



a creative
momentum
project

ACCESSING TRADE FAIRS:

MODEL FOR PERIPHERAL CREATIVE ENTERPRISES TO ACCESS
INTERNATIONAL TRADE EVENTS

SUMMARY & LESSONS LEARNED

JULY 2018

CONNECTING CREATIVITY ACROSS
EUROPE'S NORTHERN EDGE
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SUMMARY & LESSONS LEARNED

A strategic aim of 'a creative momentum project' was to increase internationalisation among creative SMEs and micro-enterprises based in peripheral and remote locations to compensate for lack of critical mass and small local markets. While online and virtual routes to market are very important, a physical presence at a Trade event in the target market is the most effective route to export markets for many creative sub-sectors (e.g. craft, film) and in particular for sourcing distributors. However the cost of exhibiting at such Trade events can be prohibitively high for some creative enterprises, especially those located in remote and sparsely populated areas across Europe's Northern Periphery.

The 'Model for Accessing International Trade Events (Fairs/Shows/Festivals)' was an activity implemented under 'a creative momentum project'. It involved developing a Model for a new business support solution to facilitate creative sector enterprises located in remote and sparsely populated areas to access new export markets through exhibiting their work at an overseas Trade Fair, Trade Show or Festival. The project also tested this Model by selecting and supporting a number of pilot creative enterprises to exhibit at a Trade Fair/Show/Festival in Europe during 2016, 2017 and early 2018.

A draft Model was developed in Q3 2015 and a first call for applications from pilot enterprises to test the Model was launched at the official project launch in October 2015. Selected pilot enterprises would receive support of 50% of eligible costs (to a maximum of €2,500) to exhibit at a Trade Fair/Show/Festival in Europe. Applicants had to specify which Trade event they wanted to exhibit at and justify why it was suitable for their business. A total of 34 applications were received in the first round and ultimately six pilot enterprises exhibited at Trade events in 2016.

The draft Model was adapted, based on feedback and evaluation of the first round of pilot enterprises, and a second call for applications opened in early 2017 for Trade events in 2017/early 2018. 31 applications were received and 16 pilot enterprises participated in Trade events.

Based on the experience of project partner organisations in developing and testing this Model, the following lessons were learned:

LESSONS FOR ADMINISTRATION OF THE MODEL

1. A requirement from the project funders that project partner organisations needed to pay service providers (e.g. Trade Fair organisers, hotel, etc) directly in advance, rather than refund the pilot enterprises the costs upon production of receipts, created very considerable administrative challenges.
2. If implementing this Model again (under a different funding source), payment should be based on refunding the pilot enterprises for 50% of their costs (to maximum €2,500) based on production of receipts. This procedure would address many of the administrative challenges, meet internal financial procedures and present a far smaller administrative burden.
3. Selection of the pilot enterprises needs to begin very early and bookings/arrangements made as soon as possible to get value for money for accommodation, transport and also a good Stand placement at the Show. Also if a selected pilot enterprise

does not proceed to take up the opportunity, partner organisations can consider offering support to the next highest scoring applicant (if they exceeded the minimum threshold).

4. The application form should be more specific and force applicants to illustrate more detail on the research they have done on the suitability of the Fair for their business.
5. The funding was complex (50% of eligible costs to a maximum of €2,500) and caused some confusion. It would be better to have simpler funding e.g. support of €2,500.
6. It is important to follow-up on the longer term benefit of participation in the Trade event with the enterprises e.g. a year later, but it can be difficult to get this information. Need to develop a better way to capture the longer term benefits for the pilot enterprises.

LESSONS FOR FACILITATING CREATIVE ENTERPRISES TO ACCESS TRADE EVENTS

1. This Model was particularly useful for quite early stage companies. Some reported that their selection to be supported by an EU co-funded project gave them confidence and enhanced profile. They found this was a positive marketing message for clients in advance of, and during, the Show.
2. Some enterprises suggested a collective insurance deal/preferential rates for members of MyCreativeEdge.eu as a useful support.
3. Advance research really pays off. Enterprises that put in a lot of research and advance planning for the Trade Show reaped the benefits.
4. Future iterations of the Model could incorporate some mentoring for the enterprises on making the most of the Trade Show, including a capacity building element together with the financial support.
5. It is important to maintain ongoing contact between the partner organisation and the enterprises to learn of the longer term impact/results of their participation. Build up a positive mutual relationship.

ADVICE AND TIPS FOR PARTICIPATING IN A TRADE SHOW

The pilot enterprises provided some tips and advice for other creatives planning to participate in an international Trade event.

BEFORE THE SHOW

- Engage with Trade Fair organisers as early as possible in order to try to secure a good position at the Show.
- As exhibiting at some Shows is 'invite only', it is important to ensure that your work is 'out there' to be discovered by curators.
- Find your market. Find the right Show to fit your product/service.
- Accommodation can be a challenge and very expensive, especially if it is a very large event and/or high season. It is important to book accommodation as early as possible, and to consider alternative options.
- It is critical to consider and plan very carefully in advance how to display your products and which products to display. Show your best sellers and edit what you display. Bring to the Show what is suited to that particular Show. This may involve considering a new range of products. It is also important to bring a range of work in different price ranges.
- For Trade events for services which do not have 'stands', research how other companies make their presence felt e.g. at some

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events a company will rent a house or hotel suite as a 'base' to meet clients.

- At such events (with no stands), it is important to research speakers, themes and attendance at the event in advance. Some events have specific formats (e.g. an app) to facilitate networking and business connections and it is important to capitalise on these.
- It is important to clarify insurance cover and organise appropriate cover. Some Fair organisers provide an insurance option, others require exhibitors to take out their own Public Liability insurance. Investigate options for insurance cover that may be supported by public agencies.
- Pre-show marketing is key. It is a good idea to send invitations to previous and potential clients inviting them to your stand (if relevant), offering special discounts for orders placed during the Show and perhaps attaching some samples if possible. Reaching out to new and existing buyers you want to meet, arranging meetings etc.
- When promoting your presence at the Show in advance, through your social media and website, it is critical to include your Stand number as the Shows/Fairs can be very large and it can be difficult to find an individual business without the Stand Number. Remember to update your website with details of the Show.
- It is important to develop high quality marketing material to bring to the Show. Engage a professional photographer and graphic designer. Visually appealing, professional marketing material that provides information on your work and (if relevant) some insight to your inspiration is important to build brand identity and provide contact details.

DURING THE SHOW

- Depending on your product/service, it can be a good idea to give away a little goodie bag with a few samples or some other type of branded promotional gift.
- New clients may not make a commitment at the Show. They may need more time to go through your details and offers and get back to you later. It is important to follow up very soon after the Show with any potential clients.
- Networking is very important. Also walking the Show and gathering ideas from the way in which other exhibitors display their Stands. It is an opportunity to see first-hand the variety of work being promoted and sold as well as to pick up some inside knowledge which can be incorporated in your own practice.
- If you are at an early stage in business, a Trade Show can give you direct access to other, more experienced entrepreneurs/makers who are often happy to share their experience. It can be a good opportunity to gauge how your work compares with others in your field and to get feedback from attendees as well as other exhibitors.
- Using social media throughout the Show is useful to promote your presence and connect with others at the Show.
- Having some type of activity or demonstration at your Stand can attract people.
- If there are talks/seminars during the Trade Show, these can be a good chance to network and meet collaborators/competitors, also to get an idea of emerging trends in the sector e.g. Virtual Reality.
- If at all possible get someone to help/ work with you at the Show. Trade Fairs are very intensive events and it is advisable to have at least two people at your Stand. One option is to hire somebody local to that area.
- Take the opportunity to do some more market research on that city/country while you are there, if possible.

AFTER THE SHOW

- It is recommended to send a follow up e-mail to every visitor to your Stand (whose contact details you get) on the same day as they visited your Stand. This can simply be a thank you for visiting your Stand, but is a chance to get your contact details to them. A few weeks later, follow up with more detail and information.
- Important to follow/connect with them on social media immediately during the event and continue the connection (liking, sharing, commenting).
- Invest in relationships you start to develop at a Show, as they often take time to grow and develop and do not always happen after just one meeting. It may be necessary to travel again to meet in person with potential new clients.

The full report 'Accessing Trade Fairs: Model for Peripheral Creative Enterprises to Access International Trade Events' can be downloaded [here](#) (PDF, 1.8MB)



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