

FIN-URB-ACT

Thematic Paper IX

Communication of SME Support Infrastructure



Communication Examples presented by the City of Reims

Summary of the FIN-URB-ACT work group meeting (28./29.10.2009)

Communication Strategy of the City of Reims and CREA-Reims

During the working group meeting on communication in Linz, the city of Reims presented an interesting integrated approach model from its Local Action Plan, on how to communicate outputs of business support activities to a broad public. Reims was lacking for many years from a real entrepreneurial spirit among people, despite a stable infrastructure of support facilities. In order to improve the situation, the city has started in cooperation with "CREA Reims" a communication campaign to raise the visibility of the local support infrastructure in order to attract people in being more entrepreneurial active. In this example the communication pole of the city of Reims is acting as the coordinator.

The communication pole of Reims consists of 25 Persons, including an in-house journalist and a specialised team for publications. Besides the cities homepage, Reims has two magazines in order to inform the inhabitants about any news related to the city. On the one hand there is "VRi – *Ville de Reims Informations*", which is the official magazine of the city of Reims with an overall edition of 100.000 copies. The magazine is published 11 times a year. The second magazine is called "*Reims Métropole Magazine*" which is editing topics for the bigger agglomeration area of Reims with an edition of 110.000 copies and six issues per year.

The network of the single member organisations of the local support group, "CREA-Reims", is involved into several campaigns and information activities for business support. They are coordinated by the communication pole of Reims. In order to better reach the "entrepreneurial community" of Reims, CREA is implementing different communication campaigns. An annual fair "Forum CREA-REIMS", organised by CREA, is bringing together different stakeholders from the local support group in order to exhibit various information support structures to interested people on how to start a business. Additionally, the local support group edits various forms of guides and flyers as well as a catalogue with 1.200 copies to improve the visibility of the network. Within the forum, a price for the best business ideas is being awarded annually.

Initiative „Génération entreprendre“ of the Region Champagne-Ardenne

Only a few years ago, the Region Champagne-Ardenne was suffering from an apparent lack of entrepreneurial spirit. Regarding the number of new business start-ups per inhabitant, the region was ranked 19th among 22 regions in France and brought up the rear concerning other economic indicators. Thus, the objective of the regional economic development policy was to raise the number of set ups of endogenous enterprises in order to ensure the viability of new projects. The aim was to create 6000 additional enterprises within the Region (2000 in Reims). From 2007-2008 first stages of the project implementation has been started. Since 2009 the project is at a regional level, thanks to its positive impact and results.

The yearly budget amounts from 350.000 € for Reims up to 700.000 € for the Region Champagne-Ardenne. The launch of the project was made possible in 2007 due to an ESF funding opportunity of 50%. Further financial partners are the Reims Chambers of Commerce (merely for the first phase), Champagne-Ardenne Chambers of Commerce, the Regional Council, and the City of Reims, since the project is on the regional level. Additionally the initiative is funded by the ERDF

since 2008. Technical support is being provided among others by the CREA-Reims network, the University of Reims Champagne Ardennes and regional and local government services.

The overall aim of “Génération entreprendre” is to resurrect a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship and to foster the entrepreneurial spirit among the people. Therefore, it is necessary to change the image of an entrepreneur, to show the added value of entrepreneurship and to encourage people dare to leap into self-employment. In order to achieve these objectives, it is necessary to clarify existing procedures and tools (financial, educational support structures, networks) and to close the lack of knowledge on the provided support structures.

The implementation was not tailored only for a particular target group. Moreover, the strategy was addressed to the general public in order to reach the hidden potentials of the “everyday people” Therefore, a massive communication campaign was initiated using billboards (400-500 pieces), showing everyday success stories. In order to reach students and young people the methods have been adapted by using street marketing, blogs, radio shows or cartoons.

Until now, the results show a high success. Following polls, 70% of the respondents recognised the campaigns, 31% were inspired to start a business due to the campaign, 36% have changed their perception of entrepreneurship and 50% became aware of the existing support tools. The projects website had 50.000 visitors per year. Additionally, CREAREIMS network received 20% more new projects and raised their loan contribution by 29% in 2008.

Within one year a 10% increase was recorded for start-ups in Reims. As quarterly figures show, there are enormous differences (up to 21, 9 %) of start-up activities before and after a campaign. Since the campaign was extended to the regional level, Champagne-Ardennes is pending among the first regions in France regarding the rate of new business growth).

In January 2009 a national framework for entrepreneurship has come into force in France: it consists an ultra-simplified (though financially attractive) system for registering and running a micro-business.

Registration can be done on-line, at no cost. Assets that are not necessary for the business activity can be taken out of the seizable assets.

Schematically two types of micro-businesses are considered:

- trades (buy and resell): maximum volume of sales: 80 300 €/year, no VAT, income tax: 1% of sales, social security: 12% of sales
- other activities: maximum volume of sales: 32 100 €/year, no VAT, income tax: 2,2% of sales, social security: 21,3% (or even 18,3% for some activities) of sales

There is no obligation concerning book-keeping. This framework is applicable in Reims and it will be interesting to know the impact of this measure on the number of start-ups as micro-entrepreneurs.

URBACT II

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