

European Union Grants Advisor Greece

Greek Small Businesses Receive IT Training and Financial Support to Become a Knowledge-Based Economy

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have emerged as a global phenomenon, transforming the way people communicate and businesses operate. However, while ICTs are prevalent in the world of large businesses, many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are not utilising the benefits of the Internet and electronic commerce as effectively as is possible.

Although SMEs represent more than 99 per cent of the enterprises in the European Union (EU), and create a significant amount of new jobs for European citizens, their importance to the EU economy is not always reflected in their use of e-business solutions. Many SMEs do not have access to the Internet, and lack the skills to utilise these tools for the benefit of their business. All over Europe, SMEs are hindered by a lack of resources, such as skilled employees, easy-to-use technology, and knowledge of the potential benefits of getting online.

Greece has made significant improvements to its economy over the last decade, through its fast rate of development and successful economic convergence with its European counterparts. To continue this trend, and foster its growth into a competitive knowledge-based economy, the Greek government remains focused on enhancing its SMEs.

SMEs are responsible for 70 per cent of job creation and the development of social cohesion and wealth in Greek society. Of the total number of enterprises in Greece, more than 99 per cent are small business with less than 50 employees. The Greek private sector SMEs employ 74 per cent of the nation's work force.

Microsoft supports the goals of Greece, and other European countries, in its belief that greater access to IT resources will improve the social and economic infrastructure of European economies. For this reason, Microsoft is working in partnership with technology companies, banks, consulting agencies, and other organisations, through its European Union Grants Advisor (EUGA) programme. The programme is designed to raise understanding and provide guidance and assistance to SMEs seeking EU funding. Microsoft and its consortium partners are committed to supporting businesses by empowering them through technology.

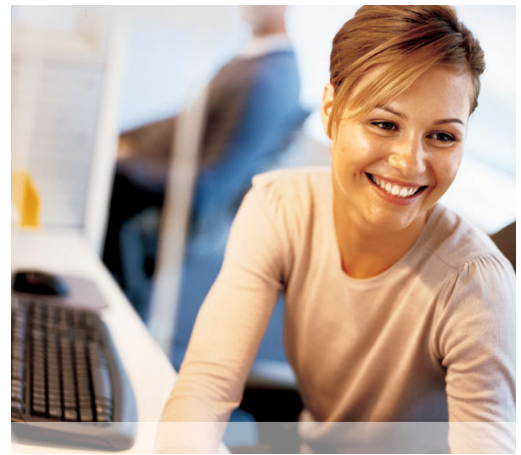
Microsoft and its consortium partners collaborate with funding bodies and other industry players to improve the use of technology grants. In its efforts, the consortium has identified more than 7,000 funding opportunities for SMEs in Europe, most of which are unknown to the majority of smaller businesses. EUGA has developed a database that lists the descriptions of each funding scheme, outlines which companies qualify, and explains how each fund can be used.

Diktyotheite is one such funding scheme, identified by the EUGA programme as being particularly useful for Greek SMEs looking to expand their IT and e-business knowledge. The government-funded programme supports SMEs conducting business online, and aims to foster competitiveness and industrial innovation, to help Europe to become the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world.



"THIS PROGRAMME'S MAIN TARGET WAS TO PROVIDE INTERNET ACCESS AND PRESENCE IN THE WEB TO AS MANY AS 50,000 VERY SMALL ENTERPRISES AND IMPROVE THEIR COMPETITIVENESS. IT ENCOURAGES ENTREPRENEURS TO INVEST IN IT AND EXPLOIT OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED BY THE INTERNET, TO INCREASE THEIR EFFECTIVENESS, SALES AND PROFITABILITY. ADDITIONALLY, THE PROGRAMME ENDOWS ENTERPRISES WITH EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT, BY PROVIDING QUALIFIED IT CONSULTANTS TO ASSIST THEM INCORPORATE IT AND THE INTERNET IN THEIR EVERY-DAY ACTIVITIES."

Fokion Angelopoulos, Director, SMSP, Microsoft Hellas



Diktyotheite supports the goals of the Lisbon Agenda—an initiative intended to encourage economic growth, and foster competitiveness and job creation. The aims of the Lisbon Agenda are to: improve EU structural reform for competitiveness and innovation, by modernising the European social model, through investing in people and combating social exclusion; and sustain the healthy economic outlook and favourable growth prospects.

Greece, in its efforts to achieve these goals, is running a positive course with its Diktyotheite programme. Through Diktyotheite, many Greek SMEs are becoming aware of the benefits of deploying ICTs and gaining access to the Internet and online tools. Diktyotheite is an action of the Operational Programmes, Information Society and Competitiveness funded by the Third European Union Support Framework, for the period 2000 to 2005.

Through this programme, the government aims to develop e-commerce in Greece and help with its transition to an e-economy in the global market. It considers ICTs play an essential role in for improving competitiveness.

Fokion Angelopoulos, Director, SMSP, Microsoft Hellas, says: "This programme's main target was to provide Internet access and presence in the Web to as many as 50,000 very small enterprises and improve their competitiveness. It encourages entrepreneurs to invest in IT and exploit opportunities provided by the Internet, to increase their effectiveness, sales and profitability. Additionally, the programme endows enterprises with educational support, by providing qualified IT consultants to assist them incorporate IT and the Internet in their every-day activities."

Believing strongly in the potential benefits of this programme, Microsoft, and its partners, OTEnet and Hellas on Line (HOL) conducted information campaigns on all available channels. This encouraged local SMEs to take full advantage of the opportunities made available

by the government's Diktyotheite programme. Additionally, EUGA partner Info-Quest sold all the necessary hardware and software to the programme participants.

Participating SMEs are offered two types of support: financial and educational. As part of the financial support, SMEs can receive partial funding to implement or update their IT infrastructure, and for the provision of Internet services. Some of the packages on offer include: the purchase of basic terminal equipment, Internet connection for two years, technical support for three years, development of a commercial website, maintenance, and virtual hosting over a period of two years. Each participating SME is able to buy the basic materials it needs up to the value of €3000 (U.S. \$3850) and receive a 40 per cent subsidy from the government.

Training support plays a fundamental role within the wider framework of the Diktyotheite programme. It includes a central call centre and 16 regional centres, three visits of up to seven hours by a trained e-business consultant, provision of informational and multimedia educational material, and online support through a Web-based portal. The training support available through Diktyotheite can help as many as 50,000 Greek SMEs familiarise themselves with new technologies and e-business practises. Throughout Greece a number of academic and technological institutions, and a variety of private companies offer training to the participants, including basic IT and Internet skills. In the last round of applications, 22,665 SMEs were approved for funding.

Diktyotheite is just one of many programmes that helps European SMEs boost their competitiveness with the help of EUGA and government funds.

Fast Facts

Country

Greece

Profile

Located in Southern Europe, Greece is home to more than 10 million people. Its economy grew by around four per cent between 2003 and 2005, largely because of an investment boom and infrastructure upgrades for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games.

Situation

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are responsible for 70 per cent of job creation and the development of greater social cohesion and wealth in Greek society. Of the total number of enterprises in Greece, more than 99 per cent are small businesses with fewer than 50 employees. Greek private-sector SMEs employ nearly three quarters of the nation's work force, yet many lack access to easy-to-use technology, or the skills to use these tools to improve their businesses.

Solution

Diktyotheite is a government-funded programme that supports SMEs to transact business online. It aims to foster competitiveness and industrial innovation, and help contribute towards Europe becoming the world's most competitive knowledge-based economy. Through Diktyotheite, many Greek SMEs are becoming more aware of the benefits of deploying ICTs and gaining access to the Internet and online tools. Diktyotheite is an action of the Operational Programmes, Information Society and Competitiveness programme, funded by the Third European Union Support Framework. Through this programme, the government aims to develop e-commerce in Greece and help with its transition to an e-economy competing in the global market. It considers that new ICTs constitute an essential tool for improved competitiveness.

Benefits

- As many as 50,000 SMEs gain a Web presence and boost their competitiveness.
- Greek SMEs get assistance in realising their economic potential by using IT solutions to help achieve business goals more efficiently.
- Greek SMEs receive IT training by professional e-business consultants.
- 22,665 SMEs were approved for funding in the last round of applications.

Contact:

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