

European Union Grants Advisor Poland

IT Training Helps Poland's Young Market Economy Drive European Industry Towards a Knowledge-Based Future

Polish people are highlighting their dynamic and self-motivated aspects. Latest figures show that in the last 15 years, the numbers in higher education have grown fivefold. Poles are keen to take full advantage of Poland's entry into the European Union (EU) in 2004 and emulate the success of countries such as Spain and Ireland, whose economies have benefited greatly from member status. Today, among communities across the country, there is a drive to increase income and gain IT skills that add real business value to a growing economy.

As a result, Poland is developing a major new sector around IT training. In the west, this type of training has been a feature of the corporate landscape for decades. Since the 1960s, the United States, the world's economic powerhouse, has led the way in demonstrating how IT can help people achieve their business goals more effectively and boost the efficiency of day-to-day operations. Further, it ultimately has a beneficial transformational effect on individuals. Consequently, technology training is now almost as ubiquitous as the teaching of reading and writing.

With the energy that distinguishes Poland as a vibrant, young market economy, Poles are trying to bridge a large gap in IT training. Computer Service Support, headquartered in Warsaw, is a leading supplier of technology training in Poland and is one organisation working to bridge the skills divide before it becomes too great.

Witold Ozimek, Training Division Director, Computer Service Support says: "We launched the company in 1993 with a team of just three people. The number of employees we

had reflected the size of the market that we operated in. But, since then, we have grown substantially as more and more organisations in Poland have switched on to IT training and see the importance of technology in helping develop productivity and economic prosperity for all."

Nevertheless, the vast majority of Polish organisations investing in IT training are larger companies—around 65 per cent. At the smaller company level (organisations of less than 500 people), the figure is tiny—between two and three per cent. In fact, in a nationwide survey of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) undertaken by Microsoft Poland in May 2005 and called "Microsoft® Index of the IT Situation", 40 per cent of respondents said IT training delivered no efficiency gains whatsoever. Artur Rybka, Small Business Manager, Microsoft Poland, says: "This, in part, reflected the poor culture around work that is a legacy from the communist era in Poland. It certainly highlighted the need to promote the benefits of IT and IT skills to SMEs."

The EU is pushing IT and training in technology as it recognises that increased personal productivity drives economic growth. In March 2000, the European Council, created the Lisbon Agenda, which aims to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010. It recognised that a powerful way to achieve this was to fund IT awareness and training schemes at the grassroots level—the European SME market. The European Council strongly believes that organisations of this size adopting and using IT, and creating dynamic local economies will lead to consistent growth at the higher macro level.



"POLISH PEOPLE HAVE GAINED A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE THEIR PERSONAL DRIVE AND AMBITION ONTO THE NEXT LEVEL IN TERMS OF PRODUCTIVITY, AND MAKE POLAND AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT PARTNER IN THE EU."

Witold Ozimek, Training Division Director,
Computer Service Support, Poland

As a result, the European Union Grants Advisor (EUGA) programme was born. EUGA is an initiative developed by Microsoft, in partnership with HP and Intel, to increase awareness and understanding of EU funds among SMEs and local and regional governments (LRGs). In Poland, in particular, it is starting to make a real impact, helping SMEs' personnel gain IT skills, increase innovation, boost local economies, and thereby helping deliver on the Lisbon strategy.

Currently, the EU is funding training at smaller organisations to the tune of €17.5 million (U.S.\$20.7m) over the next two years, and this figure is set to rise. It means these companies get access to courses at massively discounted prices (up to 80 per cent reduction). Such discounts remove the funding barrier that all too often prevents SMEs from obtaining up-to-date and relevant IT skills that can boost individual confidence as well as positively impacting the bottom line and the local community. The money comes from successful funding bids to the European Social Fund (ESF) and is a direct result of assistance from Microsoft Poland and its local consortium members, which supply key support services in the application process.

With the money in place, a campaign is now in full swing to promote the business value of IT and advertise the discounted training available. During December 2005, at Computer Service Support, which has 12 training centres across Poland, people were putting together a marketing campaign for latest-version IT courses. The campaign will comprise newspaper advertisements in the local press, telephone selling, and e-mailing thousands of target companies contained in a database. It is all aimed at leveling the playing field throughout Poland and allowing the country to gain the skills that will let it compete in the global marketplace.

The promotional drive is also backed by all the EUGA consortium members. The Consortium

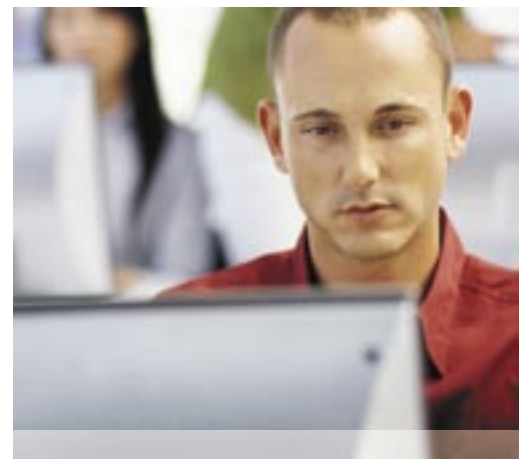
has planned a campaign that promotes the training schemes to SMEs and highlights how IT can increase personal productivity and add real value. Rybka says: "We are speaking to journalists in the press, on TV, and on radio about IT and trying to change attitudes. We have really worked hard on this and we believe the right messages are getting through." Apart from targeting journalists, Microsoft Poland is also promoting the courses available on its Web site (www.microsoft.com/poland/) and is e-mailing a database of 25,000 SMEs across the country with promotional messages and Internet links of the training companies' sites.

Accordingly, more than 50,000 Poles who work for SMEs will receive IT training by 2008 as a result of grants already allocated and those expected in the future. That gives the Consortium two years to fulfil its responsibility of helping Europe to become the most competitive knowledge-based economy by 2010. At Computer Service Support, those trained will increase their general IT skills, and learn how to use the latest-version software solutions that boost productivity across all business processes. This includes infrastructure software, software for better communication and collaboration, and a range of knowledge worker courses, which focus on desktop environments and increment the workers' productivity.

Poles, whether they work for enterprises or not, now have the chance to improve their personal circumstances and gain IT skills. Small companies can see the business value of IT in the same way as larger enterprises, and receive financial support that makes IT training more attractive. This will have a large impact on local economies in the near future and help the EU meet the aims and objectives of the Lisbon Agenda. Ozimek says: "Polish people have gained a great opportunity to take their personal drive and ambition to the next level in terms of productivity, and make Poland an increasingly important partner in the EU."

Contact:

For more information please contact Microsoft Corporate Affairs, or visit the Web site: www.microsoft.com/emea/euga



Fast Facts

URL:

www.css.pl/efs

www.microsoft.com/poland/euga

Country

Poland

Profile

SMEs in Poland represent the driving force behind local economies within this country that joined the European Union in 2004.

Situation

Among these organisations, there was a shortfall in IT training for employees. This was due to a lack of knowledge around the business value from technology in making day-to-day processes more efficient, and the cost of developing worker skills.

Solution

IT training institutions in Poland successfully applied to the EU, via the European Union Grants Advisor (EUGA) programme, and have secured funds that will exceed €17.5 million (U.S.\$20.7m) to promote and subsidise courses. EUGA is an initiative developed by Microsoft, in partnership with HP and Intel, and implemented in partnership with local consortium members, to increase awareness and understanding of EU funds among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and local and regional governments (LRGs).

Benefits

- Poles gain assistance in realising their economic potential using IT solutions that help achieve business goals more efficiently.
- SMEs drive increased growth in local economies, establishing a solid foundation for future prosperity countrywide.
- Poland's young market economy develops faster and joins EU member states in making Europe a knowledge-based economy.