1 Executive Summary

IS 98037/InfoWood

The main goal of the project was the support of Salzburg SME´s in the timber sector in order to strengthen their competitiveness against foreign competition. The means to achieve that goal was the provision of support to the local SME´s through lectures, co-operation workshops and the setting-up of a "Virtual Lumber Enterprise (VHU)". The project started on 1 January 1999 and finished at the end of March 2000 after an extension of three months (original project duration was 12 months). The project was managed under the co-ordination of the Techno-Z Salzburg and its consortium (see 1.8) consisting of the key players of the timber sector and other relevant institutions. The involved timber SME´s were identified through the usage of our databases (and the one of the Salzburg Economic Chamber) and through recommendations of the Holztechnikum Kuchl (a consortium partner).

1.1 Context

The authorities in Austria and especially in Salzburg are quite aware of the importance of the timber sector for our country's economy. It is the second most important industry (after the tourism) for the local economy. For that reason one can find in the NAP (National Action Plan) for Austria and the "Wirtschaftsleitbild Salzburg" (local economic development plan) start up initiatives to help the local SME´s. There are also supporting non-governmental actions for technological growth such as the FFF ("Forschungsförderungsfonds") which fosters R&D in the timber line through the provision of development funds for innovative companies.

As the Techno-Z Salzburg considers itself to be a major local institution playing the part of an incubator for technology orientated companies and together with its partners (the above mentioned institutions) it has gladly accepted the possibility to join the PROMISE programme in order to support these goals.

1.1 Objectives

The local timber economy can be characterised as a line which mainly produces roundwood – more or less a crude product – exports it and later re-imports the ennobled material in form of end products. That is a major problem as the local timber line loses both its know-how in processing technologies and reputation as experts in timber treatment.

For this reason the project was aimed at the improvement of the competitiveness of the Salzburg timber SME´s. This was to be achieved by the implementation of new co-operation schemes fostered through the usage of ICT-tools. We pursued this goal by conducting awareness-raising events demonstrating the benefits of the usage of ICT. Those events were lectures, co-operation workshops and the pilot (VHU). These activities were in line with press releases and mailings. The know-how derived from this project is also planned to be disseminated to other timber SME´s throughout the EU. This will ensure that the results benefit the maximum number of related companies.

1.2 Process

Starting from our goal – a substantial improvement of the competitiveness of the local timber SME´s – Infowood is based on three key-aspects:

- Cooperation work-shops
- Lectures
- Pilot

Other awareness raising activities included mailings, press releases (both local and national papers). With our work-shops and lectures we addressed SME-managers in order to gain their interest in the project.

The first step was the elaboration of questionnaire to do a survey on the local timber industry evaluating their general

situation in the market and the state of their IT-orientation. The results of the survey which reached approximately 700 timber companies in the Salzburg region, and from the panel of experts discussions are displayed in our report on the current situation of the Salzburg (and Austrian) timber line. Within the context of our timber line we have put the emphasis on the ICT-situation in the companies.

In the course of nine workshops the project initiated the development of implementation plans for the introduction of basic ICT-tools such as e-mail services, general data transmission in order to program CNC-machinery from CAD-terminals and websites.

In general, we distinguished between communication and processing technologies utilising ICT; in the course of the project we focused on both.

1.3 Results

Around 700 managers and companies were contacted through our mailings, about 25 companies attended our workshops and lectures; furthermore we integrated 12 companies into the pilot project.

In the course of the other workshops 2 groups of the participating companies identified for themselves their need to going on-line in the near future – this comprises not only the implementation of e-mail services in their companies but also web-appearances and e-business (in a first step B to B, later on B to C).

1.4 Impact and achievements

The pilot with its web-appearance provides the participating companies with the opportunity to reach a wider range of customers. It also offers them a new sales channel and better ways to serve their customer´s needs. Furthermore it is a basis for their business to business activities and will be extended to a business to consumer solution by setting up a web-shop (which is planned as a further step in the post-project phase). The co-operative initiative also serves as an example for other related companies displaying what is possible if enterprises decide to face the new challenges of the markets together instead of struggling on their own. Through the awareness measures the pilot is known at a local level and the epsilon-initiative ensures that it is also known at the European level.

At the implementation-phase of the pilot psychological issues have especially been taken into account as in the course of the project the team has learnt the importance of considering the needs of the addressed managers as well as their perception of their ICT-needs. Thus a goal and respectively problem oriented approach has been chosen to ensure a successful introduction of new technologies. We started with a client focused bottom-up and a step by step methodology in order to increase the probability of acceptance for the ICT suggested by us.

1.5 Website

http://www.infowood.at

1.6 Keywords

SME, small businesses, enterprise, e-commerce, timber, ICT, information technology, information society, IST, VHU, virtual lumber enterprise, infowood

1.7 Key Project Participants

Consortium Partners
Techno-Z Salzburg GmbH
Telekom- & Medienberatungs GmbH
Holztechnikum Kuchl
Salzburg Economic Chamber
Techno-Z Forschung und Entwicklung GmbH
Innofinanz

Virtual Lumber Enterprise:
Holzbau Maier
Tischlerei Stockinger
Holzmeister-Association

All participants are from Austria.

1.8 Contact

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