

Welcome to Passport to Trade 2.0 Project Newsletter.

In this 4th newsletter articles on how can Students & SMEs Working Together to benefit Europe. Social Media Results: Lessons from social media optimisation in practice,

Students & SMEs Working Together to benefit Europe

How can students and SMEs work together to increase economic growth in Europe? The opportunity to increase the number of student work placements and internships should give SMEs the needed added resource to boost their trade opportunities and allow students to gain by learning work ethics and getting vital experience for their future careers.

A Passport to Trade 2.0 workshop dedicated to **Students & SMEs working together to benefit Europe** was held on April 11th, 2013 at Valahia University Târgoviște, in Romania. The workshop was attended by students of Valahia University Târgoviște, Faculty of Economics, from bachelor, master and Ph.D. Studies, and business representatives from Dâmbovița County.

During the workshop 3 key points were addressed.

Opportunities for studying and finding a work placement in other European countries

First of all, students discovered how to use the site to access information about opportunities for studying and finding a work placement in other European countries. This aspect was presented by **Milanka Dimitrova Slavova**, Technology Development and Innovation – TDI Ltd, Bulgaria.

Importance of understanding cultural differences

The importance of understanding cultural differences when dealing in international trade was discussed. This was particularly highlighted with examples of culturally based viral marketing campaigns as was illustrated by the American ROM case study in Romania:

American ROM case study <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tt9NBtW4sbA>

In this case study cultural values were activated by a marketing campaign which allowed a brand to be re-energised by becoming controversial.

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This was done with a number of other cultural references such as the Athenos brand:

Athenos Case Study <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IrXoAbUIVIO>.

Whilst not SMEs these two illustrate how a good use of a viral marketing campaign via social media can benefit a business.

Social media as a useful tool for both students and SMEs

Attendees also gained insight into social media as a useful tool for both students and SMEs. This presentation was given by Aleksej Heinze, SalfordBusinessSchool, University of Salford, UK. The audience was challenged to provide insightful comments and discussed their views on the application of social media in business and for student branding. Those who took an active part in the discussions and gave the most complete answers to the questions were rewarded with a Salford Business School T-shirt. Congratulations to all the prize-winners who are: Tudorache Ana-Maria, Ph.D. student in Management; Nuță Flavia, Corporate Management master program student and Apostolov Kiril, bachelor program student in Finances.

Students discovered how to use social media to their advantage; the increasing importance of personal branding and how social media can play both positive and negative roles in their future employment. In particular the discussion was based around some of the ideas which were developed for Passport to Trade 2.0 project website.

Businessculture.org ideas examples on

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPyh8cTNkU4>

Finally, Verena Hausmann, Institute for Information Systems Research at University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany in her presentation highlighted the increasing role that social media plays in international trade marketing, as well as opportunities to advertise vacancies, or to identify student placement opportunities, share useful information and so on.

The discussions highlighted the need for students and SMEs' representatives to know basic information about the country they are planning to visit as a matter of cultural exchange but also as a tool in overcoming behavioural barriers.

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Social Media Results: Lessons from social media optimisation in practice

Social media is increasing in popularity for business as well as private use. What would be a better way to see how we can achieve results from social media than by administering a survey that targeted social media users around 31 European countries? The aim for our survey was to get at least 50 responses from each country – 35 from students and 15 from small and medium enterprises (SMEs). So, overall we aimed to achieve 1550 responses to an online survey.

With internet penetration in European Countries being over 63% of the estimated 821 million people, and over 250 million estimated users of Facebook alone (Source Internet World Stats <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats4.htm>) surely it can't be that difficult to reach at least 1550 responses to a survey which asks them to share their views on social media usage and etiquette. Our survey was designed to be as short as possible and electronic, allowing participants the flexibility for filling it in when it is convenient for them.

Social media optimisation – networks selection

We developed a project Twitter account [<https://twitter.com/Passport2Trade>] and a Facebook page [<https://www.facebook.com/passporttotrade2>] with a plan to regularly post project related updates and develop a community of interested people in the project and its results. LinkedIn was also considered but since there are so many different professional networks which exist for professional networking in Europe and the consequent lack of access from members for example in Xing in Germany and Vladeo in France it was dropped. Additionally, both Facebook and Twitter allow members to see the message without having to sign up to the service thus making it more accessible to our target audiences of the project. Similar considerations would be applicable to any SME considering engagement on social networks in Europe unless you are targeting a specific country and community of members.

Social media strategy

Our initial strategy was simple – identify the relevant networks and post messages on these networks to ask for the survey participation. We have soon realised that this simple strategy did not work. For example when using Twitter and speaking to anyone who is talking about #Estonia to signify that we are contributing to the conversation on Estonia we did not get many replies.

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So we had to change the strategy. We realized that it was essential to develop first the relationship with individuals in that country and then to ask them for help.

This was simply done by re-tweeting some else's comments about their country and speaking to them directly about a topic that was of interest to them. For example if we identified someone who contributed to the #Estonia hash tag we then addressed the twitter account directly using their @name to get their attention.

By using someone's user name did get results. People were engaging with us back and asking for more information about the project.

Once the lead was created via Twitter we have then taken the conversation to email and through email and were necessary using Skype and Telephone to clarify any points needed.
Social media strategy results

The conclusions from our project when considering social media results are as follows:

- a) Be clear on what you want to achieve as a result of your social media engagement (in our case it was to raise awareness of our project and gain responses to an online survey)
- b) Select the social networks which your target audience are likely to use (be aware that in Europe there is a variety of specialist networks, don't just expect everyone to use Twitter and Facebook!)
- c) Engage in conversations with others first to establish a relationship – reply to others' questions, contribute to the topics that they are interested in – develop your social capital with them. People are more likely to help you once you have helped them.
- d) Use network specific community building techniques – for example on Twitter – Re-tweet tweets of others, create lists of people, follow people and tweet them directly using their @name.
- e) Only once you have established a relationship and understand who the other social media user is ask them for help – in our case it was to fill in an online survey. In your case it would be develop a business opportunity etc.

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f) Thank and recognise people for the help you receive – we have a list of voluntary advisory board members as well as three Amazon vouchers which were used as a “Thank you” to randomly selected volunteers who have helped us in the project – <http://www.slideshare.net/AleksejHeinze/businesscultureorg-passporttotrade-20-survey-winners>

[BusinessCulture.org Passport-to-Trade 2.0 survey winners](#)

The key finding which is perhaps not surprising after all is that our results show that in countries where no personal networks of the research team were present there was a complete lack of response, suggesting that there is a need to develop networks initially before meaningful information exchange can commence. The project was successful in attaining more than the set target of 1550 responses but the 50 responses per country were difficult to achieve.

Read more about this project and the results of the survey in this article – Aaltonen , S, Kakderi, C, Hausmann, V and Heinze , A *Social media in Europe: lessons from an online survey* , in: 18th UKAIS Annual Conference: Social Information Systems, 19-20 March 2013, Worcester College, Oxford, UK. <http://usir.salford.ac.uk/28500/>

Balkans business culture: lessons from 5 neighboring countries

Balkans business culture: punctuality, taboos and more

Business culture plays a major role in international business. A good knowledge of foreign business culture is very important in establishing initial business contacts.

It also helps students looking for placements and internship opportunities in European countries to integrate faster into working and social life.

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One of the main tasks of the Passport to Trade 2.0 (#P2T2) project was the development of European Mobility Framework (EMF) website content related to the cultural and business environment of five European neighboring countries from the Balkans region – Bulgaria, Romania, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Turkey, and Croatia.

Country specific research and the preparation of the EMF proved a lot of business culture similarities among the countries in the region.

Balkans punctuality in business meetings

Time keeping in business has always been an important issue. Punctuality for meetings is taken seriously as it indicates respect for your meeting partner and shows that you value their time. Generally, up to 10 minutes late is acceptable, over 10 minutes late necessitates a phone call to your meeting partners to let them know that you are on your way. If you are over half an hour late it is probably worth re-scheduling the meeting. In the private sphere of life people in these countries have a more relaxed perspective on time, where a 15-20 minutes delay is to be expected and not unusual; in part this is also due to infrastructure issues – buses and trains tend to rarely run on time.

Balkans business dress code

Business representatives pay meticulous attention to their appearance. Therefore formal dress code should be adhered to and is not to be taken lightly. Formal for men would mean a jacket with shirt and tie or a suit and for ladies, a formal dress or also a suit. Business people in the Balkan region like to show their business counterparts that they value the chance to meet with one another face-to-face to develop business relationships.

Balkans taboo discussion subjects

While the number of taboos in the five countries is decreasing, business people should pay attention to some issues that are considered inappropriate and should be avoided. In Turkey family is considered sacred and should not be disrespected.

In Croatia it is advisable not to talk about money or personal problems since it is viewed as a sign of weak character. The Romanians believe strongly in fate, chance and luck.

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Respect their habit to wish themselves luck in any action undertaken – even seemingly mundane actions like sneezing and hiccupping can take on a superstitious meaning. (when selling, buying, hiccupping, drinking, sneezing and even instead of “good morning”). In FYROM, if you have been invited to a business meal your host will continue to give you food and drink and insist on paying for you; it is considered impolite to refuse this hospitality.

Body language in the Balkans

The non-verbal language has also a lot of cultural resemblances. Quite often people in the region stand close to business partners during a conversation. An arm’s length is generally considered an appropriate amount of personal space when speaking, particularly when interacting with colleagues and acquaintances. Compared to other people in the region the Bulgarians have different head gestures to indicate “no” and “yes.” Shaking your head from side to side signifies “yes” and an up and down movement means “no”. In Turkey people tend to greet each other with a two-handed handshake or by a kiss on both cheeks.

Balkans customs of gift giving

Gift giving is generally not practiced. Small presents like souvenir representing the business partner’s country are acceptable. A gift that relates to the home country is preferred in the regional business etiquette. In the five countries the first meeting is more social than business related. Business partners need two or three meetings before they are able to decide if they are going to do business or not.

Establishment of personal relations with a client is very important before doing business. Business lunches and dinners are considered more of a social occasion and a good way to develop relationships. Meals are generally very rich. The hosts in the region will often put more food on the table than can be eaten. They are proud of their cuisine and like to show off.

In general, people in the region are very hospitable, friendly and helpful. If a foreign partner wins their trust, they can rely on successful long-term business cooperation.

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