Countries and the EEA EFTA States, which are willing to share experience and information. Members of the network are:

- **E-business experts** from public administrations in EU Member States, the EU acceding and candidate countries, the EEA countries and the European Commission.

⬩ **Representatives of European, national and regional initiatives,** which provide support to SMEs with regards to the take-up of ICT and e-business (i.e. SMEs support networks, EICs, public-private partnerships, etc.). Only those initiatives stemming from public policies, i.e. supported by public authorities, either directly or indirectly through public-private partnerships, are eligible for participation in the European e-business support network. This is motivated by the consideration that this network is primarily meant to inform policy makers about other successful initiatives in the area of ICT and e-business promotion and eventually to influence policy making in this field.

⬩ **Academics, representatives of the business community and International organizations** with special interest on policies in support of e-Business for SMEs**.**

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Annex B: eBSN Workshops

During the active period of eBSN (2003-2008), **nineteen eBSN thematic workshops were organised** to facilitate the diffusion of good examples and best practices of e-Business policies and to encourage cross-border co-operation among eBSN members.

A broad range of topics were discussed, including:

- quantitative targets for e-Business policies

- e-business models, solutions and standarts for SMEs

- articulation between national regional and sectoral e-Business policies

- strategies for efficiently training SMEs in the field of e-Business and ways to improve the availability of e-Business solutions for SMEs

These workshops notably demonstrated that new policy priorities set by many Member States, regions, business associations or business support organisations reflect the shift of attention from general promotion of the **use of e-Business tools to facilitating business re-engineering by the efficient use of ICT.**

Moreover, the need for continuously overhauling on-going policies and initiatives and re-focusing objectives in a fast changing e-Business environment has been underlined by many eBSN members. Special attention to startup SMEs has been identified as an important potential priority.

Beyond the consensus on the catalytic role for competitiveness of the efficient use of e-Business, it has also been largely recognised that managerial innovation and entrepreneurial spirit are as important as technological breakthroughs. More and more, the concept of "business process innovation" is becoming an intrinsic part of e-Business; in fact "business process innovation" is the keyword for the development of new e-Business strategies and models. Therefore, coordination between the relevant policy instruments, for instance through integrated support programmes has clearly emerged as necessary during the eBSN workshops.

The importance of the sectoral approach to e-Business promotion has also been largely confirmed.

In particular, several e-Business sector-specific initiatives have been presented and discussed in sectors as diverse as wine, aerospace and defence, or textiles. A categorisation of sectors regarding their e- Business usage has even been devised: e-champions (like the ICT sector), e-intensive sectors (like banking / leasing or the media & printing sectors), e-specific sectors (like tourism or chemical industries) and late adopters (like metal products industries or health and social services).

Interesting practices have been discussed under the eBSN umbrella, for instance:

- how to promote world-class training for independent e-Business advisors through SME support networks and business support organisations

- how to set-up and manage an accreditation scheme for e-Business advisors in order to increase SMEs trust and confidence in their ICT partner

- how to bring together SMEs and local ICT suppliers in order to improve mutual understanding and eventually more adapted e-Business solutions for SMEs

All these seem to be domains where independent and trusted SME support organisations have a crucial role to play.

1st eBSN workshop

"Setting quantitative targets for e-Business policies"

Organised by DG Enterprise and the Greek Presidency

Location: Athens, Greece

Date: 16-17 January 2003

Objectives

Setting targets for e-Business policies is part of the wider Lisbon Strategy to make the European Union the most competitive knowledge-based society in the world by 2010. In this context, the objective of this workshop was to launch a debate on:

- The current situation in E.U, with regards to the efficient use of ICT and e-Business by SMEs

- The specific challenges for SMEs

- The future priorities for public policy actions in this field

- Potential quantitative targets for specific e-Business policies for SMEs

Key Results

- A broad consensus was achieved, among all Member State representatives, on the need to set concrete **measurable targets** for future e-Business policies, so that assessment of the activities, their output and impact would be feasible in the near future

- New policy priorities set by some Member States reflect the shift of attention from general promotion of the use of ICTs and e-Business tools to tailor-made coaching of enterprises to **totally transform into e-Businesses**, i.e. to facilitating business re-engineering

- Particular emphasis was placed on the **difficulties of SMEs in acquiring the required ICT** and e-Business skills, the high initial investment, the lack of commercial interest by SMEs for certain forms of e-Business

- It was shown that there are numerous examples of good public-funded initiatives in support of e-Business for SMEs. This is creating **strong incentives to share experiences and to learn from each other**.

- The discussion stressed that e-Business policies addressed to SMEs should **take into account their diversity**, as well as the changing nature of e-Business

2nd eBSN workshop

"Good targets for e-Business policies"

Organised by DG Enterprise

Location: *Brussels, Belgium*

Date: *26-27 May 2003*

Objectives

As a follow-up of the Go Digital initiative, the Commission adopted on 27 March 2003 the Communication "Adapting e-business policies in a chancing environment" that allerts Member States to the need to shift the gear from e-commerce to e-business.

In this context, the objective of the EU workshop on "Good targets for e-business policies" was to:

- Bring together eBSN members to further discuss future policy priorities

- Present practical examples of quantitative and/or qualitative targets in different e-business policy areas, such as awareness, training, e-business solutions, interoperability and networking

- Allow for an intensive dialogue among eBSN members and the exchange of practical experience

Key Results

- The enormous lack of statistics and metrics on the diffusion and use of ICT by enterprises, as well as the quality of available data have been underlined as major challenges that need to be further addressed

- The e-business policies addressed to SMEs should take into account their diversity (based on size, sector of activity, geographic location, etc.), the particular characteristics of SMEs (e.g. techno-phobia, lack of managerial understanding, lack of e-skills, etc.), as well as the changing nature of e-business

- The workshop discussions confirmed that the need for more awareness and knowledge transfer to SMEs is still valid. Member State and acceding country representatives presented examples of SMART targets for specific e-Business policies for SMEs at national and regional level

3rd eBSN workshop

"National, regional and sectoral e-Business policies in favour of SMEs"

Organised by DG Enterprise and the French Ministry of Development

Location: *Paris, France*

Date: *27-28 October 2003*

Objectives

This workshop was aimed at policy-makers in the field of e-Business for SMEs. Its general objectives were:

- To take stock of recent developments in setting targets for e-Business policies at national level

- To discuss and exchange best practise in the field of regional and sector specific e-Business policy initiatives

- To facilitate personal contacts between representatives from regional, national and sectoral e-Business initiatives, with the view to exchange best practice and to learn from experience

Key Results

- Practical experience of successful regional strategies to promote e-Business for SMEs was shared among the participants by presenting the characteristics, key players involved and the national targets and sectoral constraints reflected in regional policies. Interesting topics were addressed such as a) how to use synergies between regional actions and to promote best practice, b) how to involve SMEs into the process

- The workshop discussions led to better understanding of the sectoral constraints impacting on e-Business policies in favour of SMEs. In this context, the presentations and discussions stressed: a) the sectors which need specific assistance, b) the strategic objectives and targets for sectoral policies, c) the instruments used to promote e-Business for specific sectors, d) the most appropriate channels to use to approach sectors and e) methods to share best practices of sectoral initiatives

4th eBSN workshop

"How to extend eBSN activities to Acceding countries"

Organised by DG Enterprise and the Ministry of Economy and Transport of Hungary

Location: *Budapest, Hungary*

Date: *25 February 2004*

Objectives

The goal of the conference was to better understand where e-Business currently stands in terms of policy priority in Acceding Countries and to discuss ways of sharing experience and good practices in an enlarged Europe in the field of e-Business policies for SMEs. The main objectives were:

- To take stock of the situation of e-Business diffusion in Acceding Countries

- To present and discuss e-Business policies and their priorities for Acceding Countries

- To identify local players (network, catalysts) and potential players

- To discuss the way to extend eBSN activities to Acceding Countries

Key Results

- The e-business diffusion in Acceding Countries compared to Member States was presented by using statistical data from the e-Business Survey 2003 of the e-Business W@tch. The statistics showed that in the enlarged European Union of 25, e-business activity is largely determined by business activity and the size of the company. The results support the eBSN strategy for regional transfer of good policy practices

- The discussion stressed that several information society policies in Acceding Countries don't cover specifically e-business activities. It was also recognised that the success of e-business policies is heavily dependent on the readiness of each country/region in terms of infrastructure, utilities, and processes and also on the surrounding social-economic environment

- Great interest was given to the analysis of a successful cooperation, under the eBSN umbrella, in the e-business field between a current Member State (Finland) and a future one (Slovenia). Based on this example, discussions stressed the necessity of regional and cross-border cooperation

5th eBSN workshop

"How to train and coach SMEs"

Organised by DG Enterprise, the Consortium for the Commercial Promotion of Catalonia and the
Generalitat of Catalonia

Location: ***Barcelona, Spain***

Date: ***13 May 2004***

Objectives

The goal of the conference was to discuss the policy challenges ahead and to better understand what the success factors are to efficiently accompany SMEs engaging into e-business activities. The main objectives were:

- To discuss the articulation between e-business and innovation policies

- To identify good policy practices aiming at accompanying SMEs adopting ebusiness

- To present ways of measuring the impact of e-business policies

Key Results

- A large consensus emerged during the workshop, calling for a holistic policy approach exploiting synergies between e-business initiatives and those fostering managerial innovation and entrepreneurial spirit

- Furthermore, several practical examples of initiatives helping SMEs to efficiently use e-business techniques were presented and raised the question of the necessity to have accredited e-advisors and self-assessment tools. The presentations and discussions stressed the importance of self-assessment tools allowing SMEs to benchmark their e-business maturity, with comparison to their sector

- The workshop stressed once again the importance of defining adequate statistical indicators for the measurement of e-business policies impact. Participants stressed the difficulty in measuring the impact of ICT investments due to the fact that it has an impact over a long period. Sufficient and reliable indicators would offer great value to decision makers in measuring policy initiatives keeping in mind that, statistical indicators must continuously be reviewed in order to reflect the policy making needs

6th eBSN workshop

"Improving the availability of e-Business solutions for"

Organised by DG Enterprise, and the Ministero delle Attivita Produttive, Istituto per la Promozione

Industriale

Location: *Rome, Italy*

Date: *19 November 2004*

Objectives

SMEs have different needs with respect to ICT applications as compared to large companies. Although ICT suppliers focus their attention more and more on SMEs, there is still a lack of affordable ICT solutions for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. In this context, the goal of the workshop was to present some good practices in improving the availability of suitable e-Business solutions for SMEs both from a European but also an international perspective. The main objectives were:

- To assist SMEs in selecting IT solutions

- To promote e-Business interoperable solutions

Key Results

- E-business is considered a key enabler of productivity growth, increasing profit and decreasing costs for enterprises. In this respect, it is necessary to adopt and exploit technology, information and knowledge to create sustainable competitive advantage while further investments are required to fully capitalise on the benefits of ICTs

- Implementing an E-business solution typically requires the selection and set-up of the appropriate IT infrastructure (network, hardware, software) and the right advice to align the technical solution with the business objective pursued. Consultancy services are also needed to properly adapt the related business processes and to define a training plan for company users. SMEs usually need guidance in finding the right partners to implement this approach

- Interoperability has been highlighted as a priority issue by the eEurope 2005 mid-term review. Therefore it is considered necessary for eBSN to examine ways to define and promote interoperable solutions in the e-Business field

7th eBSN workshop

"eProcurement - eInvoicing: European experiences and trends"

Organised by DG Enterprise, and the University of Maribor, in the context of the Bled eConference

Location: *Bled*, *Slovenia*

Date: *6-8 June 2005*

Objectives

The workshop aimed at providing an insight into the eProcurement / eInvoicing topic selected by the eBSN Steering Group. Its objectives were:

- To make clear the business case for the adoption of national and cross-border eProcurement / eInvoicing practices by businesses, in particular SMEs

- To take stock of the recent developments in this field (research, legislation, standardisation, etc.)

- To review relevant benefits and legal and technical barriers

- To identify currently on-going initiatives within eBSN

- To explore the possibilities for launching new cooperation initiatives

- To recommend complementary actions at European level if appropriate

Key Results

- The presentations made clear recent interesting developments with regards to the diffusion of eInvoicing in various regions in Europe. There are now concrete indications of the real cost savings expected by the diffusion of eInvoices

- The legal environment in the various countries are critical in encouraging (like in Finland, where electronic storing of accounting documentation is allowed and eSignatures are not obligatory on eInvoices) or impeding the broad diffusion of eInvoices (like in Austria, where there is uncertainty about the legal framework)

- It was recognised that the public sector has an important role to play and high level policy commitment is key for the promotion of eInvoices

8th eBSN workshop

"Networking e-Business Policy-makers for SMEs: achievements and new policy challenges"

Organised by DG Enterprise and the EEDA, in the frame of the Cambridge e-Business Conference

Location: Cambridge, United Kingdom

Date: 5 December 2005

Objectives

This workshop session aimed at taking stock of the main policy developments and achievements of eBSN so far, as well as validating the options on future policy priorities. Soumitra Dutta, Dean of Executive Education at INSEAD moderated the panel discussion, initiated by five panellists, one representing the European SMEs community, and four eBSN members presenting achievements in the various thematic focus areas of eBSN, namely with regards to policy initiatives dealing with eProcurement–eInvoicing, sectoral policy approaches and improving the availability of eBusiness solutions for SMEs.

Key Results

- This workshop examined some of the latest public policy initiatives, and offered insights into the needs of SMEs. The crucial issues relate to accelerating effective adoption of e-Business by SMEs, leveraging broader networks of organisations that can stimulate the process, and boosting commitment among the principal players

- Recognised as an efficient policy networking mechanism, eBSN offers wide opportunities for participants to learn from each other among relevant e-Business initiatives. However, its success will depend on remaining focused and on concentrating efforts on clear priorities

- Options might usefully include focus on cross-border and cross-sector partnerships –as demonstrated by experiences with Slovenian adoption of e-invoicing methodologies developed in Finland, and then spread locally in the Western Balkans

- Other options examined included encouraging sector-specific policies for SMEs as well as the involvement of sectoral associations, so as to take account of the differences from sector to sector in implementation of e-Business practices

9th eBSN workshop

"Preparing for cross-border eInvoicing: experiences and future challenges"

Co-organised by eCenter, Faculty of Organizational Sciences, Unoversity of Maribor, Government of the Republic of Slovenia, EC and European Parliament

Location: *Bled*, *Slovenia*

Date: *7 June 2006*

Objectives

The aim of this workshop was to provide an insight into recent developments in policies promoting Cross-border eInvoicing and eProcurement. The specific objectives were to:

- Take stock of the experiences of eBSN members, notably in the six eAmber countries already engaging into cross-border eInvoicing transactions

- To look at scenarios and to make clear the business case for the development and adoption of national and cross-border eProcurement / eInvoicing infrastructure and practices for businesses, in particular SMEs

- To look at challenges of expanding regional eInvoicing initiatives into multi-region initiatives within a country and to cross-national cooperation projects

- Review and analyse common barriers encountered and challenges to be addressed in order to enable seamless eInvoicing (as a starting point to be succeeded by a more holistic approach towards eBusiness) across the EU (e.g. legislation, standardization, etc.)

- Explore the possibilities to further expand policy cooperation in this field

- Recommend complementary actions at European level

10th eBSN workshop

"Successful e-business models, especially measures to support the uptake of e-business by SMEs"

Organised by the Austrian Presidency and the Enterprise and Industry Directorate-General

Location: *Vienna, Austria*

Date: *14 June 2006*

Objectives

This workshop aimed at presenting examples of good government practices in promoting the efficient integration of ICTs into SMEs' business processes. The good practices have been selected by the eBSN Steering Group, among the policies that have been submitted by the member states.

Key Results

- Results of e-Business initiatives indicate that effects on SMEs can be significant. For example, the outcome of the PME Digital initiative is a remarkable number of micro and small enterprises with an ICT orientated Action Plan, better prepared enterprise associations to implement ICT strategies for SMEs, consultancy firms with a better understanding of SMEs, and new e-business strategic framework tools to guide SMEs towards the e-Economy

- E-business policies would be more effective if they were integrated within a more general policy framework and established links with other policy initiatives

- Policy makers should anticipate potential areas of conflict between different stakeholders and convert them into a win-win situation

- Effective policies should establish clear objectives and measurable targets focus on motivated companies, those with a vision and plan on what they want to achieve explore innovative Peer-to-Peer methods, like dialogue platforms and business networks

11th eBSN workshop

"eBusiness solutions for SMEs"

Co-organised by the Finnish Presidency, the City of Oulu and the European Commission

Location: *Oulu, Finland*

Date: *7-8 December 2006*

Objectives

The objective of the Workshop was to analyse the real ICT needs of SMEs and to review:

- How the ICT solutions and services market meets those needs
- Policies responding to ICT needs of SMEs
- Policies supporting productive and innovative use of ICT by SMEs

The questions which have addressed were:

- Are there sufficient and adapted solutions and services for SMEs?
- Are they properly marketed? Are sector oriented eBusiness solutions more appropriate for SMEs?
- What are policy makers doing to support SMEs engaging in new eBusiness models?
- What are the future policy challenges and trends?

12th eBSN workshop

"Helping SMEs go global through ICTs"

Co-organised by COPCA, and the European Commission

Location: *Barcelona, Spain*

Date: *22 March 2007*

Objectives

The aim of this conference was to demonstrate how ICTs can open new horizons for SMEs by enabling them to expand their business world-wide. Best practices of SMEs integration in European and International B2B e-marketplaces were presented. The ultimate objective was to stimulate European SMEs engage in cross border e-business transactions notably through B2B e-marketplaces.

Key Results

The participants had the opportunity to acquire a better understanding of the implications and benefits of ICT adoption and participation in e-marketplaces, through practical examples of SMEs from different sectors and company sizes. Moreover, they got a picture of existing public policies in this area.

13th eBSN workshop

"eBusiness solutions and standards for SMEs"

Co-organised by the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology and the European Commission

Location: *Berlin, Germany*

Date: *24-25 May2007*

Objectives

The aim of this workshop was to ascertain the state of play in developing standards in various areas, their further perspectives and any problems arising. Secondly, the workshop was intended to provide evidence of the extent to which these standards are being adopted in business processes, particularly by SMEs, and of the obstacles and beneficial factors that exist.

The main objectives of this workshop were:

- To identify beneficial factors and hurdles to the application of standards in the eBusiness of small and medium-sized enterprises

- To determine sensible procedures for promoting the use of standards in business processes, particularly of SMEs

- To ascertain the type and state of play in developing different standards in the EU and world-wide as well as problems of interoperability and other problems

- To show how SMEs or their interests could be better taken into account in standardization initiatives

14th eBSN workshop

"Sectoral policy initiatives in support of eBusiness for SMEs"

Co-organised by IDATE and the European Commission

Location: *Paris France*

Date: *5-6 July 2007*

Objectives

The following topics were addressed during the workshop:

- Presentation of sectoral policy initiatives promoting e-business for SMEs at Europe and international level

- Main impacts and lessons from the implementation of the sectoral policy initiatives

- Synthesis and outlook for promotion of exchange of best practices and means of replicating good policy elements through Europe.

In the workshop several questions were addressed like:

- What are the main characteristics of sectoral policy initiatives promoting e-business for SMEs in Europe?

- Are sectoral policy initiatives for promoting e-business well adapted to SMEs?

- Are they some more advanced sectors in terms of e-business initiatives?

- What are the main partnership models observed through the analysis of sectoral policy initiatives?

- What lessons can we withdraw from these sectoral policy initiatives?

- What should be done to better support sectoral policy initiatives?

- How is it possible to build up synergies and share experiences amongst policy makers, representatives of SMEs, trade associations?

- What are future policy challenges and trends?

15th eBSN workshop

"ICT Uptake for SMEs Competitiveness"

Co-organised by EU Portuguese Presidency and the the European Commission

Location: *Lisbon, Portugal*

Date: *13 November 2007*

Objectives

The 15th eBSN Workshop goal was to provide an overview of the state of play related to the Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) uptake and relevant policy initiatives at national and Community level. The conference brought together more than 100 national and international policy experts active in the field of ICT uptake and eBusiness policies, with a view to facilitate policy networking and share experiences, values that are in the heart of the eBSN concept.

Key Results

- The conference focused on ICT support programmes for SMEs in the EU and Portugal and provided evidence of transnational cooperation in eBusiness policy initiatives. It also took stock of existing eBusiness training schemes for SMEs and their results and lessons to be learnt were presented. Finally, case-studies and business good practices in ICT uptake by SMEs were shown. The workshop featured very interesting presentations by key experts

- There is a plethora of smart and innovative policy initiatives in support of E-Business in SMEs across European regions. Regional policy makers should be inspired by them in designing their policy measures which should be adopted on the needs of local SMEs, but they can also utilize good examples from other regions. To this respect, it is vital to share experience that could be expanded to other regions

- The use of e-skills by enterprises should be monitored constantly. This will help in identifying e-skills shortage in the labour market. Also, e-skills training (vocational training) should be ensured by all means

16th eBSN workshop

"Achievement and challenges in sector specific eBusiness policies"

Co-organised by Innovation Norway and the European Commission

Location: *Oslo, Norway*

Date: *3-4 December 2007*

Objectives

The focus of this eBSN workshop was on:

- fresh reports from the eBusiness Watch and the eBusiness Benchmarking studies

- experience and demonstrators of industry specific eBusiness policies and presentation of relevant case studies from the construction, tourism, health and furniture sectors

- cross-sectorial eBusiness policies and models and interoperability challenges

In the workshop was addressed both specific industry needs as well as the needs for policy decisions to respond to core challenges like standards and skills issues.

17th eBSN workshop

"Competitiveness and new technologies in the age of globalisation"

Co-organised by the Valencia Region (Generalitat Valenciana) and the Directorate General for Enterprise and Industry of the European Commission

Location: *Valencia, Spain*

Date: *10 April 2008*

Objectives

This workshop took stock of current policy initiatives and actions on the topics of eSkills for SMEs, ePayment and eInvoicing, as well as how to help SMEs succeed in the age of globalisation. The workshop splitted into four sessions, one of them devoted to the presentation of a new on-line tool on commercially available eBusiness solutions and ICT provider for SMEs performed by the European Commission.

The languages of the workshop was Spanish and English. The event recorded by the webcast channel of the Generalitat (www.canalgv.es).

18th eBSN workshop

"eBusiness for SMEs - Technical and organizational innovations for Business & Secure supply chains/ trade lanes"

Co-organised by eCenter, Faculty of Organizational Sciences, University of Maribor, Government of the Republic of Slovenia, European Commission and European Parliament

Location: *Bled, Slovenia*

Date: *17 June 2008*

Objectives

The objective of this eBSN workshop is

- To provide an overview of current trends in technical and organisational innovation, notably from the point of view of SMEs. The workshop presented new developments in the RFID arena, including new application scenarios, as well as the newly developed concept of the Authorised Economic Operator, aiming at assessing and certifying firms thus improving security of electronic transactions.

- To provide an overview of the concept of secure trade lanes as well as examples of innovative solutions for simplified international trade scenarios, such as the green corridor between Finland and Russia. The concept of secure supply chains or trade lanes provides a vision for a technology enabled environment for trustworthy and seamless trade, taking into account the needs of businesses as well as the requirements of public sector authorities, namely customs and taxation authorities.

19th eBSN workshop

"Sector specific policies and cross-sectoral processes for eBusiness for SMEs"

Co-organised by the Frech Presidency and the European Commission

Location: *Ateliers-Paris, France*

Date: *13 October 2008*

Objectives

The objectives of the workshop were:

- To overview of current situation regarding ICT usage and sectoral eBusiness policies in Europe

- To learn more and share experience about cross-sector relationship and cross-sectoral processes

- To discuss related challenges and policies

Annex C: The eBSN Portal

One of the main objectives of eBSN is to provide a "one-stop-shop" for information about regional, national and European initiatives and funding possibilities for SMEs. To that end, **eBSN has developed a portal to act as the backbone of eBSN**. The portal includes a section open to the general public, including SMEs, together with an area with restricted access for eBSN members. **The portal provides information for the following themes:**

- eBSN aims and structure

- Presentation of and links to regional, national and European eBSN members

- E-business policy initiatives at European and national/regional level

- Workshop results and presentations

- Articles and background documents

- Statistical data and surveys in relation to the adoption of e-Business among European SMEs. It includes statistics at European level from Eurostat and also statistics at national and regional level

- Examples of best practices

- News / Announcements

- Quarterly BSN newsletters

Moreover, the eBSN portal provides useful links to relevant European information platforms such as e-Business Watch, e-Business Legal Portal (ELEAS) or the B2B marketplaces portal. In addition, the eBSN portal contains a forums section, where each eBSN member can share views and information with other members.

e-Business Support Network for SMEs (eBSN) 2003-2009